

Does Human Life Have Intrinsic Value?

by Thomas W. Jacobson (11 June 2013; revised 27 January 2016)

An estimated 262 million people were killed during the 20th century by democide, which includes wars, genocide, politicide, and mass murder committed by militaries and governments.¹ In addition, four times that many – over 1 billion babies – have been exterminated by abortion since 1920.² Currently 97 nations have laws permitting preborn babies to be killed for any reason, and 38 nations for two or more reasons. The 60 noble nations who prohibit abortion, except to save the life of the mother, face a constant barrage of international pressure – especially from the current United States Government, European Union, and the United Nations – to remove all restrictions to abortion.

So does human life have intrinsic value? If based on the above data and present political pressures, the answer would be “no”. What belief systems led these people to commit great atrocities, or legalize the murder of defenseless unborn children, or take the lives of their own children by abortion, exposure, or infanticide? Obviously, except for those acting in self-defense or legitimate national defense, whatever they believed, they did not believe in the sanctity of human life.

What about you? Do you believe in the sanctity of human life? Whatever your system of belief, what you believe about the origin of life will determine what you believe about the value of life. If you believe one of the evolutionary theories – that we are all here by chance, descended from creatures – then a human life is of no more value than an owl, whale, or monkey. If you believe the earth and human life exist as a result of some accidental event millions of years ago, then life is an accident without purpose. If you believe in humanism – “the universe as self-existing and not created” and that “man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as the result of a continuous process”³ – you may have a little higher view of human life, but not sufficient that you would have a firm basis for opposing selective killing.

The late Dr. Francis Schaeffer had an extraordinary capacity to reduce complex theories to simple conclusions. He discerned that all theories of origin fall into three types: 1. nothing; 2. impersonal; or 3. Personal. He observed that no rational person holds to the first theory, and that every theory except one falls into the category of an impersonal or material beginning. Each impersonal theory jumps from a material beginning to personal mankind without justification, and without any basis of viewing human life with intrinsic value. There is only one theory that begins with a Personal God creating personal mankind, and offering a personal relationship with Him; namely, the Judeo-Christian worldview.⁴

“In the beginning God”! The first verse of the Bible changes everything. The only One who could know the truth about the origin of the universe and mankind is the Creator Himself. What does He say about man?

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’ ... And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

Prior to creating man as male and female, God created the vegetation, plants, trees, fish, birds, living creatures, cattle, animals, etc. After each of these parts of His creation, He said something so we could avoid confusion about origins: He made each “after their kind” and “with seed in them” to reproduce (Genesis 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25). Dogs produce dogs, not cats. Apple trees produce apples, not mangos. Birds produce birds, not snakes.

When God completed all the rest of His creation, then He made an extraordinary statement, showing that mankind would be the pinnacle and most precious being of His creation: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” Wow! The Personal God made personal man – male and female – in His own likeness [that’s also why the term “man” or “he” may mean male, male and female, adult and child, preborn and born]. No greater value could he have placed on a man or woman!

That was then, but what about now? What about us? While at L’Abri in Switzerland, studying under Dr. Schaeffer over 30 years ago, I was stunned to hear that the Bible speaks about God forming each person in his mother’s womb, and that He has a plan and purpose for each life. King Solomon wrote:

“Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones *are formed* in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things” (Ecclesiastes 11:5).

A generation earlier, his father, King David, wrote:

“You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, *and* skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all writ-ten the days that were ordained *for me*, when as yet there was not one of them” (Ps. 139:13-16).

When the LORD first spoke to the prophet Jeremiah, He told him:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5).

When the time appointed by God the Father to send His Only Son to redeem from sin all who would believe in Jesus, He sent the angel Gabriel to Mary, who announced to her:

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:31-32).

Jesus was conceived in her womb when the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Triune Godhead, came upon Mary (Luke 1:35). In so doing, God Almighty revealed how sacred to Him is the womb of every woman, and every child He creates therein.

If you understand that every person is created in the image and likeness of the Creator God (including you), and that He Himself is directly involved in forming each child in his mother’s womb (including you), then you know that human life has intrinsic value.

I write this today in honor of my Dad, on his 85th birthday, and in honor of my parents who were married for 58 years. Mom is in heaven with her “Best Friend” and Savior.

How we treat others, especially the most vulnerable, reveals who we truly are.

All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

¹ “20th Century Democide.

² The abortion data are predominantly numbers reported by over 70 national governments for the period of 1920-2015, and compiled by the author.

³ Humanist Manifesto I, *First* and *Second* statements of affirmation.

⁴ Author lived and studied at L’Abri in Switzerland in 1982-1983.