Alternative medicine continues to grow in popularity. Such medicine is defined in various ways, but generally has three characteristics: 1) it tends to focus on aspects which are not usually emphasized in conventional medical care, 2) there is typically little clinical research to support claims of efficacy or safety, and 3) it tends to be provided within a holistic philosophy that emphasizes the spiritual, relational, emotional, and physical aspects of health and healing. Estimates are that while 34 percent of Americans used some form of

By any method of reckoning, we have entered an age of nearly unbridled biotechnological expansion. Futurists almost universally claim that the 21st century will be what Jeremy Rifkin has called “The Biotech Century.” Richard Oliver, professor of business management at Vanderbilt University, has announced that “The Bioterials Age will complete the triumph of economics over politics, which was begun in the Information Age. It will unleash forces stronger than nationalism and more powerful than the combined armies of the world.” To coin a word, Oliver's characterization of this new age sounds extraordinarily “Technopian,” and the list of technologies which are of concern is daunting:

• The ability to clone humans.
• Pre-determination of the sex of children and their genetic make-up.
• Pharmacogenomics, which directs and tailors drugs to the genetic make-up of individual patients.
• Genetically-derived therapies for the prevention and cure of most cancers, heart disease, AIDS, and other diseases, including new strains of vaccine-resistant ones such as malaria.
• The ability to “program” out of human genes the propensities to contract various diseases and illnesses.
• Repair of damaged brain cells, spinal cords, and other diseased or damaged human tissues.
• Animals that grow replacement organs for the 50 percent of humans who die before getting a transplant organ from a human donor.
• A “smart mouse” that points the way to eliminating aging in humans.

Clearly, the future may reap great benefits from biotechnologies such as genetic engineering, cloning, cybernetics, nanotechnology, and a litany of other neologisms yet to be invented; but the future may also portend human tragedy, a loss of human dignity, and a world which is increasingly hostile to concerns which transcend the world of contemporary scientific research.

Are Christians even aware of these issues? Certainly some are. Does the Church have anything to say about biotechnology? If so, what? If not, why not? Can we afford not to speak to these issues? Can we afford to mis-speak on these issues? These are sober questions for Christians who are witnesses to the dawn of the biotech age. These are issues which ought to cause us all to lay awake at night. They are issues which demand our most careful attention. And they are matters which will require a multi-disciplinary collaboration if we are to hope to get a hearing.

One of the challenges which we will increasingly face as new technologies arise is the determination of what it means to be human. In her volume, How We Became Posthuman, Katherine Hayles argues that mortal human beings are rapidly becoming an endangered species. And even if only a portion of robotics pioneer Hans Moravec’s vision of the future is realized, human beings as we know them will have to fight for their own survival, but with an unlikely enemy. Says Moravec:

Humans can be enhanced by both biological and hard robotic technologies. Such present-day examples as hormonal and genetic tuning of body growth and function, pacemakers, artificial hearts, powered artificial limbs, hearing aids, and night-vision devices are faint hints of future possibilities. Mind Children speculated on ways to preserve a person while replacing every part of body and brain with superior
alternative medicine in 1990, this number had increased to 42 percent in 1997. A May 2000 Consumer Reports survey of 46,000 Americans—believed to be the largest study conducted in this country—found that 35 percent of those surveyed used alterna-
tive therapies. Alternative medicine raises a multitude of ethical issues for the new millennium, including those which center around the alleged link between health and spirituality and the increased importance being placed on evidence-based medicine.

Part of alternative medicine's appeal is its claim to satisfy people's hunger for spirituality and the transcendental. The interest in spirituality among Americans is staggering. Several recent studies have indicated that more than 90 percent of Americans pray, and 95 percent claim that their prayers are answered. Furthermore, more than three-quarters of all Americans believe God answers prayer for healing an incurable illness, and 14 percent claim they have experienced such healing. According to a study cited in the June 2000 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine, three-quarters of hospitalized patients wanted physi-
cians to consider their spiritual needs. One survey found that 99 percent of family physicians believed religious belief can con-
tribute to patients' healing. Ninety-two percent of HMO profes-
sionals believed likewise. About two-thirds of these same physi-
cians and HMO professionals said they used prayer or medita-
tion themselves when they were ill.

The resurgence in interest regarding spiritual matters raises questions regarding the true meaning of “spirituality” by healthcare pro-
feressionals. Medicine's traditional focus on the physical dimen-
sions of health and healing is increasingly being extended to encompass patients' emotional, relational, and spiritual concerns as well. Medical care has always been based on therapeutic touch, and evaluates the prac-
tice ethically and theologically.

Should Clergy Be Allowed to Pray for Patients? An Examination of the Constitution's First Amendment Provisions, Charles Webber, J.D. A122 Evaluates whether or not a clergy or religious group can constitution-
al challenge and describes regulatory issues.

The alleged connection between spirituality and health also has not escaped the demand for scientific validation. Researchers have attempted to investigate the impact of spiritu-
ality or religion on health and healing via the application of sci-
cific methods. Again, while the renewed attention to matters of faith should be welcomed, Christians should be wary regarding the interpretation and application of the results of such study. For example, proof that people who attend church more often are more healthy, or that church attendance leads to improved health, should be approached with caution.

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