

D. Gareth Jones

Valuing People

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Gareth Jones is already famous in evangelical circles for earlier works on ethical issues at the beginning of life which challenged much traditional Christian ethics in these areas. This latest book revisits similar themes but also addresses a wider range of subjects (genetic screening, cloning, infanticide and dementia) from the perspective of the need to value human persons.

The book is very readable and concrete, providing illustrative examples and case studies in most chapters. It also contains a helpful glossary and good index. For those seeking to gain an understanding of some of the issues and conflicts raised by medical technology it offers an accessible and thought-provoking introduction to the subject written by a leading anatomist who knows the field well.

There are, however, problems with it as a theological and ethical study. Although Jones acknowledges he takes a polemic stance and that his work is not a theological treatise he also writes as an evangelical Christian for fellow Christians. His standard pattern is to highlight the complexity of the issues and the difficult ethical decisions raised. He then privileges Scripture as a guide for Christians (chs 3 & 4) only to argue that it offers no easy answers (eg 'The Bible has nothing specific to say about human embryos').

Therefore, he repeatedly insists, evangelicals can give no simple black and white answers and must allow greater Christian freedom in these areas.

The work highlights biblical themes and demonstrates the weakness of a naïve biblicism in such complex subjects. However, Jones' argument that Christians must therefore be free to accept, for example, some embryo experimentation does not follow in the way he assumes. Indeed, his own analysis is often limited and flawed. In particular he ignores a central Christian belief that deliberate intentional taking of innocent human life is always wrong. He shows an inadequate grasp of this Christian moral tenet and of key ethical concepts by arguing from attitudes to dead bodies that not all living humans need to be treated as persons (pp 83ff) and by claiming that to destroy 'spare embryos' can be accepted because if it is murder then 'natural fertilization frequently involves the murder (or at the very least, manslaughter) of some embryos' (p 107). For all its value therefore, the book fails to offer the level of careful, comprehensible Christian moral reasoning on these issues found in such similar works as Meilaender's *Bioethics* or Wyatt's recent *Matters of Life and Death*.

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