

SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

POSITION PAPER

A **MANNAHOUSE** RESOURCE



Mannahouse
9200 NE Fremont Ave.
Portland, Oregon 97220
www.mannahouserresource.com

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SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

This document has been prepared to represent the MannaHouse Eldership's agreed upon understanding of what the Bible clearly teaches regarding topics related to the sanctity of life. (NOTE: It is the first of several installments that will deal with a variety of related issues.) It is meant to lay the doctrinal foundation for the more pastoral applications of informing conscience as well as offering forgiveness and healing. Both men and women following Christ may at times need assistance bringing their minds into conformity with the Bible as well as finding a place of forgiveness, healing, and freedom in Christ. We believe the church should not only uphold moral/ethical standards but also provide support for personal and practical solutions.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

IMAGE OF GOD

God created humankind in His image, and every person bears His image (Gen. 1:26-27; Ps. 139:14). The image of God has multiple implications, including the capacity for moral uprightness, sharing in God's rule over creation, and participation in divine community (Gen. 1:28-30; Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). In its Ancient Near Eastern context, the Bible's concept of "image" primarily expresses man's special dedication to God as His vice-regent and representative in the world,¹ with the effect that physical, earthly representation is inseparably linked with the concept of "God's image" with respect to humankind. In humanity's sinfulness, God's image is tarnished and fragmented but still present (Rom. 1:18-32; 3:23; 8:29), making all people worthy of respect and fair treatment by others (Gen. 9:6; Jas. 3:9). God desires everyone to be renewed to the perfect image of God in Christ through salvation (Jn. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:5; Col. 1:13-23), a renewal that will be fully realized when the Lord returns to resurrect and glorify believers (1 Cor. 15:45-49; 1 Jn. 3:2).

¹ See G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004). Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) kings set up images of themselves throughout their domain as a sign of their reign, just as humankind is commissioned to carry out God's dominion as his "image" in Genesis. An ANE king might set up his image in a temple in dedication to that deity, just as humans are fashioned as priests in the temple-garden of Genesis; otherwise, idols were seen as portals to the gods, just as mankind is called God's "image/idol" (*tselem*) in his capacity to mediate God's presence.



HUMAN CONSTITUTION & GOD'S IMAGE

While the Bible distinguishes between our material and immaterial components, a human being is a unified whole (Gen. 2:7; Mk. 12:30; Jn. 5:25-29; 1 Thess. 5:23). Through the reproductive union of a man and woman, a whole human—material and immaterial—comes into existence as it is formed in the womb (Gen. 4:25–5:3). While God has shared such creative power with human parents and is pleased to confer His image through them, He is nonetheless intimately involved in the formation of each human life, which He considers precious and sacred (Ps. 139:13-16; Jer. 1:5). It is the whole human—material and immaterial—who bears God's image (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6). Although Scripture emphasizes the spiritual, moral, and relational aspects of God's shared image, whole human beings, including their bodies, were created to display God's attributes through obedience to His moral standard in a time-space world, so that God's image in humanity incorporates physicality (Rom. 8:22-30; 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:14-15; 15:47-55).

BEGINNING OF LIFE

Scripture teaches a prenatal beginning for human life, specifically at conception (here defined as fertilization of the egg). A few observations can establish this. In the Law of Moses, if someone caused harm or death to a baby in the womb, there was a penalty fitting to the crime as if the fetus were an adult who had been maimed or killed (Ex.21:22-25)—in-utero life is sacred.² As to life's beginning, the often-repeated phrase “conceived and gave birth” is likely a Hebrew merism, using two contrasting points to refer to a whole process, implying that life is formed from the point of conception to the point of birth (e.g., Gen. 4:1; Jdg. 13:7; esp. Job 3:3, where even without modern knowledge of sperm and ovum, “conception” appears to occur on the night of intercourse³ —the earliest possible moment, cf. SOS. 3:4). The angel reveres the prenatal Christ as “the in-her conceived-thing” which He calls “holy” (Matt. 1:20).⁴ Similarly, Gabriel prophesies Jesus as “the holy thing-being-conceived” in Mary, who will be called “the Son of God” (Lk. 1:35).⁵ Thus, Jesus, in His humanity, is revered as holy from conception.

² See “An Exegetical Look at Exodus 21” by Lanny Hubbard

³ See, e.g., John Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 92, and textual notes on p. 69; and comments on v.3 in David Clines, *Job 1-20*, vol. 17 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1989), 82.

⁴ τὸ γεννηθὲν, “the begotten thing,” a substantive neuter aorist participle, identifying Jesus himself as that which began (in His humanity) at the point of conception. The Greek can be rendered straightforwardly as “that which was conceived in her by the Spirit is holy,” implying that Jesus, in His humanity, is holy from the point of conception.

⁵ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον, “the holy thing being begotten/conceived,” a substantive neuter present/continuous participle. Perhaps the present/continuous tense is carried into the substantive, since the angel is describing imminent events: “the thing being conceived.” Yet the present tense often loses its force in such participles (see Wallace's grammar, 620), and the context might require a future sense: “the holy thing to be conceived.” Either way, the holiness of the child is linked to with His conception here, as in Matt. 1:20.



Moreover, Mary could hardly have been more than a week pregnant when John the Baptist leaped within Elizabeth's womb at the sound of Mary's voice, at which time Elizabeth called the newly-conceived Jesus, "My Lord" (Lk. 1:26-45).⁶ An early prenatal beginning for Image-bearing human life is the unambiguous teaching of Scripture, and the further affirmation that such life begins at conception is not only biblically sound but also the wisest and safest position for those who want to protect the sanctity of human life. In short, we believe human life begins at conception.

ETHICAL CONCERNS WITH REGARD TO THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

ABORTION

For the purpose of this document the term "abortion" is being used to refer to an elective termination of a pregnancy only and is not meant to include spontaneous abortions (miscarriages). Inasmuch as human life begins at conception (Ps. 139:13-16; Job 3:3; Jer. 1:5; Lk. 1:26-45), and all humans bear God's image with their whole being, material and immaterial (Gen. 1:26-27; Jas. 3:9), elective abortion wrongfully kills a fellow Image-bearing human and is therefore sinful (Gen. 9:6; Ex. 20:13; 21:22-25).

EXCEPTIONS

In that all human life is sacred, both a mother's and her baby's life have equal value before God. In rare cases in which medical professionals warn that a mother's life is seriously threatened by a pregnancy (e.g., tubal pregnancy), we would affirm and support those who are responsible for making the difficult decision to intervene to save the mother's life if the decision were made in love (i.e., to avoid the loss of both lives, or for the sake of those dependent on the mother); particularly, if the foremost intent of the intervention were not to directly effect abortion, but only to remove the imminent threat, even if the inevitable result were the tragic loss of the baby's life. E.g., the administration of methotrexate to stop the egg's growth before a rupture occurs, or a salpingostomy or salpingectomy to remove the pregnancy or the affected fallopian tube. E.g., if a mother were likely to die from an aggressive cancer before the fetus was viable, yet treatment might save the mother's life but put the baby's life at risk, we recognize that she and/or those

⁶ See article Graham A. D. Scott in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (JETS)*, Winter 1974, pp. 29-44. In summary: Mary leaves in a "hurry" after the angelic announcement of her pregnancy (Lk. 1:39), and this occurs "at this time" (v. 39), a phrase that may refer to a very short period in the same episode (e.g., Ac. 1:15); it would take her no more than a week to travel to Elizabeth, who was six months pregnant before Mary left (v. 36); yet Mary stayed with her for three months until around the time Elizabeth gave birth (56-57).



responsible have the right of conscience before God to make the medical decision to undergo treatment according to the above rationale. However, abortion administered so that the baby does not have to undergo pain, suffering, or deformity is unwarranted. Human life, regardless of its experience or quality, is sacred.

BIRTH CONTROL/CONTRACEPTION

Human life, once it begins at conception, should be protected and not unjustly harmed. Birth control methods that stop conception (fertilization) from taking place do not transgress this Biblical principle. Methods that prevent implantation of an already-fertilized egg would violate this principle by the wrongful termination of human life. Some methods primarily work by preventing conception, but might also prevent implantation of a fertilized egg, as a secondary mechanism, in the event that conception occurs. If this secondary mechanism (preventing implantation) contributes to the method's effectiveness, such a method should be avoided in reverence for human life. Wise medical advice on the matter should be considered according to Biblical norms and values, keeping in mind that the word "conception" may be variously defined. Abortifacients (drugs that directly terminate life) are always immoral.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our goal is both to assist those following Christ to allow the Bible to inform their conscience as well as to help people find a place of forgiveness, healing, and freedom in Christ. We believe the church should not only uphold moral/ethical standards but also provide support for personal and practical solutions. To that end this document is meant to be paired with another document prepared by the MannaHouse Congregation Lead Team.

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