

Class 205 How to Engage Culture Without Marrying It: Session 4 Full Notes

Session Four: In the Image of God: Fostering a Culture of Life

4.1 The Image we spurned

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." (Gen. 1:26-28)

"There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations--these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit-- immortal horrors or everlasting splendours." C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*.

The Bible says God created Man in His Image, and he stands above everything the Creator has made. Man alone possesses a capacity for artistic creation, for true reflection, for abstract thinking, and Man alone has a conscience. Indeed, the Christian view of Man is so high that Man is only a little below the Godhead (Psalm 8:5). Man is so much like God that God's Nature and Man's can exist in one person (John 1:14). The Spirit of God lives within regenerate men and men can even become partakers of God's Nature – even to the point of being like Him some day and seeing Him as He is! (1 John 3:2)

For these reasons, Jewish and Christian societies have always been eager to cherish, celebrate, and defend human life as the greatest gift of God. The shedding of innocent blood is seen as the greatest crime in Christian societies and historically we have judged societies by how they treat the innocent, the weak and defenseless.

However, in the 19th century, Man began to reject outright the notion that he was made by God. As anti-God, anti-creation philosophies began to take the reins of culture, men were now free to deal with one another without reference to (or restraint from) Christian notions of the value of human life. Once liberated from God, technology assisted Western nations in committing atrocities on a par with any non-Christian regime:

- The Nazi Holocaust
- The forced starvation by the Communists of 6 million in the early 1930's
- Total war against civilians, including firebombing of cities such as Dresden and Tokyo

For many Christians, the key turning point in society's rejection of God took place in the 1970's, when the West turned to abortion on a massive scale for the first time as a matter of social policy. Where has the rejection of life and the image of God led the world?

4.2 Brave New World

4.2.1. Coming to grips with the abortion holocaust

Abortion is performed in the shadows within our culture and so to speak of abortion as a "holocaust" seems curious. As people by and large are not familiar with the commonness of the procedure, nor with the methods used to perform it, the use of this language seems foolish, disrespectful and even insulting to the victims of the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews. However, if life, even unborn life, is precious, then abortion in our times, when we understand it, dwarfs anything we can think of and defies any title or adjective we might attach to it. Abortion has impacted more people and families than probably any human experience we can think of other than birth and death.

What are the numbers? Within the United States, there have been anywhere between 1.1 and 1.5 million abortions a year every year since 1973. We can therefore say without fear of exaggeration that some 45 million unborn Americans have been aborted since *Roe v. Wade*.

From a Christian standpoint, the worldwide figures are so high as to cause shock – if we allow them to... In China there are some 9 million abortions a year. Overall we can safely say that there are about 42 million abortions performed each year across the world, a figure easily verifiable from various sources, even those friendly to abortion. There is no precedent for such a thing; we have no vocabulary for it. The casualty counts for historical events such as the Black Plague (30 million) or World War II (60 million) are small when we consider that in the last fifty years abortion has claimed perhaps 750 million and possibly even a billion victims.

Have Christians contemplated the spiritual costs and the human consequences of aborting 115,000 babies every day of the year?

4.2.2. Rejecting the weak, the imperfect, and the aged

No less a mainstream source than the *Encarta* encyclopedia recognizes the power of the Gospel to transfer pagan societies by uplifting life - all of life:

Euthanasia has been accepted in some forms by various groups or societies throughout history. In ancient Greece and Rome helping others die or putting them to death was considered permissible in some situations. For example, in the Greek city of Sparta newborns with severe birth defects were put to death. Voluntary euthanasia for the elderly was an approved custom in several ancient societies. However, as Christianity developed and grew powerful in the West, euthanasia became morally and ethically abhorrent and was viewed as a violation of God's gift of life.

An ominous sign for our day is the willingness of leaders to apply the utilitarian reasoning of abortion to the aged and the helpless, those for whom society has traditionally cared. Scientists in the post-Christian world propose mandatory DNA testing for newborns. Societal pressures will tempt societies to dispose of the elderly for financial reasons.

4.2.3. Playing in God's sandbox: eugenics, transgenics and chimeras

All of us will soon be presented with new frontiers of thought about exactly what makes us human. Science is pushing us into a new era of eugenics: selective (even forced) shaped breeding of human beings to achieve particular outcomes.

Eugenics was bad enough in the early 20th century. The early 21st century and our growing mastery of DNA will bring temptations that 20th century racists could not have imagined. What are researchers contemplating and working on today? The BBC tells us:

In May 2008 a cross-party attempt to ban hybrid human animal embryos was defeated on a free vote in the House of Commons, by 336 to 176. MPs had been debating the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill, which would allow regulated research using hybrid or 'admix' embryos, where the nuclei of human cells are inserted into animal eggs. The resulting embryos would be kept for up to 14 days to harvest stem cells.

In the present state of science, hybrid embryos are produced as research tools, and only kept alive for 14 days or fewer....

A hybrid embryo is a mixture of both human and animal tissue. There are several types of hybrid embryo (listed below), but recent controversy has focused on cytoplasmic embryos.

These are created by transferring nuclei containing DNA from human cells into animal eggs that have had almost all of their genetic information removed.

The resulting embryos are more than 99% human, with a small animal component, making up around 0.1% (more detail below).

The embryos are grown in the lab for a few days, then harvested for stem cells: immature cells that can become many types of tissue. The embryonic stem cells are used in research into different diseases as a way of addressing the shortage of human eggs available for research.

Scientists do not intend to actually create living animal-human hybrids. [Such beings are often referred to as chimeras after a creature in Greek mythology which had a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail.]

Some 200 medical charities have urged MPs to support legislation allowing the creation of animal-human embryos.

Possible types of animal/human hybrid embryos

- Cytoplasmic hybrid embryos: embryos created through cell nuclear replacement using animal eggs
- Hybrid embryos: embryos created by mixing human sperm and animal eggs or human eggs and animal sperm
- Human chimera embryos: human embryos which have animal cells added to them during early development
- Animal chimera embryos: animal embryos which have human cells added to them during early development

- Transgenic human embryos: human embryos which have animal genes inserted into them during early development

Source: Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Source: BBC News Website

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/ethics/animals/using/hybridembryos_1.shtml

Accessed June 24, 2008

4.2.4. Winter's coming...

There are three major trends facing the world in the early decades of the 21st century: the first is the growth of charismatic Christianity; the second, the resurgence of Islam; and, the third is something we have heard very little about yet, *demographic winter*.

Demography is the study of populations. "Demographic winter" is a term that has been coined to describe the decrease and coming implosion of populations across the world. Two generations have been raised to think of a population explosion – but this explosion has all but lost its force and the trend is now moving in the opposite direction worldwide.

Every child is a vote that the world should go on. In order to simply replace the human race, the average woman must bear on average 2.1 children. This is known as the "replacement rate." The US is the only Western society which meets this figure. The figures are dramatic: in Italy the fertility rate is just 1.2; in Spain it is only 1.1. In Russia there are more abortions than births; it is expected to lose a third of its population by 2050.

Nor are non-Western and developing nations faring much better. Even China has a rate of 1.6. South Korea's rate is among the lowest in the world.

By that year there may be 250 million fewer children in the world than there are today. But why? Demographic winter seems to be upon us as a result of several factors hitting all at once in a "perfect storm:"

- Industrialization
- Reduced fertility rates
- Delay in marriage and procreation
- Abortion
- Homosexuality

The consequences for human society of a lack of children will be enormous.

- Nations will grow grayer - and indeed are doing so already.
- Economies may buckle under the weight of social and medical payments.
- Ethnic tensions will increase along with immigration.
- Many small nations may actually become untenable, lacking the resources and people to carry on social institutions.

4.3 A better vision

4.3.1. God is pro-life

Because of sin, Man no longer cherishes life as God does. The Lord therefore presents Man with the choice and the obligation to *choose* life:

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live... (Deut. 30:19)

God also knows that Man's rejection of Him will actually cause him to embrace death instead, in all its manifestations:

For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the LORD. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death. (Prov. 8:35-36)

The Church must once again defend life for all who are made in the image of God, especially the most helpless, the unborn. Taking its cue from the Scriptures, the early Church preached against abortion and infanticide. While abortion as such is not specifically mentioned in the Torah, procured abortion in Christian theology should be viewed as a species of murder.

There is a limited reference in the Law of Moses to a "manslaughter" type of abortion:

If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follows, he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. (Ex. 21:22)

Some commentators suggest that this could have included the death penalty.

In any case, God is clear about the personhood of the unborn human being. Science tells us that we are genetically distinct from our parents from the moment of conception – but God tells us even more about our worth in the womb:

- In Psalm 139, we have the wonderful record of David being knit in his mother's womb.
- To Jeremiah God said, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." (Jer. 1:5)

Clement, writing between 190 and 200 A. D., said,

Abortion is killing human life that is under God's care, design and providence.

Tertullian, who lived circa 160 – 240 A. D., said this:

"For us [Christians] we may not destroy even the fetus in the womb, while as yet the human being derives blood from other parts of the body for its sustenance. To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter when you take away a

life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to birth. That is a man which is going to be one: you have the fruit already in the seed." -Apology 9:6

"They [John and Jesus] were both alive while still in the womb. Elizabeth rejoiced as the infant leaped in her womb; Mary glorifies the Lord because Christ within inspired her. Each mother recognizes her child and is known by her child who is alive, being not merely souls but also spirits." – *De Anima*

Indeed, in the early Christian centuries, the Church rescued foundlings and stood for life in many ways, shunning the bloodthirsty ways of the Roman Empire and modeling another, more attractive Kingdom.

4.3.2. The champion of the aged and the oppressed

God was also very clear in the Scriptures about the person of the aged. Elderly people were not to be discarded but to be treasured. The command to honor one's father and mother comes within the Ten Commandments of course. There were also other customs and commands designed to make God's heart plain to the people:

You shall rise up before the gray head, and honor the face of the old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:32)

The Hebrew culture God was shaping knew nothing of disposable children or grandparents.

4.4 Christian conscience and witness in an anti-life environment

If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. If you forbear to deliver those who are being dragged unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if you say, "Behold, we did not know it," does not He who ponders the heart consider it? And he who keeps your soul, does he not know it? And shall he not render to every man according to his works? (Prov. 24:10-12)

4.4.1. Recognizing seducing voices

The verbal and political tactics of those favoring the anti-life mentality have seduced or intimidated most Christians in the Western world away from overtly challenging this new orthodoxy. Christians must learn to recognize these tactics when they hear them.

The pressures to accept or at least ignore the brave new world include:

- Political correctness: not wanting to appear divisive or backward
- Relativism: departure from Biblical norms of behavior across society
- Expedience: the appeal to the comfort of people
- Consumerism: the invention of the concept of the "lifestyle"
- Euphemism: the use of smooth language and invented terms ("neologisms") to conceal facts and situations which might otherwise provoke a strong reaction

4.4.2. Unashamed of the Gospel

As we discussed earlier when we talked about homosexuality, Paul used three important salvation words to describe the change which God made in the Corinthians:

- First, they were **washed**.
- Second, they were **sanctified**.
- Third, they were **justified**.

All three of these concepts are fundamental to the Gospel and enable us to offer God's grace to women and men seeking forgiveness and healing for their role in procuring abortions. God also wishes to heal people of the emotional scars resulting from the grief and sense of loss of abortions.

4.4.3. Christian alternatives and preparation for encountering abortion proponents

Christians should prepare themselves to rebuild society's love for life in every sphere:

1. Pray – adopt some of these issues in prayer as a regular part of your walk with the Lord.
2. Become educated about and support abortion alternatives such as adoption.
3. Become educated about abortion apologetics. Abortion has ceased to be a “fresh” topic in our minds and as an unfortunate consequence of this, Christians are not as educated on the subject as they once were.
4. While recognizing that not all Christians will be called to activism in this area, many Christians will need to work in this area more directly, whether through the political process or elsewhere.
5. Work to promote respect for the elderly and better elder care.

4.4.4. The most important thing

Perhaps the most important thing we can do to foster a culture of life is to enjoy the abundant life which Jesus purchased for us and display it to others. A life that is lived with joy, purpose and meaning is inherently attractive. A life that is otherwise has flaws which are obvious to all but the most prejudiced.

Christians alone can model the vibrant life and family life of the Kingdom of God and we must take in lead in:

1. Cherishing life
2. Celebrating life
3. Defending life

