

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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The Devaluing of Life in America

Modern medicine affirms a proposition that is quite consistent with God's Word—that life is a continuum. (For the Christian, the Bible teaches that life extends from conception on into eternity, for all human beings will live forever.) The DNA strands present at conception are species-specific and the beginning of a new and unique individual human. Indeed, Keith L. Moore and T.V.N. Persaud, in a major medical textbook, *Developing Human*, argue that

Human development begins at fertilization, the process during which a male . . . sperm unites with a female [egg] to form a single cell called a zygote. This highly specialized, totipotent cell marked the beginning of each of us as a unique individual. [A zygote is defined] as the beginning of a new human being. Although most developmental changes occur during the embryonic and fetal periods, some important changes occur during later periods of development: infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Although it is customary to divide human development into *prenatal* (before birth) and *postnatal* (after birth) periods, birth is merely a dramatic event during development resulting in a change in environment. [pp. 2, 18]

Furthermore, the Bible also affirms consistently that humans are of infinite worth and value because they bear the image of God. Humans both resemble God and represent Him as stewards over His world. The life-as-continuum concept means that at all stages of development the human life is of value to God. Postmodern American culture has utterly abandoned that belief and conviction. In terms of the value of human life, we are a culture firmly anchored in mid-air!

Let's examine several developments within American civilization that illustrate the utter abandonment of the value of human life.

- First, consider the recent scandal of Planned Parenthood involving the selling of body parts of babies aborted during late term abortions. What Planned Parenthood refuses to admit is that a fetus is valuable and worth money to someone precisely because that fetus is a human being. The body parts of the baby are of value because that baby has a human brain, a human heart, a human liver, a human kidney, etc. This baby is not simply a mass of tissue or the "product of conception." This baby is a human being, which, if left alone, will develop into a mature adult human being. Abortion is a deliberate interruption of a process designed by God. With biting cynicism, columnist Ross Douthat writes; "But in the end, Planned Parenthood's defenders insist, listening to an abortionist discuss manipulating the 'calvarium' (that is, the dying fetus's skull) so that it emerges research-ready from the womb is fundamentally no different than

listening to a doctor discuss heart surgery or organ transplants. [These babies are] Human beings that the nice, idealistic medical personnel at Planned Parenthood have spent their careers crushing, evacuating and carving up for parts.” What God considers of infinite worth and value, Planned Parenthood doctors treat as a piece of meat!!!!

- Second, consider the growing acceptance of euthanasia, or more specifically physician-assisted suicide. Physician-assisted suicide is legal in some form in a handful of European countries (e.g., Belgium and the Netherlands), Colombia and five American states. But draft bills, ballot initiatives and court cases are progressing in 20 more states and several countries (e.g., Britain, Canada, Germany and South Africa). In short, the idea that doctors should be allowed to prescribe lethal medication for some patients who are close to death or suffering greatly is gathering support across western civilization. This growing acceptance of physician-assisted suicide (really a form of euthanasia) is to preserve human dignity, to offer “death with dignity.” But this is not about human dignity; it is in fact stepping away from this bedrock standard of civilized life. Furthermore, it defies comprehension that doctors would sanction such practices. Former psychiatrist in chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital writes: “The reasons for opposing . . . doctor-assisted suicide never went away. The reasons have been with us since ancient Greek doctors wrote in the Hippocratic oath that ‘I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it nor will I make a suggestion to that effect.’ The oath is a central tenet in the profession of medicine, and it has remained so for centuries.” Indeed, Dr. Leon Kass, former chair of President Bush’s Bioethics Commission, wrote on the Hippocratic Oath that “Medicine and surgery are not simply biological procedures but expressions, in action, of a profession given to helping nature in perpetuating and enhancing human life. The doctor is the cooperative ally of nature not its master. It should not need saying, but the exercises of healing people and killing people are opposed to one another.” Furthermore, as a Christian, it is difficult to embrace deliberately ending a human life because life is sacred and even the endurance of suffering confirms its own dignity. Especially since the Affordable Care Act went into effect, physician-assisted suicide has a very pragmatic dimension to it: It is conceivable that we are headed down a slippery slope where the “vulnerable are threatened and where premature death becomes a cheap alternative to palliative care.” Indeed, Wesley J. Smith of the *National Review* writes that “once society generally accepts the dark premise that killing is an acceptable way to end suffering—we haven’t yet—there is no way to effectively constrain euthanasia inflation.”

Joni Eareckson Tada has astutely observed that “If you truly believe in the value of life, you care about all of the weakest and most vulnerable members of society.” In today’s Postmodern, Post-Christian culture, the two most vulnerable segments of our population are the baby growing in a mother’s womb and the elderly, sick or suffering person who could be a candidate for physician-assisted suicide. As a culture, the devaluation of life is apparently the new national norm. An unborn baby is assigned no value or worth and can be dismembered with approval from the courts and from the national government in the name of science. We make

available to those who are suffering the option of suicide—legitimate and clean—and call it “dignity.”

The disciple of Jesus Christ has a different perspective on life, on suffering and on eternity. The Apostle Paul concludes Romans 8 with these words:

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (ESV)

The value of human life, regardless of its developmental stage and the value of a suffering human life only make sense from the perspective of eternity. Paul gives us that perspective.

See *Issues in Perspective* (26 April 2014); Wesley J. Smith in the *National Review* (30 August 2015); *The Economist* (27 June 2015), pp. 9, 16-20; and Ross Douthat in the *New York Times* (26 July 2015).