

Human Life: Its Moral Worth

The moral worth of human beings is absolute and eternal. God has created humans in his image; therefore human life has intrinsic moral worth. The following concepts are essential to our understanding of a human being's moral worth.

*Image of God*¹ is the Scriptural term that refers to the transcendent dignity imparted by God to mankind at creation. The image of God is who we are, not something we possess. The image of God is intrinsic to the entire person as an embodied soul (or ensouled body). It is a gift of God that finds continuity in human procreation and finds expression in such aspects of our human nature as reason, volition, moral sense, God-consciousness, worship, etc.² However, bearing the image of God does not require certain capacities such as self-consciousness, self-awareness, autonomy, rationality, ability to feel pain or pleasure, level of development, relational ability, etc. Bearing the image of God qualitatively separates humankind from the rest of creation and gives human beings their mysterious, unique, and infinite moral worth and dignity.

Every being of human origin is a *person*. A person is not a *Homo sapiens* with the superadded quality of "personhood." Some, however, would attempt to withhold moral worth from human beings unless they "qualify" as persons. The status of "personhood" cannot be conferred by society.

The image of God confers upon each human being a sacred quality. The sacredness of human life calls forth respect and love for each individual as uniquely created in God's image. Love and respect for human beings as created in God's image require more than mere respect for autonomy or privacy. How we treat others reflects our attitude to God. "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."³

The beginning and continuity of the moral worth of human life are concurrent with human life itself. Human worth begins with the one-cell human embryo and lasts lifelong. A living human being is an integrated organism with the genetic endowment of the species *Homo sapiens*. This includes the inherent active biological disposition for ordered growth and development in a continuous and seamless maturation process. It also includes the potential to manifest such fundamental traits as rationality, self-awareness, communication, and relationship with God, other human beings, and the environment. Thus a human being, despite the expression of different and more mature secondary characteristics, has genetic and ontological⁴ identity and continuity throughout all stages of development from formation of the human being until death. Human embryos are not "potential" human beings; rather, they are human beings with potential. Moral worth is not dependent on potential. A human being with a defect or disease is no less a person.

The image of God, intrinsic to each individual, imparts moral worth in all stages of human life. The image of God makes each individual uniquely worthy of service. Each person is known and loved by God, and the image of God in man endows every one with a capacity to know and love Him. The capacity for this personal relationship with God demonstrates the immense value God places on each human life. CMDA believes the proper response to being made in God's image is one of gratitude and should be borne out in faithful relationship to God and others.

¹Image of God

¹The Image of God present in man is referred to in: Gen 1: 26-27; 5: 1-3; 9: 6; I Cor 11: 7; and Jas 3: 9. The Image of God is displayed resplendent, undiminished and uniquely in the person of Jesus: II Cor 4: 4; Col 1: 15; Heb 1: 3. The Image of God is being developed into Christ-like dimensions in his followers: Rom 8: 29; I Cor 15: 49; II Cor 3: 18; Eph 4: 24; Phil 3: 21; Col 3: 10.

²CMDA recognizes that Christian traditions have varied views of what constitutes the image theologically and the ways in which it has been affected by the fall into sin (Gen 3).

³Matthew 25: 40

⁴Ontology is the philosophical study of what is real or actual, of what exists. Ontological identity means identity existing in reality.

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