

What Do We Do Now?

By Joni Eareckson Tada and Nigel M. de S. Cameron

We are standing at a unique point in history. All the advances in technology that have enabled humankind to move from primitive tribal cultures to complex societies have only begun to prepare us for what comes next.

We have now begun to use technology on ourselves, to reshape ourselves, to determine what we shall be—a watershed in the history of the human race. Until now our human nature has been “given,” something we inherit and take for granted. We can keep fit, eat well, use surgery and medications to address accidents and ailments. We are who we are, and who God has made us.

On the Threshold

Today we stand on the threshold of a brave new world in which it will increasingly be up to us to decide who we shall be. In small and significant ways, it already is.

Using in vitro technology with “pre-implantation genetic diagnosis” enables us to weed out genetically sick embryos and perform very early abortions. But it also enables us to choose babies whose tissue and organs we may want to use later, for others.

The cloning debate shows how things will develop. Look at this pattern: First will come some new discovery, a new technique, an amazing and disturbing achievement. It will dominate the news magazines, and in common with many others, we will worry about what it may mean. The biotech industry and its allies in the medical and science communities will lobby hard for its acceptance. New scientific discoveries usually need no law to make them legal; it is the old laws that need to be revised, and that is hard. Turning outrage and alarm into public policy will prove complex and difficult.

Those who support the new technique will hold out the prospect of “cures”; disabled and sick people will get paraded in front of congressional committees and television cameras.

Meanwhile, the biotech lobbyists will play with language and use focus groups to devise the best way to market this new “product.” Sometimes they will employ an outrageous technique—as in the Harry and Louise pro-cloning radio ads, when one character asks the other (talking about embryo cloning for experiments), “Isn’t this cloning?” and gets the resounding answer “Nooooo!” Dr. Joseph Goebbels, Adolf Hitler’s propagandist chief, became famous for his declaration that lies need to be big to be believable. The biotech industry’s “big lie” that denies that experimental embryo cloning at all is a terrible warning of what we shall soon face. The debasing of language will make debate increasingly hard.

In our first struggle for human dignity in the face of biotechnology, we have barely made a start. Many worried Christians have moved to the forefront of the campaign to ban cloning. Yet most others fail to see the importance of the issue or know much about it. Fewer still understand that this is just the tip of the

biotech iceberg. An agenda awaits us that will rival and surpass the significance of abortion. The human species is in the process of redesign and reinvention; the “post-human future” awaits us.

In his famous book commending a Christian view of all of life, Francis Schaeffer asked the question, *How Should We Then Live?* How are we to live as believers in the first years of the twenty-first century? How are we to live, knowing what we know about the mix of blessings and threats that come together in the biotech revolution—and the profound threat that it could pose to humankind? Are these things inevitable? Can we resist them? What strategy should we use?

Strategies for the Church:

Salt and Light in the Twenty-First Century

God calls us to be salt and light, and never before has that role been more important. We are light to declare the truth; we are salt to preserve what is good and deter decay. We are called to be salt and light in the face of biotech’s threat to human nature and its unique dignity. So what do we do?

Four key strategies need to work together.

1. **Be distinctive!** The apostle Paul tells us not to be “conformed” to the standards of the world around us. Never has that principle been more needed than as we face the brave new world. Just as Christians have learned to “just say no” to abortion, and as they may soon need to say no to euthanasia, we will be called on to navigate complex uses of technology as we retain our distinctive Christian identity.

We find little encouragement in how Christians have responded to in vitro fertilization. Pastors and teachers have ignored it, and many Christians have been through treatment cycles with little awareness of the huge ethical issues at stake. But the debate on cloning and embryo stem cell research has awakened us to the fact that abortion is not the only issue of profound moral significance. We are more alert to the emerging biotech agenda. If we can learn well from this experience, we will become prepared for the demands on our integrity that we will soon meet. Our discipleship may meet no greater challenges as we step forward into the vast temptations of the brave new world—temptations in the shadow of Babel.

2. **Be informed!** The Church of Jesus Christ must be by far the best-informed sector of the population in respect to these new questions and the threats they pose. That means education—and the Church is well able to mount a huge educational initiative for its members. Only in this way will we become prepared to live distinctive lives, and to serve as salt and light for human dignity in our culture.
3. **Mobilize!** We must mobilize. The energy and commitment that have characterized the Christian response to abortion show what can be achieved. Yet, as we know, political work on abortion has engaged only a small slice of the Church. Many sympathize; few have acted. We have vast potential in the Church, with tens of millions of Christians and, side by side with the educational resources of individual congregations, we have hundreds of colleges, seminaries, and Bible schools. We have huge parachurch ministries, websites, magazines and conferences. As the biotech challenge emerges as the greatest opportunity for salt-and-light Christian response in this century, we have at our disposal a vast reservoir of resources.
4. **Engage!** We must engage. As on so many great issues of the day, some outside the Church agree with us, and we welcome their agreement and seek to work with them. Such a strategy was the cornerstone of William Wilberforce’s famous efforts to end slavery. This eminent British statesman worked with anyone who would work with him to improve the conditions of the slaves,

to end the slave trade, and finally to abolish slavery in the global British Empire a generation before the Civil War raged here in the U.S. We have worked with unbelievers on the rights of the handicapped, on pornography, human rights, the reform of prison conditions, and religious liberty. We must work with others here.

Most people agree with us that cloning is wrong. That includes many religious leaders—some mainline, liberal Christians (who, like the United Methodist Church, are often pro-choice on abortion)—as well as Jewish and Islamic leaders. It also includes many environmentalists and pro-choice feminists. Christians need to be ready to work with anyone who believes that human dignity is at stake in the biotech revolution and is prepared to work with us. It will bring us side by side with people who take very different views on other issues—what writer and lawyer Wesley Smith has called “strange clonefellows”!

Be distinctive. Be informed. Mobilize. Engage. Powerful ideas can have powerful consequences—but we must build strategies and follow through with them if we want our ideas to shape the culture. That is how we answer those many committed believers who ask us: “But what can I do?”

Sometimes the emphasis is on the “I”—“What can *I* do?” Every individual, each one of us, can commit to this fourfold challenge.

Sometimes the emphasis is on the “do”—“But what can I *do*?” People often ask that question as a way of shrugging their shoulders, throwing up their hands in horror, turning their backs, and walking away from a problem that seems too big to face. But the answer is always very practical. In the rest of this chapter we outline some practical steps we can all take, starting now. We believe in a great God who has given his people mighty resources for such a time as this. This battle is winnable. But—to stick with the metaphor of war—we must be prepared to fight.

Abortion and the Biotech Agenda

Key to the educational program that will awaken the Church to the biotech agenda is our commitment to fight abortion. For a generation, abortion has captured the heart and imagination of Christians like nothing else. From a slow start, evangelicals have joined Catholics in an equal partnership in political as well as caring work. As a result, the pro-life movement has grown powerful in Washington, D.C., and in state capitals around the nation. Through hundreds of crisis pregnancy centers, tens of thousands of devoted volunteers work to undermine the abortion culture in their communities. Abortion has proved the one issue of bioethics that has engaged the conscience of the Church and commanded its action. Indeed, it has proved the one social issue that has captured the imagination of Christians on a huge scale. It gives a sharp focus to our political influence and has been the chief distinguishing mark of our agenda for cultural issues. We seek a culture of life.

Yet while abortion stands out as “the” issue for many Christians, fewer than desired have taken this issue seriously. In every church fellowship you can find a handful of activists. So much depends on the pastor or priest. It is not that most evangelical pastors and Catholic priests are pro-choice, but they have different priorities. They do not all agree that this issue is so important.

That is not a criticism (although that depends on their other priorities!). God does not call us to spend all our time and resources fighting abortion. Believers face many challenges in a culture that is slowly but surely turning its back on the Christian vision of the world. But in many churches, the “priorities” are inward-looking, institutional issues such as new buildings.

For many Christians, the great social and cultural issues of our day attract hardly any notice at all. *Most evangelical Christians do not even vote!* Many of them seem able to live in almost complete disengagement from the culture and its “salt and light” opportunities. Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to

illustrate how religious people can use their religion to block out love for their neighbors. All the vast religious activity of our generation, with its buildings and organizations and meetings, can offer us cover as we ignore the needs of our day and our opportunities to meet them. We conveniently forget that, for a Christian, every opportunity is also a responsibility.

Second, the pro-life movement has focused almost exclusively on abortion and shown little interest either in the emerging biotech issues or even the growing threat of euthanasia. Abortion, of course, is not a disease; it is a symptom. The move to liberal abortion is not an isolated development; it emerges from a much broader collapse in our idea of what it means to be human, and from a compliant and weak medical profession that has gone along with changing social assumptions. Euthanasia is a further symptom of the same disease.

When Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop issued their wake-up call *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*—a book and a powerful video series that had a dramatic effect on evangelicals worldwide—they made exactly this point: that abortion and euthanasia are twin products of the same abandonment of the sanctity of life.

Third, as we cast our eyes on the unfolding biotech agenda, the pro-life movement's great strength—its strong focus on abortion—could also emerge as a weakness. For while abortion is a vivid example of a larger group of principles—treating people like things, using human beings as commodities, denying the image of God—in back of abortion lies a new mindset in medicine and society. We find ourselves in a much wider discussion in which medicine and technology are on trial. Euthanasia and cloning are not “other” issues; they form part of the same issue. And as we have been arguing all through this book, manufacturing and manipulating human life is evil in the same way that killing is evil. Abortion, for all its horror, is not *the* issue; it is merely the plainest example so far of the abuse of human dignity in our culture. But there are others. And they are getting worse.

So as we seek to educate the Church, we need to begin with abortion, but not end there. What lies behind *taking* human life (abortion, euthanasia), *making* human life (the copying and manipulation of the new biotech—cloning, genetic engineering), and the prospect of *faking* life (artificial intelligence, nanotechnology) is really one principle: the desire for power and control over human life, our own and the lives of others. It is a desire for power and control to decide, not just issues of life and death, but what kind of life shall be lived. It's the Babel desire to declare independence from God and assert absolute control over us and our affairs. It's the sin of rebellion against God, let loose first in the Garden of Eden, sampled in Cain's murder of his brother, and finally demonstrated by the builders of the tower. Yet they were just preparing the way for us. What they built with bricks and mortar we build with eggs and sperm and genes and nanotechnology.

If we are to work to prevent, under God, what C. S. Lewis called “the abolition of man,” these opening years of the twenty-first century are our strategic moment. We have in our generation the best opportunity for Christians to be salt and light. We have a cause so great that we find it hard to grasp its importance. We have a chance to shape the future for good and for God, and defeat forces intent on destroying human nature as we know it. Babel is rising again, a high-tech challenge to the glory of God and the dignity of his human creatures. Today's Babel builders are out to make a name for themselves on a far larger scale. God has called us to rule his earth for him. Jesus Christ has summoned us to be salt and light in the corruption of our own generation. *This* is our task.

We need to get on with it.

We wrestle not against the media, the biotech industry, and pharmaceutical companies. In this battle, we wrestle against spiritual powers of darkness.

Christians recognize the Devil as a real and personal being. Scripture calls him a liar, a murderer, and an accuser of the brethren (John 8:44; Revelation 12:10). He *lies* in that he pushes the premise that a tiny “clump of cells in a petri dish” isn't worthy of moral respect and legal safeguards. The Devil is a *murderer*

in that he promotes the destruction of human life, whether in a research lab or by the bedside of a ventilator-dependent, brain-injured person. Finally, he is an *accuser of the brethren* in that he slanders Christians, charging us with caring more about “zygotes” than real people with heartbreaking diseases; he is constantly condemning Christians who work to safeguard life and promote human dignity.

At the Joni and Friends International Disability Center and the Christian Institute on Disability, we understand it is a moral battle, a battle that focuses on what people believe about the human embryo. We believe that all pursuit of medical advancements reflects *somebody's* morals; we don't want the media, politicians, celebrities, pharmaceutical companies and the biotech industry setting the moral agenda. Wise leaders who hold a biblical worldview must be our guides. We need advocates who have a deep respect for life and a commitment to improve our culture, not diminish it.

You are that advocate. The first handicapped people to be carted off by Nazi medical teams were disabled people who had no advocates, no one to speak up or stand up for them. When Psalm 140:12 states, “I know that the LORD secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy,” God is thinking of *your* hands and *your* voice.

What Does it Involve?

There are several ways to promote a pro-life perspective in your church. Start by forming a disability ministry, creating an outreach into local nursing homes, and forming a partnership with your local crisis pregnancy center. From there, you can:

- Alert your church's prayer team to the need to cover these issues in prayer. Provide them with information on local, state, and national legislation or policies. If your church does not have a prayer team, organize a group of like-hearted Christians who will agree to bring these issues before the Lord in prayer. Ask your pastor to address stem cell research in a sermon series, or to include it in Sanctity of Life Sunday.
- Organize a panel discussion on stem cell research at your church.
- Ask a Bible college or seminary in your community to hold an off-campus bioethics course at your church, then invite other churches to participate and advertise the course.
- Ask an informed and interested couple in your church to host a short informational seminar on the ethics of artificial reproductive technologies, including in vitro fertilization.
- Plan a Sunday school class using curriculum such as *Playing God?: Facing the Everyday Ethical Dilemmas of Biotechnology* by Charles Colson and Nigel M. de S. Cameron, Ph.D.
- Volunteer as an ombudsman at your local nursing home.
- Ask how you, or an interested elder in your church, might serve on an ethics committee at your local hospital.
- Sponsor a symposium at your church; gather four or five presenters who can speak to the topics in this book. To locate presenters in your area, contact the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity.
- Create a small watchdog task force that will investigate bills and initiatives in either your state assembly or in the U.S. Congress. Contact your state representative of National Right to Life.
- Contact your state or U.S. representatives at their district offices; leverage your vote by also asking a couple of friends to call or write. Follow up the effort by writing or calling your representatives at your state capital or in Washington, D.C.

- Coordinate a letter-writing party to reach your state or national representatives and local or state supreme court justices. These letters ought to be personal and not sound as though you copied them from an organized campaign. A personal letter informs not only legislators and judges, but their clerks and staff who do much of the research for the judicial or representative's office.
- Connect with groups like Not Dead Yet or ADAPT to find out what policies or laws are encroaching on the welfare of disabled or elderly people.
- Coordinate a network of writers who are either disabled or elderly to submit op-ed pieces and letters to editors, most especially newspapers in your state capital or Washington, D.C.

Most of all, share your convictions in thoughtful, reasoned conversations with friends, neighbors, coworkers, and family members. To be salt and light in your community is to engage people in these issues, whether waiting in a hair salon, writing a letter to the editor, walking through a nursing home, talking in the coffee klatch, meeting on a community bioethics board in a hospital, sitting in the student lounge at college, or spending hours in an emergency room.

You are in a battle for the minds and hearts of men . . . *you* are the advocate.

In the book *How to Be a Christian in a Brave New World*, we tell the story of Larry, a truck driver who broke his neck and just wanted to die. Here's what I (Joni) wrote to Larry:

Dear Larry,

I can appreciate the fact that you just don't want to go on. Really. There are days when I wake up, even now, after all these years, and think, Lord Jesus, I don't have the strength. But the weaker I am physically, the harder I have to lean on the Lord; and the harder I lean on him, the stronger I discover him to be. God always seems bigger to those who need him most. He is drawn to people like you and me. He's attracted—he has a special heart for—the weak. And I will tell you flat out, I would rather be in my chair knowing him, than on my feet without him. I'm going to be praying for you over the next few weeks, asking God to aid and comfort you . . . and that the Lord Jesus, the Bread of Life, the Resurrection and the Life, he who has the Words of Life will help you want to live. In the meantime, I'm sending you some resources and groups in your area who can serve as your advocate there in the nursing home.

Larry is *not* better off dead than disabled. The fact is, better to be disabled than follow the wisdom of this age. Better to follow life . . . the Resurrection and the Life. And the life that Jesus gives is always abundant. It's why Jesus was nailed to the cross. Not only to redeem us from sin, but to reclaim this world as rightfully his.

That's the message that will change Larry's heart. And it's the message that, with a lot of prayer, will change the soul of a society . . . the heart of our nation.

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About the Authors

Joni Eareckson Tada is a global Christian stateswoman and an internationally renowned advocate for people with disabilities. She is the Founder and CEO of Joni and Friends International Disability Center, a nonprofit organization with a worldwide outreach to people with disabilities and their families. A diving accident in 1967 left Joni, then 17, a quadriplegic in a wheelchair. Since then, Joni's wisdom and influence have been shared with the world through Christian books, the media, speaking, and her service in disability advocacy. She served on the National Council on Disability under two U.S. Presidents; during her tenure, the Americans with Disabilities Act was drafted and passed into law. Joni has also served on the Disability Advisory Committee to the U.S. State Department. Her driving desire is to see every person with a disability find hope, dignity, and their place in the body of Christ. Joni and Ken Tada have been married since 1982.

Nigel M. de S. Cameron, Ph.D., is President Emeritus of the Center for Policy on Emerging Technologies, and he has been a Research Professor and Associate Dean at the Illinois Institute of Technology where until 2008 he was Director of the Center on Nanotechnology and Society. In 2003, he co-founded the Institute on Biotechnology and the Human Future. Cameron has served on numerous advisory boards and represented the U.S. on delegations to the UN General Assembly and UNESCO, and been a participant in the U.S./EU dialogue Perspectives on the Future of Science and Technology. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, and has testified before both houses of Congress, the European Parliament and the European Commission's Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies. In 2008, he was the U.S. Government's nominee to the UN Human Rights Council as Special Rapporteur for the Right to Health. A naturalized citizen of the U.S., he is a native of the UK where he studied at Cambridge and Edinburgh Universities and the Edinburgh Business School.