

The Bible and Bioethics: From Timeless Truths to Timely Applications

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ABSTRACT: This essay discusses my efforts to integrate daily Bible readings into an upper-division course entitled “Ethics in Science.” This approach involves having students keep a daily journal about what they discover by considering on various topics of biomedical ethics in relation to a broad range of philosophical perspectives and to the natural law and divine command philosophies.

IN THIS ESSAY I WRITE in the first person and generally shy away from academic jargon. Those interested in my more “academic” papers concerning ethics and numerous other topics will find a bibliography as well as many downloadable resources at my professional website.¹ What follows in the

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¹ See www.ryanmacpherson.com. See “Teaching Objective Morality to a Postmodern Audience” in *Here We Stand: A Confessional Christian Study of Worldviews*, ed. Curtis A. Jahn (Milwaukee WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2010), pp. 127–75; “The Natural Law of the Family,” chap. 11 in *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal*, ed. Robert C. Baker (St. Louis MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), pp. 201-19; “The Coercive Reality behind Pro-Choice Rhetoric: Identifying What ‘Popular Sovereignty,’ ‘Reproductive Freedom,’ and ‘Death with Dignity’ Demand from Persons Who Disagree,” *Proceedings of the Nineteenth University Faculty for Life Conference (2009)*, ed. Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.

present essay is a personal account of the interpersonal relationships that I have fostered in the classroom around the Word of God. To be clear, this activity represents only a small portion of my syllabus content and only a small fraction of the assessment used for determining students' grades. The bulk of the assigned readings and lectures involve material that is fairly standard across college and university campuses.² What I emphasize here is something distinctive, but not (I hope) entirely unique.³

To frame the discussion, let me note that I aspire to be a cutting-edge traditionalist: old-fashioned but not antiquated, relevant but not relativistic, historically situated and yet transcendent. I propose to glean insights from the Bible, a collection of books written in the Near East between 2000 B.C. and A.D. 100, and to apply those insights to problems that we never imagined during our youthful years but that we now encounter regularly today. More specifically, I seek to develop a moral theology from Holy Scripture and to apply it to dilemmas occasioned by biomedical advances (or perhaps better called "biomedical regressions," as the case too often shows itself to be).

Why would I bring the Bible into discussions of bioethics? Conversely, I might ask, "Why should we leave the Bible out?" The Bible stands alone in the world's vast catalog of literature. Read by more people, translated into more languages, and preserved far better than any other text from the ancient

(Washington, D.C.: University Faculty for Life, 2013), pp. 243–76.

² For example, Donald C. Abel, *Fifty Readings in Philosophy*, 4th ed. (New York NY: McGraw-Hill, 2011); Kelly James Clark and Anne Poortenga, *The Story of Ethics: Fulfilling Our Human Nature* (Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003); James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (Boston MA: McGraw-Hill, 1999); Russ Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?* (New York NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004); Adil E. Shamoo and David B. Resnik, *Responsible Conduct of Research*, 2nd ed. (Oxford UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009). For students' research papers, I encourage use of the following online databases, as well as standard library research: Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary Library Essay Collection (www.blts.edu/library/essays), Catholic Medical Association (www.cathmed.org), Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity (www.cbhd.org), Christian Life Resources (www.christianliferesources.com), Christian Medical and Dental Associations (www.cmda.org), Lutherans for Life (www.lutheransforlife.org), University Faculty for Life (www.uffl.org), and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library Essay Collection (www.wlssays.net).

³ For another unusual approach that I have taken in a moral philosophy course, see my "Moral Philosophy beyond the Textbook" (December 13, 2016), <http://www.intoyourhandshell.com/blog/136>.

world, the Bible stubbornly resists being supplanted by rival books.⁴ As biblical scholar William White, Jr., observed:

Alexander the Great and his generals virtually annihilated the social structures and languages of the ancient societies that their empire absorbed. The Babylonians, Arameans, Persians, and Egyptians ceased to exist as distinct civilizations; only the Greek (Hellenistic) culture remained. Judaism was the only ancient religion and Hebrew the only ancient language that survived the onslaught. The Hebrew Bible...is the only ancient document that has survived completely intact.⁵

Even more interesting, the Bible itself contains a prophecy that no other people other than the Jews, no language other than Hebrew, or no religion other than Judaism) would survive the tumult of kingdoms during the Persian, Greek, and Roman conquests: “For I [the LORD] will make a complete end of all the nations to which I have driven you [the Jews], but I will not make a complete end of you.”⁶

The New Testament similarly deserves a bibliographic category unto itself: it is by far the most well-attested document from classical antiquity. The extant manuscripts are both more numerous and more proximate to the time when the original copies were first composed than for any other text, be it by Homer, Herodotus, Plato, or Aristotle. With remarkable precision the content dovetails both with the Hebrew prophetic writings (which we find fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ) and with historical and archaeological records of the Greco-Roman world in which Christ and His

⁴ Over five billion copies of the Bible have been printed since 1815. The entire Bible has been translated into 349 languages, and in 2,123 languages at least one book is available. By comparison, Mao-Zedong’s *Little Red Book* appeared in perhaps 800 million copies during the height of communist propaganda in China (1966 to 1971): <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/best-selling-book-of-non-fiction>. In recent years, the China-based Amity Publishing Company has led the world in the number of Bibles printed. Melissa Steffan, “World’s Biggest Bible Publisher? China,” *Christianity Today* (November 13, 2012, revised May 23, 2013), available at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2012/november/worlds-biggest-bible-publisher-china.html>.

⁵ William White, Jr., “Introduction” to *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, ed. W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr. (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), pp. ix–xviii, at p. ix.

⁶ Jeremiah 46:28 (New King James Version).

apostles lived.⁷

So, no, I will not be talking about how Canaanite or Assyrian texts provide a road map for navigating the bioethical dilemmas of our present age. Nor will I rely on the latest pop theology that is here today and likely to be gone tomorrow. Rather, our attention will be directed to the Bible, where we will find timeless truths with timely applications. Simply put, the Bible is Holy Scripture, that is, God's⁸ inspired,⁹ inerrant,¹⁰ infallible,¹¹ complete,¹² preserved,¹³ and efficacious¹⁴ Word revealing Christ as Savior.¹⁵ In this essay I will answer three questions:

- (1) How should one read the Bible?
- (2) How does the Bible relate to prevalent moral philosophies in general and bioethics in particular?
- (3) How can we as pro-life faculty integrate Bible reading with the academic objectives of our respective disciplines?

1. How Should One Read the Bible?

One might proceed by reading the Bible cover to cover (as I have done several times), by reading it in a chronological sequence (for example, by interspersing the prophetic writings with the historical narratives found in First and Second Kings, as I also have done several times) or thematically (such as by using various study aids in order to locate all of the verses pertaining to prayer, forgiveness, or other major topics). Each of these approaches has value, but I wish to recommend two other approaches as well.

First, I suggest reading the Bible liturgically. The liturgy of the church

⁷ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 5th ed. (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975).

⁸ Jeremiah 23:28; 1 Corinthians 2:13; Galatians 1:11-12; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:16,18.

⁹ Matthew 22:43; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:20-21.

¹⁰ Psalm 12:6; John 8:31-32, 10:35.

¹¹ Joshua 21:45, cf. 23:14; 1 Kings 8:56; Psalm 77:8; Isaiah 34:16; Matthew 5:18; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Hebrews 10:23; 2 Peter 3:9,13.

¹² Deuteronomy 12:32; Matthew 28:20; Revelation 22:18-19.

¹³ Psalm 12:7; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:22-25, quoting Isaiah 40:8.

¹⁴ Isaiah 55:11; John 8:31-32, 17:20; Romans 10:14,17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 3:5-7; Revelation 1:3.

¹⁵ Matthew 5:17; John 5:39, 20:30-31; Galatians 3:22,24-25; 2 Timothy 3:15.

consists of sections from Holy Scripture that have been selected and sequenced in a manner that edifies the Body of Christ, as tested by broad experiences that encompass every language, nation, tribe, and people.¹⁶ The liturgy is the mother tongue of Christians in every place and every time, and it consists (roughly) of 90% Scripture. I have marked the margins of my Bible with an indication of which Gospel texts or Epistle lessons have been appointed for various days in the ecclesiastical year. Thus, when I read my Bible, I can think not only of the context in which it was written, as I pass from one chapter to the next, but also of the context in which the text is lived, as the church passes from one Sunday to the next.

Second, I suggest that readers of Scripture should come with questions in mind – questions that the Bible itself would desire that we ask of it. Good questions provide a purpose for the exercise of reading the Bible. If the questions are well-composed, they also guard against the imposition of our own subjective experiences into the text. In other words, the questions should not help me decide “what does this text mean to me?” (subjectivity, easily slipping toward theological narcissism) but rather “what would God desire to teach me through this text?” (objectivity, respecting the prophetic character of the Scriptures). To that end, I have developed the following seven questions, each paired to a key word:

1. Confession: Of which sins does this passage convict me?
2. Absolution: How does this passage reveal God’s forgiveness for me in Christ?
3. Prayer: For what does this passage instruct me to ask or thank God?
4. Tradition: How has this passage inspired the creeds, confessions, liturgy, hymns, or catechism of my church?¹⁷

¹⁶ The allusion is to St. John’s vision of heaven, in which he saw saints from “every language, nation, tribe, and people” (Revelation 7:9).

¹⁷ For an example of how this simple question can lead to profound understanding, consider the reference in Luke 1:41,44 to John the Baptist leaping in his mother’s womb upon hearing the voice of Mary. The *Smalcald Articles*, III.viii.9–10 (Lutheran, 1537) cites Luke 1:41,44 to demonstrate that God’s Word is efficacious. Although not addressing the abortion debate, the commentary clearly indicates that a life in the womb is fully human and can respond to the spoken word. Hence, our contemporary pro-life position does not require some new or forced interpretation, but rather conforms to interpretations of Scripture that go back long before *Roe v. Wade* and that were established without any bias toward the current debate.

5. Interpretation: How do other passages help me to interpret this one? or How does this passage help me to interpret others?
6. Vocation: How does this passage guide me in my station in life?
7. Evangelism: How can I share with an unbeliever what this passage has taught me about God's grace in Christ?

For ease of memory, it may be noted that the seven key words together form an acronym, C-A-P-T-I-V-E, reminding us that through the study of Scripture Christians learn to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”¹⁸

Finally, let me note that when desiring to make firm conclusions as to what the Bible does or does not say, attention to the original languages – Hebrew and Greek – is essential.¹⁹ For those lacking linguistic ability, a close proxy may be obtained by reading one of the more literal English translations, such as the New King James Version, together with Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, which maps each English word to its corresponding Greek or Hebrew term, assigning each vocabulary word a unique code number for those who, with Shakespeare's Servilius Casca, shrug: “It's all Greek to me.”²⁰

2. How Does the Bible Relate to Other Perspectives?

Both in their studies of history and in contemporary social media posts my

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 10:5. A pdf handout containing these questions and suggestions for their use may be found at www.hausvater.org/bible-studies.

¹⁹ For example, comparing the usage of key Hebrew words in Exodus 21:22–25 to all other instances in the Hebrew Bible, it becomes clear that the passage deals with the case of an aggressor who induces premature labor, and that the penalty to be assigned is proportionate to the harm caused to the child (not merely to the mother). Interpreters who deny that the Bible here affirms the value of life *in utero* are wrong, as anyone with a basic understanding of Hebrew can readily see. Unfortunately, some English translations give the mistaken impression that an aggressor who induces a miscarriage (i.e., loss of life to the child) without harming the mother is not to be penalized for murder, but in fact the text teaches the opposite. See John Piper, “The Misuse of Exodus 21:22–25 by Pro-Choice Advocates” (February 8, 1989), www.desiringgod.org; Dave Miller, “Abortion and Exodus 21,” 2004, www.apologetics.org; Greg Koukl, “What Exodus 21:22 Says about Abortion,” 2002, www.str.org. Although these three sources are popular presentations – blogs and radio transcripts – they provide citations to standard lexicons and academic journals typical of graduate-level research.

²⁰ The folk-memory version is quoted above, whereas the original passage reads, “It was Greek to me” (William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* I.2).

students encounter a complex labyrinth of moral philosophies. Casting aside as much of the fancy terminology as possible while still retaining a sufficient understanding of the matter, I suggest that the crucial question is this: Does at least one moral precept exist that is not of our own making? If so, then we have affirmed *ethical objectivism* – the idea that morality is not (or, at least, is not entirely) of our own making.

Here I am taking a cue, ironically enough, from the agnostic philosopher Russ Shafer-Landau, whose book *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?* provides an instructive taxonomy of moral philosophies. Surprisingly, Shafer-Landau, although an agnostic, rejects all forms of moral skepticism and endorses a form of ethical objectivism. I appreciate his insightful arguments, but when it comes to objectivism I part ways with him by pursuing natural law theory and divine command theory rather than the ethical rationalism that he prefers.²¹

In any case, here is my expanded version of his taxonomy, with some additional subcategories plus several pertinent Scripture references added to illustrate how the Bible relates to prominent moral philosophies.

1. Ethical Objectivism: Morality is not of our own making; it exists independently of our thoughts or feelings concerning it.
 - a. Divine Foundation Theories
 - i. Divine Command Theory (Exodus 20:1-17, Ten Commandments)
 - ii. Natural Law (Romans 1:20–23, 2:14–15; Cicero, Aquinas)
 - b. Rational Foundation Theories
 - i. Rational Idealism (Plato)
 - ii. Categorical Imperative (Kant)
 - iii. Virtue Ethics (Aristotle, Aquinas)
2. Moral Skepticism: Morality either does not really exist at all [nihilism], or else we ourselves invent it, whether individually [subjectivism] or as a society [relativism].
 - c. Moral Nihilism (Isaiah 5:20 warns against it.)
 - i. Error Theory (Mackie)
 - ii. Emotivism (Ayer)

²¹ Schafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?* (cited n2).

²² For a fuller discussion, including a focused evaluation of each philosophy, see Ryan C. MacPherson, “Teaching Objective Morality to a Postmodern Audience” (cited n1).

- d. Ethical Subjectivism (Judges 21:25 reveals this pitfall; see also Romans 3:3–4.)
 - i. Egoism (Rand)
 - ii. Self-Assertion (Nietzsche)
 - iii. Existentialism (Sartre) (Isaiah 29:16 refutes this.)
 - iv. Situational Ethics (Fletcher)
- e. Ethical Relativism
 - i. Social Contract Theory (Hobbes)
 - ii. Utilitarianism (Mill) (Romans 3:8 rejects the idea of “the end justifies the means.”)
 - iii. Evolutionary Ethics (Darwin)
 - iv. Liberal Justice Theory (Rawls)

Scripture is in accord with Ethical Objectivism and rejects Moral Skepticism. For example, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), in which God decrees what is good and what is evil, falls under Divine Command theory. Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Romans affirms Natural Law theory by insisting that God’s attributes and our responsibilities toward God are evident to all people by nature (Romans 1:20-23, 2:14–15). In each case, morality is not of our own making; hence, it is objective.

On the other hand, the book of Judges concludes, following the narration of several horrid events, with the dismay that “in those days...everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). This is a narrative that condemns the chaos that ensues when Moral Subjectivism is embraced by a culture. Saint Paul similarly rejects subjectivism – now applied to truth in general rather than morality in particular – when writing “What if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not!” (Romans 3:3-4). The Apostle also rejects the utilitarian philosophy that “the end justifies any and every means” when criticizing the slogan (popular already in his own time) “Let us do evil that good may come” (Romans 3:8).

As for Moral Nihilism, the Prophet Isaiah warned against those who render the distinction between good and evil meaningless: “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil” (Isaiah 5:20). Existentialism (a subcategory that can fall under subjectivism or nihilism, depending upon how one defines it) holds that each person can invent human nature (and hence morality) anew through the assertion of one’s own choice. But Isaiah warned against this denial of God’s creation of human nature: “For shall the thing made say of him

who made it, ‘He did not make me’? Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, ‘He has no understanding’?” (Isaiah 29:16).

Additional examples could be given, but the point already is established: reading the Bible remains a relevant exercise while studying moral philosophies, past and present. As Solomon observed, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). More specifically, Scripture steers us toward Ethical Objectivism and away from Moral Skepticism.

A Christian should not, however, suppose that the Scriptures are useful simply for finding fault with the misshapen moral philosophies of pagans and apostates. Rather, Scripture also has been written for the correction of Christians – yes, of people like me.²³ For that reason, I caution against the search for proof-texts that will result in the condemnation of abortion, for example, without simultaneously discovering the more comprehensive truth that being biblically pro-life means more than being “anti-abortion” or “anti-euthanasia,” for it includes affirming and welcoming and caring and supporting the lives of all: very young or very old, rich or poor, strong or disabled, mainstream or minority. In my book *The Culture of Life: Ten Essential Principles for Christian Bioethics*, I glean from Holy Scripture the following basic lessons:

1. “The culture of life cherishes God’s creation.”
2. “The culture of life celebrates marital procreation.”
3. “The culture of life flows from marriage.”
4. “The culture of life honors parents.”
5. “The culture of life respects the elderly.”
6. “The culture of life provides for widows and orphans.”
7. “The culture of life nurtures the rising generation.”
8. “The culture of life fosters a free and just society.”
9. “The culture of life *appears* doomed to extinction.”
10. “The culture of life heralds the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Perhaps there is an eleventh or twelfth principle that I left out, but I did attempt here to summarize the recurring themes in Scripture that pertained to bioethics. Even if I overlooked something of importance, I was careful to conclude with that which is most important: “The culture of life heralds the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” In that chapter I summarized the experiences of Norma McCorvey (the

²³ Matthew 7:3–5; 2 Timothy 3:15–16; 1 Peter 4:17.

“Jane Roe” of *Roe v. Wade*) and of Dr. Bernard Nathanson (the “abortion king” who led the effort to legalize his diabolical craft).²⁴ Not only did both of them leave the pro-abortion camp to become advocates for life, but they also had their own lives renewed through the forgiving love of Jesus Christ. Let us pray that the same grace will be received by those who in more recent years have spearheaded the efforts to legalize same-sex marriage or to trivialize manhood and womanhood through the transgender revolution.

In terms of philosophical orientation, those two movements partake, respectively, of gnosticism and existentialism. But no matter the *ism* by which they may be known, such agendas are defined in Scripture as distortions of God’s created order, and people need objective help to be freed from them – that is, a help not of their own making, beginning with a moral code not of their own making that exposes sin as sin and a redemption also not of their own making that bestows the forgiving love of Christ who came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

3. Integrating Bible Reading with Academic Disciplines

I teach at a Christian liberal arts college, but I cannot always assume that my students are biblically literate. Although the bulk of them come from my own conservative Lutheran tradition, many other denominations are represented, and some students do not admit to any Christian affiliation at all. For all students, the faculty desires that they “grow in the grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by means of the Gospel.” That is literally the number one objective of our college. The next objective flows from it: “To demonstrate independent critical thinking so that they are not shaken from the eternal foundations on which their moral and spiritual growth is based.”²⁵

With institutional objectives like these, I could assign Bible reading to my students without need for further justification. But I also realize that some of our students need to transfer their credits elsewhere, and I realize that there are campuses that are less congenial to the study of Scripture than my own campus. Therefore, I also offer the following justification for assigning daily Bible readings to students enrolled in my upper-division class entitled “Ethics and

²⁴ On McCorvey, see also Ryan C. MacPherson, “How a Christian Child’s Love Won Jane Roe’s Heart,” January 2009, www.hausvater.org/book-reviews/152.

²⁵ Bethany Lutheran College, *Academic Catalog* (August 1, 2016), p. 6.

Science”: reading the Bible enriches their learning. It really does.

I ask each student to read about a chapter (25 verses) per day from the Bible and to keep a journal, submitted to me in installments once per month. In those journals they identify connections between what they read in Scripture and what we are reading and discussing in class, as well as what they are encountering in other courses or in other areas of life, especially with regard to topics pertaining to medical ethics.

I grade the students’ journal entries by a simple rubric of awarding credit in direct proportion to how many verses they read (the target being 25 per day for 25 days, or 625 verses in total); how many applications they make to the subject matter of this course (at least three, to achieve full credit) and to experiences beyond this course (again, aiming for three); and how many of the seven C-A-P-T-I-V-E questions they answer.

Aside from the spiritual benefits of this project, students also gain academic insight into why many people think that the Bible is relevant to bioethics. If that were not sufficient justification for following my example, one might consider permitting students to select other traditional texts and then invite a class discussion concerning the similarities and the differences. (In my course on moral philosophy, we read a wide range of primary sources.) A comparative exercise of this kind reveals some of the ways that the Bible is astonishingly unique.

On the final exam during the Spring 2017 semester, I included a reflection question concerning my students’ Bible Reading Journals: “Describe how your daily Bible readings have enhanced your understanding of this course and other aspects of your life.” The following excerpts from student responses indicate their own appreciation for this assignment:

- There is no end to the list of benefits that can come from carrying out daily Bible readings.
- The Bible is filled with instances of objective standards, the most notable being the Ten Commandments.”
- My daily Bible readings have helped expand my understanding of this course. By reading the Bible, one can start to see the moral truths that God has laid down for mankind. This helps to instill the idea that there can indeed be objective moral truths.
- Are we naturally good or inherently evil? This is answered for us in the very first few chapters [of Genesis]. God created us, and we, along with all of creation, were good. However, evil entered the world when Adam and Eve fell into sin. We have all inherited this evil from our parents, yet we strive to follow God’s good commands and

by Jesus' saving work and the gift of the Holy Spirit we are made holy. It is a strange and difficult duality that we live with, but we have our reward in heaven.

- The Bible readings backed up many of the points in my research paper. They showed me that God is the Author of all life and that birth control is basically re-writing what the Author has written. This is wrong.
- As we were introducing the reproductive topics [in class] such as abortion, IVF [*in vitro* fertilization], surrogacy, ET [embryo transfer], contraception, and embryo research, I focused on the passages about being "fearfully and wonderfully made" [quoting Psalm 139:14] in spite of being "conceived and born in sin" [paraphrasing Psalm 51:5]. I was struck by how plainly the Bible asserts the worth of every human life despite our inborn sinful nature.

Some of the journals get quite personal. One semester, a student's grandmother was suffering from late-stage cancer. Midway through the course, she died, and the student missed class to attend the funeral. Providentially, the section of Scripture the student read that day came from 1 Thessalonians 4:15–18:

- We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

This past semester was no different. Poignant excerpts from my students' writing reveal once more the real value of biblical literacy and the liturgical life:

- Last December, [name omitted for privacy] died unexpectedly. He was my dearest friend, and his sudden death shocked me for months. Holy Week was a very dark time for me as I wrestled with his death and human mortality in general. Easter was a joyous reminder that I will see him again.
- What I learned for life application, which is also similar to one of the lessons taken from the Bolstad presentation, is the importance of being rooted in Christ, reading the Bible every day.

What was "the Bolstad presentation"? I invited an alumnus who had taken this same course nine years earlier to return with his wife and talk about the challenges and the joys of parenting a child with severe disabilities. Their son Torian was born with what for months remained an undiagnosable condition

that literally is rarer than one in one billion, for there are only a few cases in the entire world. On his bad days, the newborn endured three hundred seizures; on his good days, perhaps only five or ten. So far as could be discerned, he was both blind and deaf. Day after day, for the fifteen months of his life, Torian received love from his Dad, his Mom, and his five siblings, all so young that most adults advised they should be sheltered from the tragedy. Instead, the parents included their children in every step of their brother's triumph. At the end of the session, I asked Mrs. Boldstad how it came about that she (by the way, not a college graduate) discovered so many Bible passages to include in her discussion. Torian's mother is like a walking concordance for every Bible passage that offers comfort amid grief. When I asked how she became such an expert, she looked dumbfounded and then said, "Well, I just read my Bible every day." Then I turned to my students and said, "Maybe now you understand why I've asked you to read your Bibles every day." This essay is entitled "The Bible and Bioethics." The life, death, and coming resurrection of Torian Bolstad is where the rubber has met the road.

Conclusion

The Bible makes important contributions to our discussions of bioethics. Historically, the Bible is a unique collection of records from the ancient world, tracing the history of God's interaction with man from creation through the first century A.D., and providing a revelation of God's moral law that we find echoed in the human conscience. Spiritually, the Bible promises concerning itself that it is a wellspring of blessings, including the promise of eternal life with God as well as insight for prudent living in the present world. Academically, one can make the case that the study of Holy Scripture enhances one's education in the realm of ethics, even among those who disbelieve the Bible's content.

I do not discuss higher criticism, form criticism, the new Pauline interpretation, liberation theology, or other developments championed by esoteric "Biblical Studies" scholarship over the past few generations. I have a Ph.D. in a different field. Although I also have completed part of the course work toward a Master of Divinity degree, my claim to expertise, if any,

²⁶ Ethan Bolstad, "A Father's Tribute: In Memory of Torian Bolstad (2014-2015)," *Hausvater Project* (June 2016), <http://www.hausvater.org/articles/332>.

consists solely in this: I have read the Bible about twenty times in English, plus half of the New Testament in Greek and perhaps five percent of the Old Testament in Hebrew, all while joining with the church in a liturgical tradition that reaches back many, many centuries and pondering how it all fits together with the six chief parts of the Christian faith as delineated by Martin Luther in his Small and Large Catechisms, namely, the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Holy Baptism, Confession and Absolution, and the Lord's Supper.

A common temptation in the academy is to think less of a "popular" approach such as the one that I have suggested here because it is not "esoteric" enough to impress fellow scholars. If someone wishes to think less of me for that reason, so be it. But I hope no one would think less of the Bible. It contains timeless truths with timely applications for people of all walks of life among every language, nation, tribe, and people. No matter how sophisticated biomedical research may become, the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6) remains the risen Lord and compassionate Savior.