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Christ and Culture Revisited



THE SACREDNESS OF LIFE IN A CULTURE OF DEATH

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On the surface, Oklahoma City and New York City do not appear to have anything in common. The capital city of the state of Oklahoma boasts a population of less than a million people and is primarily known for the ranchers and farmers that helped settle the state. By contrast, New York City's population is well over eight million people and is home to some of the most famous buildings and people in the world.

However, common bonds the two cities share are tragedy and loss of life. In downtown Oklahoma City and in Lower Manhattan are memorials designed to remember the tragedies the two cities experienced on April 19, 1995, and September 11, 2001, respectively. The memorial site in Oklahoma City is framed by two entrances marked 9:01 and 9:03 while the field in between the entrances contains 168 illuminated chairs representing the lives of those killed at 9:02 a.m. in the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. At the New York City memorial site are the footprints of the two 110-story towers that comprised the World Trade Center. On the stone perimeters marking the footprints of each building are the names of almost 3,000 people who died when hijacked commercial airplanes flew through the two towers, the Pentagon in Washington, DC, and crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, when passengers overpowered the plane's hijackers.

Following each attack, the nation went into mourning at the loss of life intentionally taken at the hands of fellow humans. Families began to share the pictures and stories of their loved ones and the numbers of those killed began to take on names, personalities, and experiences. Still today, the pictures and stories of each of the individuals who died on those days are shared at the museums at the respective memorial sites as well as on the official memorial websites. In the midst of death, society recognizes at

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the heart of what is lost during tragedy is life—and life is sacred.

When Pope John Paul II issued *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life) on March 25, 1995,¹ three weeks before the Oklahoma City bombing, it was to “reiterate the view of the Roman Catholic Church on the value of life and to warn against violating the sanctity of life.”² Throughout the *EV*, John Paul II provides an understanding of the Catholic Church’s stance on abortion, euthanasia, and birth control as well the then-almost two-decade-old invitro fertilization method of conception. John Paul II, who expressed concerns these actions added to a growing “culture of death,”³ advocated for a “culture of life” by defining why human life has worth and dignity.⁴ In almost thirty years since the late pontiff issued *EV*, a culture of death has expanded as terrorist attacks, wars, increases in suicides, school shootings, and human trafficking, as well as easier access to abortions, and controversies and opinions surrounding a global healthcare pandemic have all added to a devaluing of human life.

While those killed by abortions, euthanasia, murders, suicides, wars, pandemics, and terrorist attacks could be reduced to a set of numbers and statistics, the numerical value does not express the individual lives and worth of each human being represented. Often humanity recognizes the loss of life is unnatural. People do not grieve for inanimate objects that can be replaced, but rather they mourn when life is lost and when human dignity is not upheld or respected. Though the Ten Commandments are often the basis of law for many governments of civilized society, God has placed his law, his moral law, on the heart of every human being (Rom 1:32; 2:15).

This article will seek to examine why human life is sacred and valued. The author will first examine the first murder in Scripture, as well as God’s response to the violence and corruption that filled the earth. The author will then provide an explanation of why life is sacred as its origins are found in the *imago Dei*. Finally, the author will provide application and implications for why upholding the sacredness of life is necessary.

¹John Paul II, “Evangelium Vitae,” The Vatican Website, accessed 7 December 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.

²Benjamin Garcia and Katherine Brind’Amour, “*Evangelium Vitae* (1995) by Pope John Paul II,” The Embryo Project Encyclopedia, accessed 20 December 2021; <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/evangelium-vitae-1995-pope-john-paul-ii>

³John Paul II, “Evangelium Vitae.”

⁴John Paul II, “Evangelium Vitae.”

I. CAIN AND ABEL

The first murder in human history occurred during the second generation of people. Cain, the older son of Adam and Eve who was a “tiller of the ground,” (Gen 4:2)⁵ offered the Lord fruit he had harvested from the ground. His younger brother, Abel, “also brought of the firstlings of his flock and their fat portions” (Gen 4:4). In the Genesis account, Moses recorded that God had regard for Abel’s offering, but did not have regard for the offering Cain gave (Gen 4:4–5).⁶ Cain, who responded to the Lord’s disregard of his own offering with anger and a downcast countenance (Gen 4:5), was given a warning by the Lord: “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?” (Gen 4:6–7). Radisa Antic notes God’s questions of Cain “were intended to provoke a change of heart” due to his angry state that “is often a prelude to homicidal acts.”⁷ God, who knows the hearts and minds of mankind, told Cain sin was “crouching at the door; and its desire” was for him who was plotting to take the life of his younger brother (Gen 4:7).

In the fields Cain does take the life of his brother, Abel. While the motive appears to be jealousy, what is most jarring is the callous and indifferent response Cain gives to God as he inquires of Abel’s whereabouts (Gen 4:9). Only after God tells Cain of his punishment for the murder of Abel does the older brother respond in remorse—and yet his remorse and regret is for the consequences of his actions rather than the actions that led to his punishment (Gen 4:13–16). Though the Lord said Cain would be a wanderer the remainder of his life, God protected Cain as he marked him with a sign so that no one who found him in his wanderings would slay him for vengeance (Gen 4:15). While the sign God placed on Cain is unknown, “God was trying to change the being of Cain, which was permeated by hatred and petrified in rebellion” as he manifested both his love and protection.⁸

Interestingly, Scripture does not record the response of Adam and Eve to the murder of their second child at the hands of their firstborn. Based

⁵All Scripture references are from the New American Standard (NAS) version of Scripture unless otherwise noted.

⁶God’s acceptance of Abel’s offering and disregard for Cain’s offering is further reiterated in Heb 11:4 where the author of Hebrews observed that “by faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain” indicating that God knew the heart motivations of both men. God still knows the heart motivations of all humanity today.

⁷Radisa Antic, “Cain, Abel, Seth, and the Meaning of Human Life as Portrayed in the Books of Genesis and Ecclesiastes,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 44, no. 2 (2006): 205.

⁸Antic, “Cain, Abel, Seth,” 206.

on other responses to the loss of life, one can only imagine the anguish and heartache the couple experienced. While one life does not replace another, in his grace God gave Adam and Eve another son, Seth (Gen 4:25).

Violence on the earth did not cease with Adam and Eve's sons. Ten generations later, during the days of Noah, the Lord "saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" and "the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Gen 6:5, 11). Though "all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth" (Gen 6:12), Noah found favor in God's eyes. While the Creator prepared to destroy "all flesh" with the impending flood, Noah and his family were spared and protected under the covenant God established with him (Gen 6:17–18). At the conclusion of the flood, God promised he would never again destroy every living thing as he had done even though the inclination of humans is evil (Gen 8:21).

From the very beginning of creation, God showed that he values human life. While sin and its effects have continued to permeate mankind, the sacredness of life has not diminished. God, who sent his own Son to die for sins of men, values the lives of human beings.

Evaluation of the sacredness of life leads one to examine why human life is important. Therefore, one must begin with an understanding of why human life is different than any other aspect of creation—namely that man is made in the image of God.

II. *IMAGO DEI*

The creation of man on the sixth day of Creation is the only aspect of God's created work of which the Triune God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to our likeness" and then "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen 1:26–27). Formed by God from the dust from the ground, man is the only part of creation that God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" for man to become a living being (Gen 2:7). The original Hebrew word "formed" (*yatsar*) indicates "a basic meaning of 'molding' something into a desired shape."⁹ The same word is used in the creation of the animals, however, man is the sole part of creation made in the image and likeness of God.¹⁰ The distinction of being made

⁹James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 528.

¹⁰It is beyond the scope of this article to address the variance of the many ways "image of God" has been defined by theologians throughout the centuries.

in the image of God sets man apart from the rest of creation while simultaneously indicating all of mankind is an image-bearer of their Creator.¹¹ The image of God is defined as the God-given ability humans possess to have a relationship with God.¹²

John Hammett notes “humans are image-bearers of God because they are created as such”¹³ and this gives humans a “special dignity.”¹⁴ The fact humans are created in God’s image makes them “unique” among God’s creation and gives them “transcendent worth and dignity, simply because they are image-bearers.”¹⁵ All humans, therefore, are created in the image of God which gives them both worth and dignity and enables each to have a relationship with God. While the fall has damaged this relationship, Scripture shows that Christ Jesus is not only the one who can restore a relationship with God,¹⁶ but he is also the perfect image of God.¹⁷ Through a relationship with God through Christ Jesus, man can be “renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (Col 3:10).¹⁸ John F. Kilner observes that God’s image, as is revealed in Christ Jesus in the New Testament, provides the plumb line for human existence and growth.¹⁹ One human being is not made any more or less in the image of God than any other person.

Often discussions regarding a culture or sanctity of life focus on life in the womb as the unborn child is made in God’s image. While this discussion is true and warranted, the scope of the discussion needs to broaden to

¹¹The reference to man being made in the image, or likeness, of God is not limited to Gen 1:26–27. Gen 5:1–2, 9:6 and Jas 3:9 also use the same phrasing.

¹²John S. Hammett, “Human Nature,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. by Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 386. Human beings are the only element of creation living on earth that can have a relationship with God.

¹³John S. Hammett, “A Whole Bible Approach to Interpreting Creation in God’s Image,” *SWJT* 63, no. 2 (Spring 2021): 31. Hammett notes that “[e]ven after the fall, humans are spoken of as being in the image of God, so the image is not lost in the fall” while simultaneously noting that “[h]ow humans live out their creation in God’s image has been damaged in some way by sin” (35).

¹⁴Hammett, “A Whole Bible,” 32.

¹⁵Hammett, “A Whole Bible,” 35.

¹⁶Among the passages of Scripture that give evidence of this truth are John 3:16, 6:52–58, 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 3:24, 5:8–9, 6:23; and 1 John 5:1–4.

¹⁷John 5:19–24, Colossians 1:15–20, and Hebrews 1:3. It is imperative to note the distinction between Christ Jesus being the image of God while man is made in the image of God. He is God; humans are not.

¹⁸Other passages of Scripture that speak to the renewal of humans into the likeness of Christ Jesus include Romans 8:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18. Scripture makes evident transformation into the likeness of Christ occurs following salvation through Christ Jesus.

¹⁹John F. Kilner, “The Image of God, the Need for God, and Bioethics,” *Christian Bioethics* 23, no. 3 (2017): 267.

include the mentally and physically disabled, and older adults who society disregards due to their senior status. Being made in the image or likeness of God is true of all mankind—regardless of ability, age, social status, or race. “Biblical affirmations that all people are created in the image of God provide a ringing denunciation of basing people’s significance on their particular attributes—precisely because that image is not a matter of current attributes, which vary in degree from person to person.”²⁰ Understanding that every person is an image-bearer should alter perceptions while simultaneously recognizing that God places value and dignity on every life and gives each life purpose.²¹

III. GOD GIVES LIFE, VALUE, AND DIGNITY²²

In the Declaration of Independence, the document that let England’s King George III know the thirteen colonies were cutting ties, America’s founding fathers penned, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”²³ Several of the United States’ founding leaders were deists, yet recognized the value of human life was not granted by government, but rather by the Creator of mankind—a free democracy, they noted, can only uphold and reinforce the value of the lives of its citizens by ensuring those God-given rights are protected. Additionally, when the United Nations was formed in 1945 following the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust, the preamble to the organization’s charter included the statement, “We the people of the United Nations determined . . . to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person.”²⁴ Neither the government of the United States or the

²⁰Kilner, “The Image of God,” 6.

²¹Of note is Jas 3:8–12 where James writes the same tongue cannot bless the Lord God while also cursing men who are made in the image of God. When people demean an individual based upon disability, age, race, or social status, they are not only insulting a fellow image-bearer, they are insulting the Image.

²²A review of literature revealed human dignity and sacredness of life are used synonymously and interchangeably. They are used in the same manner in this article.

²³“Declaration of Independence,” National Archives, accessed 30 December 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>. In his 2001 Pulitzer-Prize-winning biography of John Adams, David McCullough notes in the initial draft of the Declaration of Independence that “certain ‘truths’ were described as ‘sacred and undeniable,’” but the “simpler, stronger ‘self-evident’ was substituted.” See David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 122. The author of this article asserts human rights are those that are within the bounds of Scripture and not those that encourage or perpetuate sin.

²⁴“United Nations Charter: Preamble,” United Nations, accessed 30 December 2021, <https://>

organization designed to uphold international order is biblically based, yet both recognize the value and dignity of human life. Inherent in man is something that tells us that human life is sacred and valued and should be treated as such. As previously noted, this moral law is written on the hearts of men by God. Human rights stem from the acknowledgement of the sacredness or dignity of human life.

Because mankind is created in the image of God, each life has value and dignity as bestowed on them by their Creator. As the Creator, God knows his created beings and it is he who gives mankind its dignity, not created being to another created being. Susan Haack expounds on this when she writes, “We are equal to each other precisely because none of us is the maker of another—we have all received our life equally as a gift from the Creator.”²⁵ John Stott notes the value of humans “depends . . . on God’s view of us and [his] relationship to us” while also observing that human dignity finds its basis in three relationships: God, fellow man, and the earth and its creatures.²⁶

1. *Relationship with God.* “God desires relationships with people and He is the initiator of the relationships.”²⁷ God called out to Abraham and Moses by name.²⁸ The Lord told Jeremiah that while the prophet was in the womb he knew him, consecrated him, and appointed him as a prophet to the nations (Jer 1:4–5). David said the knowledge God had of him was “too wonderful” and “too high” for him to attain (Ps 139:6) and also wrote God “searched him” and had “known him” (Ps 139:1).

David’s use of the word *yada*, or “know,” was emphasized with his proclamation that God was “intimately acquainted with all” his ways (Ps 139:3). Aspects of David’s life did not escape God—he was familiar with them before David knew they would occur. David knew God personally while also recognizing God knew him personally. David not only declared God’s knowledge of him (Ps 139:1–6), but also God’s presence with him (Ps 139:7–12). The knowledge and relationship God has with man is not

www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/preamble

²⁵Susan Haack, “Christian Explorations in the Concept of Human Dignity” *Dignitas* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 5.

²⁶John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 198–99. Stott bases this claim on God’s words in Gen 1:26–27: “God created man in his own image” (relationship with God); “male and female he created them” (relationship with fellow man); and “...fill the earth and subdue it” (relationship with the earth and its creatures).

²⁷Ashley Lane Allen, “A Study of Selected Factors Related to Mentoring in Women’s Ministry Leaders in Selected Southern Baptist Churches” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 19, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

²⁸For Abraham, see Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–6; 17:1–6; and 22:1, 11. For Moses, see Exodus 3:1–9.

limited to the Old Testament, but also affirmed in the New Testament.

Jesus Christ, God made flesh, said no one could come to the Father except through him (John 14:6), and no one could come to the Father without the Father drawing the individual to himself (John 6:44, 65). Jesus called his disciples to himself²⁹ and called out to Paul as he was on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians (Acts 9:1–8). God’s desire for relationship with people through Christ is still true today. Just as God knew all the aspects of the lives of Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah, and Paul, he knows all the same qualities of each individual today.

This aspect of God’s character is not limited to a select handful of people, but rather is true of all humanity for all time. God knows individuals personally and knows what individuals need. Jesus reiterated this in the Sermon on the Mount when he reminded the disciples God knew the food, drink, and clothing they needed (Matt 6:30–33). Jesus also reminded them God knew and provided what the birds need and that man is worth more than the birds (Matt 6:26).³⁰

Additionally, and most importantly, humanity is the only part of creation for whom Christ died. The entire metanarrative of Scripture points to mankind’s redemption in Christ. Jesus said God loved the world and sent his only begotten Son to save the world (John 3:16) and Paul reinforced this in his letter to the Romans when he wrote, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). God loves people—the sole part of creation who was made in his image.

The *imago Dei* shows not only the capacity man has for a relationship with God, but also the personal way God knows humans. Both Jeremiah and David referred to God as LORD, or Yahweh. God’s personal, holy name was originally revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:14–15) as his memorial name, known as I AM. Jesus revealed himself to people as I AM through seven statements made in John’s Gospel.³¹ He used the same

²⁹Matt 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:27–8; 6:12–16; and John 1:35–39.

³⁰God’s provision of the basic necessities of life is not contingent upon an individual knowing Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. God in his providence, kindness, and grace provides these things to his creatures.

³¹Jesus told his followers: “I am the Bread of life” (John 6:35, 48, 51); “I am the Light of the world” (John 8:12); “I am the Door of the sheep” (John 10:7); “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11); “I am the Resurrection and the Life” (John 11:25); “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6); and “I am the True Vine” (John 15:1). By revealing himself through the use of the phrase “I AM,” Jesus showed those around him that he is God while simultaneously fulfilling Old Testament prophecy in relationship to the seven phrases.

phrase when he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion (John 18:8). God desires to relate to mankind personally.³²

Stott notes God's divine image "includes those rational, moral, and spiritual qualities which express something of who God is."³³ Thus, humans are able to learn about God from teachers and preachers; know him through Christ and serve him; live dependent on him; and obey his commands and precepts as outlined in Scripture.³⁴ Stott concludes "all those human rights we call the freedom to profess, practise [*sic*] and propagate religion, the freedom of worship, of conscience, of thought and of speech, come under this first rubric of our relationship with God."³⁵

2. *Relationship with fellow man.* When God made Adam, he declared, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18). From the beginning of creation, God intended for man to be in relationship with fellow man. Floyd Schneider said relationships have a two-fold purpose: to express care and concern for individuals and to get to know others better.³⁶ Hammett notes God made humans with a need to have community and relationships with other humans.³⁷ From Abraham to Moses to the Israelites, God calls people, rather than "isolated individuals to himself."³⁸

In the New Testament, relationships are evidenced in Jesus' relationship with his disciples as well as Scripture's emphasis on the necessity of believers establishing relationships with others and "living in harmony with one another."³⁹ Establishing relationships with others is the underlying element of the Great Commission and Jesus sent his disciples to witness two-by-two so they could work together in community to share the gospel with the lost (Luke 10:1–24). Jesus prayed for unity among believers as these relationships "form the basis of a believer's witness to the world and the world recognizes Christians by their love for one another."⁴⁰ The early church was also characterized by the community they had with one

³²Of note is that God calls people by name in Scripture. Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Samuel, Zacharias, the disciples, and Saul (Paul) were all called by name by God. They all responded with an immediate understanding that it was the Lord calling them.

³³Stott, *Issues Facing Christians*, 198.

³⁴Stott, *Issues Facing Christians*, 198.

³⁵Stott, *Issues Facing Christians*, 198.

³⁶Floyd Schneider, *Evangelism for the Fainthearted* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000), 28.

³⁷Hammett, "Human Nature," 368.

³⁸Hammett, "Human Nature," 368.

³⁹Allen, "Selected Factors," 21.

⁴⁰Allen, "Selected Factors," 21.

another (Acts 2:42, 46).

Hammett observes today's postmodern society desires community.⁴¹ However, true community as God desired and designed is first established with him and then overflows into relationships with others as commonality is found in Christ Jesus. While Scripture shows God's desire is for community among mankind, sin including "anger, pride, self-centeredness, envy, [and] greed" tends to "frustrate [man's] attempts to build community."⁴² Redemption in Christ Jesus is the beginning point of true relationship with both God and man.

3. *Relationship with earth and its creatures.* When God created man and woman, He told them to be fruitful, multiply, fill and subdue the earth, and "rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:28). Man and woman were given the responsibility of caring for and keeping the earth. The unique relationship mankind has with the earth and its creatures gives man the responsibility to steward the earth and its resources while also enjoying the rights of work, rest, the earth's resources, food, clothing, shelter, the preservation of life and health, and freedom from poverty, hunger, and disease.⁴³

Stott rightly summarizes the three relationships of human dignity as follows:

[A]ll human rights are at base the right to be human, as so to enjoy the dignity of having been created in God's image and of possessing in consequence unique relationships to God himself, to our fellow human beings and namely that our Creator has also redeemed or re-created us, at great personal cost, through the incarnation and atonement of his Son. And the costliness of God's redeeming work reinforces the sense of human worth which his creation has already given us.... There is no situation in which it is permissible to forget the dignity of human beings by creation, and their consequent right to respect.⁴⁴

⁴¹Hammett, "Human Nature," 399.

⁴²Hammett, "Human Nature," 398.

⁴³Stott, *Issues Facing Christians*, 198.

⁴⁴Stott, *Issues Facing Christians*, 199–200.

IV. APPLICATION AND IMPLICATIONS

The importance of understanding the *imago Dei* and the relationships that extend from it provide the foundational perspective of how man views the sanctity, or dignity, of human life. Because man is not the author of life it is imperative to look to the one who created life and, therefore, gives life value and purpose. Each life is created in God's image and subsequently is considered sacred regardless of the perspective of fellow man. While sin has marred this image, because of his mercy, God offers redemption and renewal through Christ Jesus.

In *EV*, Pope John Paul II recounted the words issued to the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Sixty years after its initial proclamation, the statement is still true:

Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or wilful [*sic*] self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on the body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons: all these things and others like them are infamies indeed. They poison human society ... they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator.⁴⁵

In response, John Paul II noted the “disturbing” state of society was “far from decreasing” but rather was “expanding.”⁴⁶ In addition to the scientific and technological progress that have proved to diminish the dignity of human beings, John Paul II wrote, “a new culture climate is developing and taking hold, which gives crimes against life a new and—if possible—even more sinister character, giving rise to further grave concern: broad sectors of public opinion justify certain crimes against life in the name of the rights of individual freedom, and on this basis they claim not only exemption from punishment but even authorization by the State, so

⁴⁵John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae*.”

⁴⁶John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae*.”

that these things can be done with total freedom and indeed with the free assistance of health-care systems.⁴⁷

The lack of respect for the sacredness of human life has continued its downward spiral since 1995. A postmodern society, as well as an increase in asserting rights and freedoms with little to no regard to how they affect others, have been factors that have contributed to a society that seemingly has little care or concern for life. The late pontiff noted the “tragic” result is not only “the destruction of so many human lives still to be born or in their final state extremely grave and disturbing, but no less grave and disturbing is the fact that conscience itself, darkened as it were by such widespread conditioning, is finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between good and evil in what concerns the basic value of human life.”⁴⁸

In a world that continues to grow increasingly dark, sinister, and callous, it should not be a surprise that human life is not valued and held in high esteem. When people have a true understanding of who God is and how he has made each individual member of society “fearfully and wonderfully” (Ps 139:14) only then will a true understanding of the sacredness of human life be realized. This understanding affects and changes society and as it is carried over into how people treat one another. While laws and restrictions can provide protection and consequences, they cannot change the hearts of individuals and how they view and value their own lives and the lives of others. Only redemption and renewal in Jesus Christ can provide this transformation.

Though redemption is provided in Christ Jesus, it should also not be a surprise when the judgment of God comes upon a society due to individual and collective sin and lack of repentance. Continuing to kill life in the womb, while also allowing almost twenty percent of the nation’s states to legally allow physician-assisted suicide,⁴⁹ does not escape the wrath of God upon society. Sin has consequences.

Human beings were not created for easy disposal, but rather to give glory to the Triune God (Isa 43:7). From conception to death, and every stage in between, human life should be valued because God values life and every life can bring glory to the Creator. Regardless of gender, race, abilities, and age, God places a premium on human life as it is made in his image and he gave his Son for the redemption and restoration of man.

⁴⁷John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae*.”

⁴⁸John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae*.”

⁴⁹Currently California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington have so-called “death with dignity” laws.

The body of Christ should lead the way in manifesting a value for the sanctity of life at every stage in word and deed. This mandate encompasses both Christians individually and the church collectively. One's relationship with God is manifest in how an individual views, treats, and speaks to and about others. As believers are renewed into the image of Christ, their love for God should overflow in loving and valuing other people—brothers and sisters in Christ and lost people. As Christ came to provide eternal and abundant life (John 10:10), believers, who have been entrusted with the gospel of life, should speak life in a culture that is surrounded by death. The love of Christ compelled the apostle Paul to speak truth among the Corinthians and his love should continue to compel believers today (2 Cor 5:12). In a culture that continues to self-define what it means to be a person, believers must stand firmly on what the Creator of life says in his word while simultaneously not allowing their love to grow cold as lawlessness increases (Matt 24:12).

