



Winter 2021
Volume 7, Issue 2

LIGHT

KINGDOM · CULTURE · MISSION

HUMAN
DIGNITY
AROUND
THE
WORLD

Christian Ethics for a Digital Age



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What Moses Taught Me About Human Dignity

Recently, our life group at church had the opportunity to walk through Exodus together. As we read those chapters, I was once again reminded of an aspect of Moses that has always resonated with me—he seeks to right wrongs.

Whether it was defending the honor of Zipporah and her sisters or standing up to Pharaoh, injustice was something that deeply affected him. Moses clearly believed that dignity matters and was worth defending.

Were he alive in our time, Moses would be aggrieved at the various ways human dignity is being marred across the globe. We touch on several of those instances in this edition, from the devastating inroads made by the predatory abortion industry in the United Kingdom, to the ways technology is being wielded in authoritarian ways. In fact, if we just limited this edition to reviewing the last few months, we would, sadly, have more than enough material to cover.

On Aug. 31, the world watched as thousands of Afghans made desperate attempts to flee Kabul when the Taliban assumed power. The United States was leaving Afghanistan after two decades, and for those who helped our government, the idea of staying under an oppressive regime was enough to cause them to leave everything behind and flee their homeland. The vulnerability of these image-bearers was on full display as news coverage showed fathers passing babies across a wall to waiting soldiers. Families were packed into cargo jets while people clung to the wheels of the plane in a last-ditch attempt to escape their new reality in Afghanistan.

Just a few months later, on Dec. 1, I stood on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court with thousands of pro-life advocates as the oral arguments for the *Dobbs v. Jackson Whole Women's Health Organization* case was heard. In this moment, the vulnerable image-bearers we had in mind were the preborn, those who have not yet had a chance to take their first breath. As we listened to the justices ask questions of each counsel, it helped us gauge how the Supreme Court may rule next June on this important case that could overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

As we look across this vast world of ours, it is clear that the dignity of human beings is under assault. And Christians cannot stand passively by.

My hope is that by reading these timely articles, your heart will be moved to learn more and, like Moses, be willing to advocate for a better way. Thankfully, as believers on this side of the cross, we have something Moses did not: a message of hope. Over and over again in Scripture, we see Jesus valuing that which the world deemed as invaluable. And at the core of Southern Baptists' hearts is a desire to see human beings flourish. By living out the Great Commandment and carrying out the Great Commission, we can help make this broken world a bit better and be an advocate for those who are desperate for a better tomorrow.



BRENT LEATHERWOOD
ACTING PRESIDENT, ERLC



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LIGHT

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The ERLC will always

STAND FOR LIFE

We believe in the dignity of every human life because each person is created in the image of God. As the ERLC continues to stand for life, we will resource the local church through curriculum, content, and events; advocate for pro-life legislation; and place life-saving ultrasound machines in pregnancy resource centers. Believing that abortion can end in our lifetime, will you join us as we STAND FOR LIFE?

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WE ARE THE NEW PRO LIFE GENERATION



Why We Are Highlighting Human Dignity

Everywhere we turn today, it seems our fellow human beings' lives—and their inherent value—are under attack. But it's not mainly from the faraway actors we might expect, though there is some of that. Tragically, it's neighbor against neighbor, family member against family member, Christian against Christian. Yet, we're not talking about the type of division Jesus told us to anticipate on account of him (Matt. 10:34-39). Instead, we see abortion, genocide, character assassination online, belittling, sheer hatred, abuse, racism, and petty division—among other things. All of these are assaults on one another's dignity and come from those we should rightly assume will protect us; a parent, a doctor, a government leader, a fellow citizen, a brother or sister in Christ, or even a pastor.

The opening chapter of Genesis leaves no doubt as to the worth of each person we see (and those who are still hidden in the womb): "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'" (Gen. 1:26). We are lovingly and intentionally crafted in the *imago Dei*—the image of God. Whatever else that means, it certainly signifies that we have infinite value that should be respected. This reality makes each act of violence against one another, whether in word or deed, particularly egregious. We cannot attack one another without attacking the image of the very God who created us.

We chose to make this issue of *Light* about human dignity around the globe because of the clear assault it is under on a daily basis. We are calling Christians to wake up to what others are facing—and how we might be participating in it—so that we can uncover the works of darkness, repent where needed, and walk as children of the light, in part, by advocating for the sanctity of every single life (Eph. 5:10-11). As we do, we show the world a truer picture of who the God of the universe is and remove stumbling blocks to the gospel being proclaimed and heard.

In order to stir our hearts to prayer and action, Michael and Chelsea Sobolik highlight the tragic Uyghur genocide taking place in China; Mindy Belz, world-class journalist, recounts the perseverance of Christians persecuted in the Middle East; Elizabeth Graham talks with pro-life advocates facing an abortion culture in Northern Ireland; and Jenny Yang covers the plight of refugees. In addition, Jedd Medefind writes about caring for children who have lost parents during the pandemic; Juliana and Jordan Wootten call us to contend for the lives of those with disabilities; and Jason Thacker explains how we can use the digital age for the good of our neighbors—among other important contributions.

We, as the people of God, should be on the frontlines of pleading for the correct thinking about and just treatment of everyone, from conception to natural death. We have heard the authoritative voice of God through his infallible Word, and he has spoken clearly about the value of those made in his image—and the price he was willing to pay for their eternity: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). May he purify his people so that we wholeheartedly live this out, for the sake of God's glory and the salvation of the nations.

Lindsay Nicolet

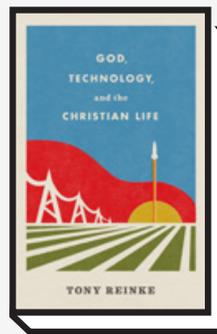
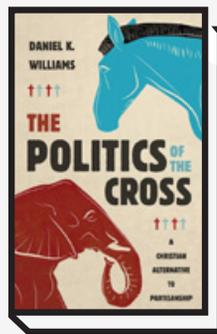
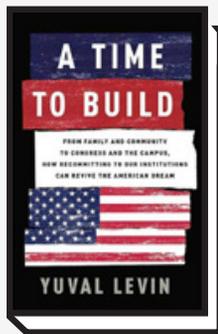
LINDSAY NICOLET

MANAGING EDITOR, *LIGHT* MAGAZINE



WE CANNOT ATTACK
ONE ANOTHER WITHOUT
ATTACKING THE IMAGE
OF THE VERY GOD WHO
CREATED US.

Books



3 God, Technology, and the Christian Life by TONY REINKE

One of the most pressing questions of our day is, “What are we to do with the technology available to us?” It’s a question chiefly concerned with ethics. And seemingly, how we answer grows more consequential by the day. In his book, *God, Technology, and the Christian Life*, Tony Reinke addresses this question head-on. But before doing so, Reinke asks and answers a few others first: “What is technology?” “What is God’s relationship to technology?” “Where do our technologies come from?”

Sufficient answers to these questions (and more) put us in a position to *behave* like Noah and David and countless others before us, who, as Reinke outlines in the book, wielded the technology of their day in faith and with wisdom. “God calls each of his children to make faith-based decisions on how we use the available technologies in this world,” Reinke says. *God, Technology, and the Christian Life* is his faithful, power-packed contribution to a conversation that Christians desperately need to be having. —JORDAN WOOTTEN

1 A Time to Build by YUVAL LEVIN

The times we live in are deeply polarized and divided. From our families and churches to media and government, it seems that all of our institutions are failing and that the culture wars are driving us irreconcilably apart. As distrust festers, it can often feel that the only way forward is to burn it all down. *A Time to Build* by Yuval Levin looks at these trends and offers a more compelling solution.

Levin argues that rather than destroying the institutions that have failed us, we must rebuild them through communal commitment and a return to trustworthiness. Rather than seeing our institutions as stages on which to perform, we must allow ourselves to be shaped by them in meaningful ways. This book offers a new way of thinking that allows the reader to see how they can take practical steps toward renewing our relationships, institutions, and nation. —HANNAH DANIEL

2 The Politics of the Cross by DANIEL WILLIAMS

There is no question that American politics is fraught with unhealthy tension. In Daniel Williams’ *The Politics of the Cross*, he offers a vision that goes beyond partisanship and instead asks Christians to devote themselves to furthering the moral demands of the Kingdom of God in the public square. Building on his previous work that has explored Christian political activity through history, he advances a political theology grounded in the inherent dignity of each individual and calls Christians to reject partisanship and tribal identity. Rather, as exiles and sojourners, we should look to advance the principles of the gospel even as we have robust debates about particular policies. This is essential reading for anyone looking for a Christian political vision that is neither right or left, Republican or Democrat, but gospel-saturated, Kingdom-oriented, and dignity-centered. —ALEX WARD

Men and Women of Whom the World is Not Worthy

A REVIEW OF *THEY SAY WE ARE INFIDELS*

Jill Waggoner

I first read *They Say We Are Infidels* in 2016, and it has become a book I reference time and again. Author Mindy Belz's fascinating and informative account opened my eyes to the historical church and the plight of current believers in the Middle and Near East.

Belz, previously a senior editor at *WORLD* magazine, combines her world-class journalistic skills with rich storytelling in this book. It expanded the way I understand the international locations and events that have been a part of the national conversation all of my adult life. With the recent advance of ISIS in Afghanistan and withdrawal of U.S. troops, we again see these protracted conflicts rise to the forefront, and hers is the voice I want to hear.¹

They Say We Are Infidels describes the ways in which Muslims and Christians have lived among each other—although

not always peacefully—for centuries, and specifically the diversity of cultures found within countries of Syria and Iraq. She even includes a timeline of key events going back to 1920 to aid the reader in a greater perspective.

ON-THE-GROUND EXPERIENCE

Belz's book is shaped by her personal experiences of reporting on the events and people in the Middle East since the 9/11 attacks. She focuses on how oppressive regimes and terrorist groups assaulted Christians wherever they were found, and describes the personal ramifications for international and political actions. Further, Belz helps us imagine life as a refugee—a life she encountered as she followed many fleeing persecution in Iraq.

Belz returned frequently to the area for over a decade, maintaining her relationships with churches and individuals she met along the way. These friendships allowed her access into the everyday lives of believers, particularly women, who live in much more restricted ways than many in the United States can fully comprehend. She writes about them in an intimate and respectful way, understanding that her access into these lives and hearts was a privilege to be honored.

Belz writes about Nisreen, a widow from the Iraq War who also lost her son when he, along

with three other men, was violently murdered by insurgents while leaving the church one night in 2017. Nisreen stayed in Mosul to grieve for 40 days but eventually fled to Aleppo, Syria, for safety, hoping to achieve refugee status with the United Nations. Belz met her in 2018 and describes her grief, "She wore black and clutched a tissue, her face drained of color, ready to give way to tears at any moment. 'We lost everything, we lost everything, we lost everything,' she murmured."

I was both convicted and encouraged by how faith truly sustains men and women like Nisreen and how the body of Christ sacrificially served each other, even at the risk of their own lives.

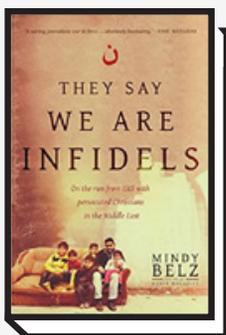
A CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSE

Belz's descriptions, combined with factual documentation, of the terror inflicted upon women—who were truly girls as young as age 12—haunted my dreams. I caution anyone who reads this book to be prepared for disturbing content including accounts of sexual abuse and forced marriage. Yet, I would recommend Christians read it. Our eyes must be opened to the reality of what is happening to innocent image-bearers of God at the hands of ISIS, even today after the defeat of the Islamic caliphate. And we must be compelled to endure in the work of prayer, advocacy and support, even long after the news headlines have ceased.

While we ponder how these places are part of our Christian history, it is critical that we understand that this diversity is the Christian church as it exists today. Belz's love for these believers comes through in her writing, helping us all to see these people as our brothers and sisters in Christ, consider how we might help the vulnerable among them, and long for the day when wars will cease. ★

Jill Waggoner is an editor at the ERLC.

¹ <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/mindy-belz-helps-christians-think-about-the-middle-east/>



I WAS BOTH CONVICTED AND ENCOURAGED BY HOW FAITH TRULY SUSTAINS THESE MEN AND WOMEN.

Image taken from the cover of *Redemptive Kingdom Diversity: A Biblical Theology of the People of God*

Upholding the Dignity of All People

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDS FOR COMBATTING RACISM AND EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Jarvis J. Williams

The Bible clearly teaches that God created all humans in his image (Gen. 1:26–27). The concept of human dignity, for example, is a biblical truth because God created humans in his image.

In my view, Christians should not show loyalty to any organization, on the left, in the middle, or on the right, that seeks to undermine what God clearly sets forth in

Scripture as his biblical and theological vision for redemptive kingdom diversity and human flourishing. We ought to work with our fellow image-bearers in society and in ways consistent with our biblical and theological convictions and with our Christian conscience to promote human flourishing for all people whenever possible.

What is needed is a sustainable biblical and theological guide for the people

of God in our pursuit of redemptive kingdom diversity because God's vision is grounded in his redemptive purposes for his people and the entire creation through his Son, Jesus Christ, and because this vision is empowered by the Spirit.

When Jesus's substitutionary death absorbed God's wrath for sinners (Rom. 3:25; 5:8–10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:14–15; 3:13–14; Eph. 1:2–22), it also disarmed all earthly and demonic powers of evil (Col. 1:15–20; 2:14–15). Racism is one of those sins for which Jesus absorbed God's wrath and one of those earthly and demonic powers that his death disarms. Racism is opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and against God's vision of a redeemed and unified creation through Christ (Rom. 3:24, 29; Gal. 1:4; 2:16; 3:1–5:26; Eph. 1:7, 14; 2:11–3:9).

God recreates through Christ, out of different tongues, tribes, peoples, and nations, one new (but diverse) people

commanded to live in pursuit of reconciled community with one another and with their neighbors now in anticipation of the age to come (Isa. 52:12–53:10; 65:17–25; Rom. 8:19–22; Gal. 5:13–6:15; Eph. 2:11–5:20; Rev. 5:6–9; 21–22). Christians should intentionally pursue love of neighbor because God through Christ gives us the indwelling presence and power of the Spirit and because God’s Word commands us to walk in love in the power of the Spirit and by no means to fulfill the lust of the flesh (Isa. 65:17–25; John 17:1–26; Acts 2; 1 Cor. 13; 2 Cor. 5:17–21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13–14; 4:4–6; 5:13–14; 6:10; Eph. 2:11–3:12).

One way Christians walk in the Spirit is to love our neighbors as ourselves (Gal. 5:13–14, 22; 6:2; cf. Lev. 19:18). We should not use our freedom in Christ to pursue our sinful passions in accordance with the flesh (Gal. 5:13, 17–21). Those who live to gratify their flesh will not inherit eternal life (5:16–6:10). Being complicit in racism is proof that one is perhaps enslaved to the flesh and to its seductive powers of evil (5:17, 19–21), rather than enslaved to love by the power of the Spirit as a citizen of the kingdom (Matt. 5–7; Gal. 5:13–6:10).

God’s kingdom is an “already but not yet” kingdom, whose king is a Jewish Messiah. The kingdom is filled with diverse ethnicities, diverse dialects, and diverse nationalities of beautiful image-bearers from all over the globe who have tasted the salvation of the one God, the one Lord, and the one Spirit by faith in Christ, and who have participated in the one baptism (Eph. 4:4–6). The diverse people of God are redeemed by God to live in obedience to him and to the gospel of Jesus Christ until Jesus returns.

The New Testament gives clear imperatives for citizens of the kingdom to obey the teachings of Jesus and the gospel (Matt. 5–7; Gal. 2:14; Phil. 1:27; 1 Pet. 4:17) as we walk in love in the power of the Spirit with fellow image-bearers inside and outside of

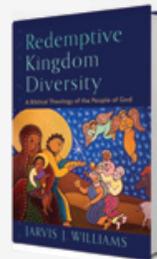
the church (Gal. 5:13–26; 6:10). Practically, members of God’s kingdom must lovingly oppose racism in step with the Spirit, whenever and wherever it appears, because we are new creatures in Christ with the full force of the gospel and with common grace resources and common sense (Rom. 13; 2 Cor. 5:17–21; Gal. 5:21; 6:15; Eph. 2:11–22). When fellow image-bearers from any group dehumanize those within or outside of their group because of racism, Christians’ love for one another and for our neighbors should compel us to state both with scriptural authority and with absolute clarity that such behavior is a sin

WE OUGHT TO WORK WITH OUR FELLOW IMAGE-BEARERS IN SOCIETY AND IN WAYS CONSISTENT WITH OUR BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS AND WITH OUR CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE TO PROMOTE HUMAN FLOURISHING FOR ALL PEOPLE WHENEVER POSSIBLE.

against God and neighbor (Gen. 1:26–27; Gal. 5:13–6:10). God’s image-bearers should never disrespect, dishonor, or dehumanize one another.

Christians must be vigilant in our commitment to Scripture and the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must be careful about the words we use to express any biblical truth, for the devil is like a roaring lion going throughout the earth seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Still, as a Black (with a multiethnic heritage) Christian pastor of Asian, Black, Brown, and White brothers and sisters, I thank God that Genesis

READ MORE



Redemptive Kingdom Diversity: A Biblical Theology of the People of God

JARVIS J. WILLIAMS
(Moody Publishers, 2018)

1:26–27 clearly states that God created all humans in his image and bestows upon us God-given dignity, that he promises to redeem us, to reconcile us to himself and to one another through Christ, and to restore the entire creation through Christ. When racism seeks to dehumanize fellow image-bearers at either a personal or sys-

temic level, Christians everywhere should be able to stand up and assert without hesitation, with absolute clarity, and with their Bibles open, that racism is evil because God created humans in his image (Gen. 1:26–27) and because God in Christ redeems some from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation (Rev. 5:9). Therefore, all Christians should read, listen to, preach, obey, and faithfully apply in their normal rhythms of life and in their own social locations what the Bible

clearly says about human dignity and redemptive kingdom diversity, from the womb to the tomb, with their Bibles open and with common grace and a common sense in the power of the Spirit! ★

Jarvis J. Williams is associate professor of New Testament interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

This piece was adapted and used by permission from Jarvis J. Williams’ Redemptive Kingdom Diversity: A Biblical Theology of the People of God (Baker Academic a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021). You can order a copy here: <http://www.bakerpublishinggroup.com>.



“I Am Somebody”

SEND RELIEF'S COMPASSION MINISTRY
HELPS PEOPLE REALIZE THEIR WORTH

Taylor Field

Ron* had been an alcoholic for decades, but he had a turnaround at our Ministry Center in New York City. It started with a prayer in a park, but it wasn't easy. After an agonizing time in detox and rehab, Ron entered recovery.

Baptists do Bible study, so it was a rough moment when Ron finally told us in the group that he hadn't actually been forgetting his glasses. He simply couldn't read. At all.

Ron wasn't big on sharing feelings, and so it wasn't until I went with him to start a specialized reading program that I really got to know him. As we waited for the subway, he pointed out the tunnel where he used to sleep when he was homeless. "The rats in there were terrible," he said, and then he remained silent.

He also told me a little about his alcoholic dad. When he was a kid and his dad was at home, his dad used to knock him out of his chair if he didn't put the fork on the table in just the right place. Ron shrugged as though it wasn't a big deal.

As we traveled to another part of the city, I had never thought about how totally frightening an unfamiliar subway station would be if you couldn't read. The signs on the walls would mean nothing. Maybe he wasn't standing in the right place on the right platform, just like when he used to put the fork in the wrong place. I watched Ron fight not to show how scared he was.

The interviewer at the reading program was gracious, telling Ron that at one time he was not able to read either. I left the two to work together on filling out the application. A little while later, the interviewer came to fetch me. "You better come," he said with a worried look.

There was Ron, who always tried to act so tough, with his face in his hands, sobbing uncontrollably.

"What's wrong?" I asked, as I sat beside him.

It took Ron a while to be able to speak. Then he said something very simple, something that crystallized for me what our mission is all about.

"I just can't believe I *am* somebody," he said between sobs.

To be somebody. In Ephesians, the goal of ministry is to help each Christian grow into, as some translators say, a "mature *person* to the measure and stature of the fullness of Christ" (4:13). We are actually God's "workmanship," even God's "masterpiece" (2:10).

SEND RELIEF

Send Relief is a collaboration between the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board. It is a compassion ministry. It works to help people become "somebody" in Christ Jesus.

To share Christ's love in a tangible way is an important avenue to make a

connection with so many. Even when there are huge gaps between people, kindness tends to cross many cultures. In the end, Paul says, it is God's kindness that brings us to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

Send Relief has five focus areas.

1. Strengthen communities. Send Relief walks with people in under-resourced communities to help develop the local neighborhood and beyond.

can't really be called "buckets." They are a river. They connect integrally with each other. Being involved in strengthening communities often leads to care for refugees, which can mean protecting children and families, which may lead to fighting human trafficking. These are sometimes the very communities that are least able to respond to major crises.

Furthermore, to honor human dignity for each person, Send Relief is expanding

JESUS DIDN'T GO OUT AND MEET NEEDS ONE DAY AND SHARE THE GOSPEL THE NEXT. EVERYTHING HE DID REVEALED THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL.

2. Protect children and families.

Send Relief comes alongside vulnerable families by caring for children in foster care, the orphan, women in a crisis pregnancy, and families needing restoration.

3. Fight human trafficking. Send Relief works to assist those who have been caught in a web of human manipulation and exploitation.

4. Care for refugees. Send Relief helps the churches be the hands and feet of Christ in walking with refugees through their resettlement process.

5. Respond to crisis. Send Relief helps equip and train churches to address the crises that affect our communities—from national disasters to pandemics to other conflicts.

These focus areas help us organize and work more effectively. However, we can't really isolate these areas. These focus areas

its ministry sites on the national front. These Ministry Centers work to execute, model, and multiply missions for all the churches in our convention.

OPPORTUNITIES TO UPHOLD HUMAN DIGNITY

I see two opportunities in this new phase of work.

A renewed understanding of wholeness: First, in compassion ministry, there is a renewed understanding that we can do more together than we can do separately. The Word of God binds us together. In some of the most controversial issues in our world today, we may find around 10 or so Bible verses that address that specific issue. However, there are more than 2,000 verses in the Bible that talk about helping the poor.

The current generation understands that the gospel has an amazing coherence



in terms of our outreach. Ephesians 1:10 tells us that God’s plan is to unite all things in Christ, things on heaven and on earth. All things—that relates to salvation and sewage, housing and heaven, crime and the cosmos.

Jesus didn’t go out and meet needs one day and share the gospel the next. Everything he did revealed the truth of the gospel—from feeding, to teaching, to healing, to challenging religious leaders, to preaching on the need for repentance and salvation. The kingdom wasn’t carved up.

Of course, as one friend told me, “This is not new. It is just new to you.” Yet we do have a renewed sense of the health of the living Word of God as it relates to the

inestimable dignity of each person. Many young people understand this wholeness intuitively. We have a window of opportunity. We can take action for the chance to help each person realize their own human dignity and truly be “somebody.” Then, Christians can be known again for what we stand for, not just what we stand against.

The biblical understanding of being human:

The second opportunity relates to our biblical view. In these turbulent times, the Bible helps us understand both our nobility and our savagery—nobility because we are created in the image of God and savagery because we are fallen, which has made human history so tragic.

Just as Ron said in the beginning story, “I am somebody,” so Genesis 1 lets us know how special we are. As one poet put it, “We feel that we are greater than we know.”

We sense that we are not just a zero. We are not merely a chance glob of protoplasm, or as one physicist put it, “just

a man named Muretus that helped give me strength.

Muretus was a wandering and poor scholar in the sixteenth century. In Italy, he became sick and was taken to a place where the destitute were kept. The doctors looked at his situation briefly and spoke together in Latin, the

SOMETHING IS ONLY WORTH WHAT SOMEONE IS WILLING TO PAY FOR IT. ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE, FOR US, THE PRICE PAID WAS INFINITELY HIGH—THE LIFE OF THE SON OF GOD.

a chemical scum on the side of a moderate-sized planet.”

In my neighborhood in New York City, we remind people that they are not just a trash can with a hairy lid. Sometimes the women in our group tell each other that according to the Word of God, they are each a precious diamond, not plastic jewelry. Because tangible addictions and homelessness have been high in our area, I often remind myself of one Bible teacher’s phrase: We are “magnificent even in ruin.”

We have such value. As the TV shows about antiques and pawn shops remind us, something is only worth what someone is willing to pay for it. According to the Bible, for us, the price paid was infinitely high—the life of the Son of God.

THE REASON FOR THE MINISTRY

When I first began working in compassion ministries in New York City, the challenges of homelessness seemed totally overwhelming. I read a story about

language of the educated. They assumed that others would not understand what they were saying.

In essence, the doctors looked at each other and said that it was unnecessary to expend time and money on this worthless human.

Muretus sat up in his bed, looked them in the eye, and said in clear Latin, “Call no person ‘worthless’ for whom Christ died.” Then, he lay back down again.

That is the reason for our service at Send Relief, regardless of the challenges and frustrations. No one made in God’s image is worthless. No one for whom Christ came, lived a perfect life, died, and now invites to trust in and follow him is to be cast aside. Because of the *imago Dei*, each of us can see ourselves as “somebody.” ★

Taylor Field *has been working with Compassion Ministries with the North American Mission Board for over 35 years.*

**Name changed for privacy purposes.*

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& BRENT LEATHERWOOD





REFLECTIONS

THE

EMBRACING THE DIGNITY
OF ALL PEOPLE,
IN WORD AND DEED

Herbie Newell

TALKERS

When God created the world, man had incredible freedom, important responsibility, and inordinate adventure.

However, it wasn't enough. Satan, as he so often does, tricked humanity into trading an infinitely good thing for temporary satisfaction that ultimately led to shackles (Genesis 3). That first bite of the forbidden fruit changed everything in a moment—our relationship with God, the world, and each other.

We feel the effects of that original sin every day in the big and small things of life as we cry out, along with the Apostle Paul, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me” (Rom. 7:19-20).

Because of sin and the resulting brokenness, we are in a predicament. We long to do good, but we wrestle with our sin and humanity while consistently failing to live up to God's ideal. This affects our vertical relationship with the Lord which then trickles down into our horizontal relationships as we fail to care for and show compassion to those around us, much less others around the world.

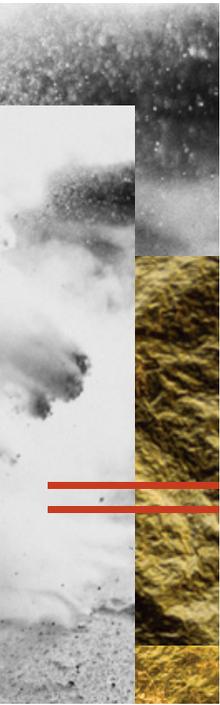
TURNING FROM AN INWARD FOCUS

Jesus himself knows that our sinful tendency is to focus on ourselves and resist



caring for the vulnerable around us. In Matthew 25, Jesus pointed to those who fed, clothed, visited, and cared for the marginalized, especially among fellow believers, as his true followers. Our Lord pointed to these good works, not because they are able to rescue us from our sin, but because good works like these are characteristic of someone who has been redeemed by Jesus and is being transformed into his image day by day.

It is our natural bent to remain inwardly focused and comfortable in our own safe geographic, economic, cultural, and certainly linguistic paradigms. Without even knowing it, we let self-interest and protection rule, while our world becomes smaller, and we grow blind to the suffering of others. But God is continually calling us to something better, and it's to



lay down our lives, our interests, and our rights on behalf of others—our brothers and sisters in Christ, our neighbors, the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, and the orphan (Luke 9:23-24; James 1:27). He calls us to model his grace through the hard work of physical reconciliation and redemption (2 Cor. 5:18).

Every person, from every tribe, tongue, and nation, is created by God, made in his image, and purposed for his works. No one is outside of God's purview. Bearing an indelible mark of their creator, all are made unique and special, and are infinitely loved. No one needs to understand this truth more than those who are on the margins of our world—the vulnerable children living on the street, the single mother with two jobs, children living with special needs, and the child yet to be born.

SEEING ALL MEN AS IMMORTAL

When God declared in Genesis 1:27 that we are made in his image, it was an all-encompassing statement: "So God created

man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." *Man. Humanity. All.*

C.S. Lewis brings this point home in *The Weight of Glory*: "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."¹

This immortality is an enduring truth and one that points to God's utter goodness and grace that none of us has earned (1 Cor. 15:50-54). Before Adam and Eve had done a thing, they had God's image. Scripture is clear about the truth of human dignity from beginning to end. *Even when we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Even when we were far off, God heard us. Even when we are faithless, he is faithful* (Rom. 5:8; Col. 1:21).

We humans aren't always willing or even able to see this dignity and the sheer goodness of God that it represents in our own lives, much less the lives of others. We come from a long line of God's people who fail to see what God sees in the people made in his image. Cain murdered his brother, Abel. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. David dishonored Uriah the Hittite and defiled Bathsheba. All of these acts show our self-centeredness, our sin, our failure to see immortality, and our blindness to the image of God placed in others.

We continually fall short when it comes to acknowledging God's image in others.

But God is continually calling us to something better, and it's to lay down our lives, our interests, and our rights on behalf of others—our brothers and sisters in Christ, our neighbors, the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, and the orphan.

Developing this comprehensive understanding of others' dignity is difficult because of the sin which took residence in this world in the Fall. However, our God is more powerful than sin living in us (1 Cor. 2:12; 1 John 4:4). Because of the sweet, restorative grace of Jesus, Christ followers have the ability to confess our sin, get back up when we fall, and then

This mission we have received is costly and dangerous. We will raise questions and proclaim truths that sinful men do not want to hear.

try again. And he gives us the Holy Spirit, who transforms our hearts and enables us to see the dignity and worth in every person we meet.

Working with children who are vulnerable, wounded, forgotten, and orphaned has given me a front-row seat to what happens when the Body of Christ begins to see others the way God sees them. We start to see the beauty in those who are ignored and locked away in orphanages. We see the potential of the fatherless as we help them dream about the future. And we experience the Body of Christ filled with joy as we see families reunited and children given opportunities through adoption. This is just a taste of what gospel-driven justice looks like.

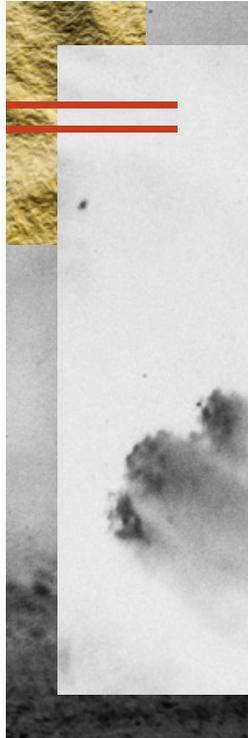
LIVING AS CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS

All of creation points back to God and brings glory to his name. However, only humanity bears his image and demonstrates the profoundly life-changing attributes of his love, grace, kindness, goodness, humility, and more. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5, we are Christ's ambassadors. As we pursue acts of gospel-driven justice, seeking to uphold the immeasurable worth of every individual, we reflect the image of God in us and display his marvelous glory.

I love how Matt Chandler, pastor of The Village Church in Dallas, Texas, explains why we step into this gospel-driven justice. He says, "We live open-handed lives and seek to spot injustice and despair around us, and we enter into sorrow and pain so that the love, mercy, and beauty of God's reconciling work in Christ can be seen in our lives in the hopes that a broken world will see and give praise to God."²

Beloved, the Word of God is full of imperatives toward gospel-driven justice for the orphan and vulnerable. This kind of justice is utterly pro-life and entirely biblical. When we show the gospel to vulnerable children and their families, we are demonstrating to them that we truly believe that every individual life bears the image of the Creator. And we open the door to tell others about the One who is life himself.

The greatest evidence of the sanctity of life found in the Bible is that God sent forth his Son, born of a woman and made in the image of God, to live, suffer, and die





so that through his resurrection, he might redeem broken image-bearers back to God. Life itself is sacred because we have a God who created it, took on human flesh, and paid the ultimate price to sanctify it.

On this side of the cross and resurrection, the same enemy of Genesis 3, Satan, is alive and well, deceiving men as he awaits his final destruction, twisting God's truth, and tempting men's hearts to cast aside their fellow man. We must resist him with every fiber of our being and every resource from the Spirit so that he will flee from us (James 4:7). In our culture, part of that resistance means proclaiming the truth of God's Word and advocating for every individual, from womb to tomb, to be protected and respected.

As the church of the Lord Jesus Christ,

we have been given the mission to reclaim the broken in the name of our Savior. This mission we have received is costly and dangerous. We will raise questions and proclaim truths that sinful men do not want to hear. Nevertheless, we must persevere. Let's pray for eyes to see and ears to hear the call and prompting of the Spirit to show and proclaim the gospel through our care for the vulnerable ones, the widows, and the orphans throughout the world. ★

Herbie Newell is the president and executive director of Lifeline Children's Services.

1 C.S. Lewis. *The Weight of Glory*, HarperSanFrancisco, ©1949 C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd., Copyright renewed

© 1976, revised 1980 C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd., pp. 45-46.

2 Matt Chandler, *The Explicit Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 150.

MEXICO

ARGENTINA

SOUTH KOREA

BENIN

POLAND

SLOVAKIA

UNITED STATES

THE GLOBAL STATE OF ABORTION

AN INTERNATIONAL ROUND-UP OF
RECENT LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS

Catherine Parks



A ccording to the pro-choice Guttmacher Institute,¹ around 119 million unplanned pregnancies occurred each year between 2015 and 2019. Of those pregnancies, around 61%, or 73 million, ended in abortion.¹ These numbers represent 73 million precious lives lovingly created in the image of God. The fight to save preborn lives like these and see an end to the atrocity of abortion continues around the world, even as several countries are moving to legalize abortion for the first time.

In the fall of 2021, three ERLC staff members traveled to Northern Ireland to deliver a life-saving ultrasound machine to one of the country's only pregnancy resource centers, an effort made possible by the Psalm 139 Project.² While abortion was legalized in Great Britain in the 1967 Abortion Act, this law was not extended to Northern Ireland.³ Abortions were only allowed in Northern Ireland if a woman's life was at risk or her physical or mental health were greatly endangered.⁴ However, a vote in Parliament in October 2019 decriminalized abortion in the area for the first time. Now, ongoing disagreement has stalled the full roll-out of abortion services, but it is a matter of time before it is widely available in Northern Ireland.

Like Northern Ireland, other countries around the world are seeing abortion legalized for the first time, even as efforts to end abortion in the United States are growing. Here is an overview of some of the countries making moves on both sides of the abortion debate.

COUNTRIES LEGALIZING ABORTION

MEXICO

In September 2021, Mexico's Supreme Court ruled that prosecuting a woman for abortion is unconstitutional, a decision



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that serves to practically legalize abortion. Ruling on a law from Coahuila, a state on the Texas border, the court's decision immediately affects only that state, but it establishes a legal precedent for other judges throughout the country. In light of the decision, court President Arturo Zaldívar stated, "From now on you will not be able to, without violating the court's criteria and the constitution, charge any woman who aborts under the circumstances this court has ruled as valid." Those circumstances are expected to include abortions carried out within the first 12 weeks of a pregnancy.⁵

This is a landmark decision for a country that is largely Catholic and has traditionally held strong opposition to abortion. While Texas has greatly tightened restrictions on abortion, this decision could open the door for women in Texas to seek legal abortions along the border shared with Mexico.⁶ Women already cross the border to obtain the abortion pill mifepristone from Mexican pharmacies.⁷ This decision could increase access to surgical abortion as well.

ARGENTINA

Mexico follows in the footsteps of Argentina, another largely Catholic country, which passed a bill in December of 2020 to decriminalize abortion at up to 14 weeks of pregnancy for any reason.⁸ This makes Argentina the largest country in Latin America to legalize abortion.

In 2018, Pope Francis, a native of Buenos Aires, was quoted as saying about abortion, "Last century, the whole world was scandalized by what the Nazis did to purify the race. Today, we do the same thing but with white gloves."⁹ In his recent comments to the U.N., Francis decried the view many hold of abortion as a solution to society's complex problems, saying, "It is troubling to see how simple and convenient it has become for some to deny the existence of a human life as a solution to problems that can and must be solved for both the mother and her unborn child."¹⁰

Pro-abortion sentiment had previously been on the rise in Argentina, increasing in 2019 partly due to public outrage over the case of an 11-year-old who received a Caesarean section after being raped by her grandmother's 65-year-old partner. The girl and her mother sought an abortion, but questions about guardianship rights stalled the process until she delivered a baby by C-section at 23 weeks. Abortion rights activists rallied around this situation, mobilizing to increase public demand for legalization.¹¹

The decision in Argentina has set the stage for other South American nations to rethink their policies on abortion. Chile has voted to debate a bill to legalize abortion up to 14 weeks, while Honduras responded by adding their abortion ban to the country's constitution, in effect putting a lock on the ban.¹²

SOUTH KOREA

Abortion was decriminalized in January of 2021, enacting an April 2019 decision by the Constitutional Court. The decision ruled that the law holding women and medical professionals seeking or providing abortions criminally accountable was unconstitutional. Under the new law, abortion is legal on demand until 14 weeks, at which point it becomes illegal except in the case of rape, risk to the health of the mother, or if the preborn child shows signs of severe abnormalities. In such cases, abortion is legal up to 24 weeks. The law also allows for use of the abortion pill mifepristone.

While abortion is now legal in South Korea, there are no laws guaranteeing the right to access an abortion, but pro-choice advocates seek such protections in the country.¹³

THAILAND

In January of 2021, Thailand's Parliament voted to legalize abortion in the first trimester, with the Senate voting 166 to 7 in favor of amending a law that imposed prison terms of up to three years for those having

abortions and up to five years for abortion providers.¹⁴ After 12 weeks of pregnancy, however, a woman having an abortion is still subject to potential fines and a shorter prison sentence. There is an allowance for abortion after 12 weeks under certain conditions that have been determined by Thailand's Medical Council. These conditions include pregnancies that result from sexual assault or pose a threat to the mother's health, or those in which the preborn child is known to have abnormalities.

BENIN

In October of 2021, Benin's parliament voted to further legalize abortion in the West African country where it was already permissible in cases of rape, incest, or threatened the life of the mother.¹⁵ Now, abortion is legal up to 12 weeks if the pregnancy is likely to "aggravate or cause material, educational, professional or moral distress, incompatible with the woman or the unborn child's interest."

Minister of Health Benjamin Hounkpatin praised the measure in a statement, citing statistics that nearly 200 women die in Benin each year due to abortion complications. "This measure will be a relief for many women who face undesired pregnancies, and are forced to put their lives in danger with botched abortions," said Hounkpatin. This new law will also give abortion access to women in neighboring West African nations where abortion is still illegal.

COUNTRIES WORKING TO REVERSE LEGALIZATION

POLAND

In October of 2020, the Polish Constitutional Tribunal decided in favor of increasing restrictions on abortion, a law which went into effect in January of 2021.¹⁶ Previously, abortion in Poland was legal in the case of fetal abnormalities, pregnancies resulting from rape or incest, and when the mother's life is in danger. This law takes away the legal

**PRAY
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WITH
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ELSE TO
TURN.**

option to abort in cases of fetal abnormalities. Critics have seen the decision as a means of practically doing away with abortion in the country, since 1,074 of 1,100 abortions performed in Poland in 2020 were because of fetal abnormalities.

SLOVAKIA

Poland's neighbor Slovakia saw a motion to tighten abortion rules narrowly defeated in a vote of 59 to 58 in October 2020.¹⁷ While the measure would have continued to allow abortion on demand until 12 weeks, it would have required the waiting period to be 96 hours instead of the current 48-hour requirement. It would also have banned clinics from advertising their services and required women to declare their reasons for obtaining an abortion. Activists in Slovakia and Poland pushed back against the measure. Many Polish women seek abortions in Slovakia because the restrictions are much lower than at home.

The proponents of the proposal, many of whom are Christians, have said they will try again to see it passed.

UNITED STATES

Guttmacher Institute, a pro-abortion organization, has called 2021 the "worst legislative year ever for U.S. abortion rights."¹⁸ In the first six months of 2021, 90 abortion restrictions were enacted in the U.S., more than in any year since *Roe v. Wade* was handed down in 1973. These restrictions include near-total abortion bans, bans on abortion after six weeks, bans on abortion in cases of fetal abnormality, and others.

On December 1, 2021, the Supreme Court heard a case—*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*—concerning a Mississippi law banning most abortions after 15 weeks.¹⁹ Mississippi's law has never gone into effect due to lower courts ruling that the law violates *Roe*. Now, Mississippi is asking the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and *Casey v. Planned Parenthood*, the two landmark rulings legalizing access to abortion in the U.S.

The Texas Heartbeat Act is also



undergoing challenges in several cases. The Heartbeat Act bans abortions after a fetal heartbeat is detected. At least 10 other states have passed fetal heartbeat abortion bans, but they have all been blocked by courts. Between 85 and 90% of abortions in Texas take place after a fetal heartbeat has been detected, and in the month after the bill was enacted, abortion rates dropped by half.²⁰ Experts expect them to continue to decline.

In October, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in *Cameron v. EMW Women's Surgical Center* regarding the ability of Kentucky's attorney general to intervene to defend the state's dismemberment abortion law.²¹ Many other states have passed bills with similar intervention clauses, giving this case the potential to affect the laws in other states.

PRAY AND WORK ON THE BEHALF OF THE VULNERABLE

As those who believe every human life is precious and made in the image of



God, we should mourn the legalization of abortion in countries around the world and pray fervently. Here are some specific ways we can ask God to intervene:

PRAY FOR WOMEN LIVING IN COUNTRIES WHERE ABORTION ACCESS HAS BEEN GRANTED OR EXPANDED.

Pray that the light of the gospel would break through and that they would see Jesus as their hope, rather than an abortion procedure that will end one life and devastate another. Pray for Christians in these countries to be bold in love and to come alongside those experiencing unplanned pregnancies or vulnerable to an unplanned pregnancy.

PRAY FOR COUNTRIES SEEKING STRICTER LAWS AGAINST ABORTION.

Pray that God would grant them wisdom and turn hearts toward life. Pray that many lives would be saved as a result

of these laws passing. Pray for women in these countries who are fearful that their choice to terminate a pregnancy might be taken away. Pray that they would see a future and a hope in Christ and find help in his people.

PRAY FOR THE UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT JUSTICES AS THEY DECIDE THE DOBBS CASE.

Pray for wisdom and insight. Pray that the horrors of legalized abortion in America would end and that the church would rise up to care for those who find themselves in difficult situations with nowhere else to turn.

While we pray, we should also continue to work in our local communities to see that abortion-vulnerable women are given the care they need. If *Roe* is overturned here in the U.S., there will be an even greater need for Christians to walk alongside women in crisis, being the

hands and feet of Jesus to those whom he created and loves. As we eagerly anticipate and pray for that day, let's labor to protect every preborn life possible and intentionally serve families so that abortion becomes unthinkable. ★

Catherine Parks is an author and acquisitions editor at Moody Publishing.

- 1 <https://www.gutmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-worldwide#>
- 2 <https://psalm139project.org/>
- 3 <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/explainer-abortion-act-in-the-u-k-challenged-but-upheld-by-the-high-court/>
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THE UYGHUR GENOCIDE

THE MORAL IMPERATIVE OF CARING
FOR PEOPLE ABOVE ALL ELSE

Michael Sobolik and Chelsea Sobolik





Photo Attribution: Nacho Calonge / Getty Images

For the past four years, the world has watched one alarming report after another trickle out from Xinjiang, China's westernmost territory. On Oct. 5, 2021, however, a former Chinese prison guard shared particularly horrifying accounts of the torture Uyghurs endure in Xinjiang "reeducation" camps: "Kick them, beat them (until they're) bruised and swollen. Until they kneel on the floor crying . . . Everyone uses different methods. Some even use a wrecking bar, or iron chains with locks . . . Police would step on the suspect's face and tell him to confess."

These revelations, reported by CNN, also included accounts of extreme torture, including sexual abuse and even gang rapes.¹ They are, sadly, part of a broader plan.

Since 2017, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has waged a systemic

campaign of oppression and persecution against the Uyghur people, a predominantly Muslim and Turkic-speaking ethnic group. The geographic scope of the CCP's campaign against Uyghurs is global, but primarily restricted to Xinjiang, where Uyghurs have lived for centuries. Under the guise of national security, the CCP is seeking to "pacify" the region with totalitarian tactics like pervasive surveillance, thought control, ideological reeducation, and forced birth control.

The CCP's oppression of the Uyghur people does not stop there. Beginning in 2018, reports began to emerge chronicling how China is exploiting this group vocationally. China is the world's largest producer of cotton and solar panels, and the vast majority of these exports come from Xinjiang. For many Uyghurs, the reeducation camps are a launching pad to compulsory labor in these industries. Whether in Xinjiang or throughout China, the CCP is relocating Uyghurs and exploiting them for free or underpaid labor.

FORMAL DETERMINATION OF GENOCIDE

In response, the Department of State labeled these atrocities as a genocide on Jan. 19, 2021—the final day of the Trump administration.² President Joe Biden has upheld this finding.³ The label carries significant weight, beyond the bipartisan agreement surrounding it. The United States is a signatory of the Genocide Convention of 1948, which obligates member states to “prevent and punish” genocide anywhere it occurs.⁴ Issuing a formal genocide finding is the first step in this process.

Deeper than America’s legal obligations, though, is the moral imperative. Words matter, especially in politics. Genocide, according to the 1948 Convention, is specific action taken “with intent to destroy” an ethnic or religious people group.⁵ Confronting evil of this magnitude begins with naming it accurately. The United States has taken this first step.

It is, however, just that: a first step. For America to meet its legal and moral obligations in the face of an ongoing genocide, tough diplomacy is necessary, but wholly insufficient apart from a broader effort. Indeed, subsequent atrocity determinations from parliaments in Canada,⁶ Britain,⁷ the Netherlands,⁸ and Lithuania⁹ have raised global awareness, but they have failed to stop the CCP’s oppression of Uyghurs. Chinese government officials blatantly deny all accusations of political persecution in Xinjiang and show no sign of easing up.¹⁰

Over the past four months, subsequent events suggest the president is unwilling to meet these atrocities with more than words.

THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION’S CONFLICTED RESPONSE

At the outset of Biden’s presidency, the president cast his vision for America’s China policy: “We’ll confront China’s economic abuses; counter its aggressive, coercive action; to push back on China’s

attack on human rights, intellectual property, and global governance. But we are ready to work with Beijing when it’s in America’s interest to do so.”¹¹

The reference to cooperation was code for, among other things, climate change. Biden had indicated early on that climate change was his most important policy priority.¹² Given Beijing’s emissions levels, a global climate policy wouldn’t be truly global without China’s involvement and buy-in. Thus, the president announced his intent to bifurcate America’s competitive and cooperative agendas with

CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE ON THE
FRONTLINES OF ADVOCATING FOR
THE DIGNITY, HUMAN RIGHTS,
AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM OF
ALL PEOPLE. WE CANNOT REMAIN
SILENT OR COMPLACENT IN THE
FACE OF SUCH INJUSTICES.

China to ensure progress on both tracks simultaneously.

The CCP’s response was blunt, and has remained consistent: Beijing will not allow Washington to have its cake and eat it too. The price of progress on climate policy is America respecting China’s “internal issues,” such as its policies in Xinjiang, by remaining silent.

This tension came to a head last summer. Because of China’s significant cotton and solar panel exports, companies that operate in Xinjiang or purchase

these goods from China run the risk of financially supporting the oppression of the Uyghur people. U.S. laws prohibit the importation of any goods tied to compulsory labor.¹³ In response, the White House debated in June whether to deem all exports from Xinjiang as having been made by slave labor.¹⁴ According to reporting from *Washington Post* columnist Josh Rogin, the climate faction fought and won a debate within the administration to only designate one company.¹⁵ Washington pulled its punches.

Since then, subsequent reporting from mainstream sources like the *Associated Press* have revealed that John Kerry, former secretary of state and Biden's climate czar, has grown increasingly influential within the administration—and has used that influence to sideline officials advocating for a stronger response to China's genocide.¹⁶

When asked about the trade-off between climate policy and human rights, specifically the Uyghurs, Kerry responded: "Life is always full of tough choices."¹⁷

In December, Congress unanimously passed the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act and sent the bill to President Biden for his signature. On Dec. 23, the president signed the bill into law.¹⁸ This is certainly good news, and we ought to be grateful for this important action.

HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS RESPOND?

For Christians, underneath issues like human rights and the environment are foundational concepts like human dignity and caring for creation. These frameworks come from Scripture's opening pages and form the basis of much of Christian political thinking. Given the brokenness of our world as a result of the fall, however, these callings will conflict at key moments. The Uyghur genocide is such a moment.

Right now, millions of Uyghurs are forcibly detained in internment camps, subjected to forced labor and draconian birth control. Countering the CCP

THE *IMAGO DEI* SHOULD REORIENT OUR PRIORITIES AND TRAIN OUR HEARTS TO CARE ABOUT PEOPLE, ABOVE ALL ELSE.

must be a top priority of this administration and our allies. President Biden must respond with bold leadership and swift action. One of the roles of governments is to protect its citizens and allow them to live and worship freely. When governments fail to do this, the proper response is to counter them with strong moral leadership.

Scripture tells us that every human is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). The *imago Dei* should reorient our priorities and train our hearts to care about people, above all else. As Christians, we ought to care well for the world in which we've been entrusted. That means that we should advocate for policies that care for the environment, but we should do so with the understanding that our care for people must always be our top priority.

CONCLUSION

We might feel helpless to counter the Chinese Communist Party as they are perpetrating a genocide against the Uyghurs, but each one of us can use our voice to speak up on behalf of those who can't speak up for themselves. You can share articles on the persecution of Uyghurs on social media. You can invite a Uyghur to share their story through Zoom to your community. You can urge the U.S. government to continue taking strong measures to address these injustices.¹⁹



Photo Attribution: Vudi Xhymshiti/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

And we ought to pray often for persecuted people around the world. Below are a few specific ways to pray.

- Pray for the leaders of China, that they will end their oppression and persecution of their citizens, especially Uyghurs, Christians, Hong Kongers, the Falun Gong, and other ethnic and religious minorities.
- Pray for Christians in China, that they will be bold in proclaiming the good news of the gospel and that they will stand up for those who are being persecuted.
- Pray for world leaders, that they will have the courage and wisdom to counter China morally and hold the CCP accountable for their gross violations of human rights.

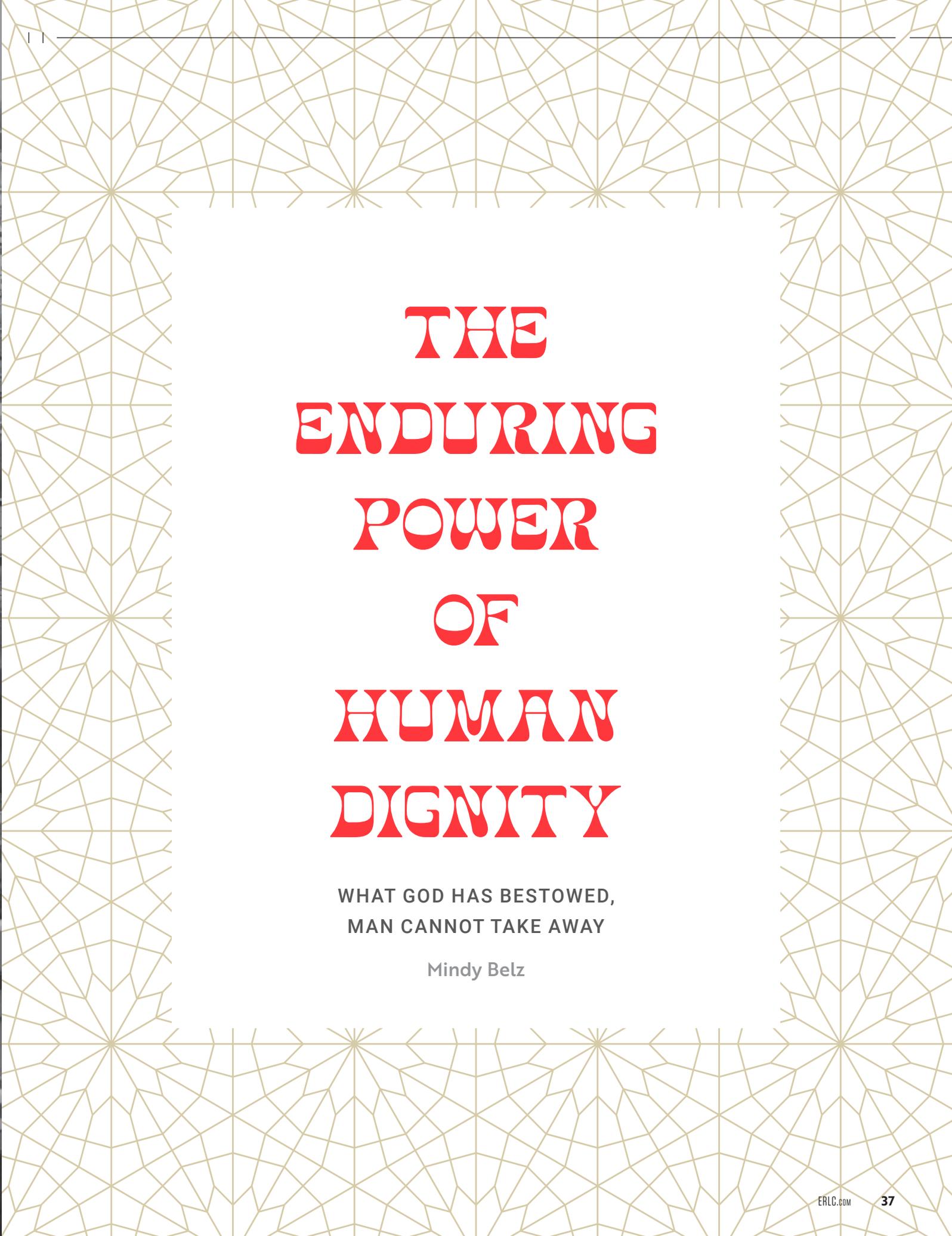
Christians should be on the frontlines of advocating for the dignity, human rights, and religious freedom of all people. We cannot remain silent or complacent in the face of such injustices. Proverbs 31:8 instructs us to “open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute.” When we advocate for the vulnerable and oppressed, we are fulfilling the commands of Scripture and modeling to the watching world the heart of Christ. ★

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**THE
ENDURING
POWER
OF
HUMAN
DIGNITY**

**WHAT GOD HAS BESTOWED,
MAN CANNOT TAKE AWAY**

Mindy Belz



HE CHURCH I WAS VISITING IN BAGHDAD MET IN THE EVENING. WHEN

THE SERVICE ENDED, PEOPLE STOOD IN THE GARDEN, TALKING AS THE COOL AIR AND THE LONG TWILIGHT OF THE IRAQI DESERT SETTLED OVER US.

“You should check out what’s going on upstairs,” one of the Iraqi women whispered.

I’d heard that Muslim women had begun meeting with women from the church. So I assumed I’d find about a dozen people gathered as I climbed the stairs and slowly opened the door to the upper room. To my amazement, I looked across a sea of women, row upon row, all dressed in full head-to-toe black burqas. I settled into a corner chair and scanned the room, stopping when my head count reached 350 women.

THE DRAW OF DIGNITY

What would draw so many Shiites from some of Baghdad’s poorest neighborhoods to a church full of unveiled Christians? Christians who worshipped on the edge of the city’s Green Zone, an area full of checkpoints and government officials?

First, charity.

Months before the meetings began, the church started handing out food parcels, bringing in the Shia families from nearby neighborhoods by bus several times a month.

Second, dignity.

As women in the church got to know these Muslim women, they found that they had things in common among all their differences. This happened as Islamic State militants were taking over large areas

of Iraq, spreading fear and occupying cities only 50 miles from Baghdad. ISIS, a Sunni movement, targeted not only Christians but Shia families too. Like the Christians, these Muslim women feared the future and what it held for their children.

So the women in the church invited them for conversations and to share their stories. First a few came, then 50, then the hundreds I saw. The pastor's wife led the evening discussions—about what it means to be a Christian, about how Christian and Muslim women can help one another, caring for their children, making ends meet, and bearing burdens.

Yes, the Muslim women heard Scripture passages, but what first permeated this upper room was mutual respect, punctuated by laughter, and singing. And all of it in a room of open windows, with soldiers in the streets below. These women became fearless in the presence of one another, drawing strength from their shared humanity.

WHY DOES HUMAN DIGNITY SURVIVE IN THE DARK?

I have learned the most about human dignity from seeing it under assault, yet rising up, in the midst of widespread indignity.

MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN CANNOT STOP GOD'S DEVOTION TO MAN.

The Middle East Christians, living as they have for centuries under Muslim dominance, know the terrain well. At the height of the war in Syria, Chaldean Bishop Antoine Audo spoke to me by phone. It was winter, and the lights were out in his hometown of Aleppo. The phone line disconnected six times as we talked. Despite wartime hardships, he continued



to hold services, to perform baptisms, and to go about the city delivering supplies to the needy. I asked how he could carry on.

“The anarchy of the war allows you to perceive in even stronger terms the greatness of human dignity, just when it seems so humiliated,” he said.

Why does human dignity survive in the darkest hellholes? Because it is an unconquerable thing. Unconquerable because it begins not with humans but with God who made them.

At the very beginning, in the garden, men and women were created in God's image—the *imago Dei*. Over and over, the Old Testament histories tell us: man's inhumanity to man cannot stop God's devotion to man. It's not because man is so great but because the God who made him is.

And in the last days, our days, God pours out his spirit on all flesh, says the prophet Joel, male and female, slave and free, young and old (Joe 2:28-29). The Book of Acts opens at Pentecost with this vision and these words from Joel. What God had done for Peter, writes theologian N. T. Wright, he was beginning to do for the whole world.

The stoning of Stephen tested the new-found dignity for the early believers, and a



remarkable thing happened: heaven itself opens to Stephen as he is dying. He sees the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand. It's an indelible picture for those facing persecution through the centuries—Jesus at attention over the death of his saint, and Stephen, fully aware of both his present and his future, crying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

God plants these visions in human hearts when dignity is under assault. The ISIS militants at the height of their power knew how to debase their sworn enemies, how to make them appear less than human. They raped and sold women, they paraded kidnapped men in orange jumpsuits and then beheaded them.

Yet when the Islamic State fighters paraded 21 Egyptians before a camera in 2015, made them kneel for execution on a Libyan beach, the men in jumpsuits remained calm. Instead of protests, they gazed to heaven in prayer, whispering, "*Ya Rabbi Yasou,*" "My Lord Jesus."

MAINTAINING DIGNITY AMID EVERYDAY INDIGNITIES

For the survivors there are everyday indignities, too. The work of terrorists isn't the only dehumanizing factor. Refugee or displacement camps meant for temporary shelter can steal dignity, too, as men and women who once owned businesses and made their own livings suddenly must subsist in tents waiting for outside help.

During that time my Iraqi friend, Insaf Safou, made it her ministry to restore everyday self-worth for women made homeless and abused by ISIS.

"Daesh [the Arabic word for ISIS] destroyed our culture, our churches, and our lives. But women have life-giving power within them, and Daesh cannot destroy the God who made us; they cannot kill our God-given dignity."

Insaf, a former refugee herself, knew the importance of restoring what ISIS had shattered for women in Iraq and Syria. "They need to build their dignity as much as feed their families," she said.

She believed in small projects, and that small projects would grow into larger community efforts. Once a tailor in

WHY DOES HUMAN DIGNITY SURVIVE IN THE DARKEST HELLHOLES? BECAUSE IT IS AN UNCONQUERABLE THING. UNCONQUERABLE BECAUSE IT BEGINS NOT WITH HUMANS BUT WITH GOD WHO MADE THEM.

Baghdad, she helped women with simple sewing projects. When mastered, these could help them grow businesses, sewing to support their own families, then to employ and pay other women, and in that way support whole communities.

Today Insaf's daughter runs one such business in Iraq, Hopeful Hands. It employs Syrian and Iraqi women, Muslims and Christians, in a growing sewing cooperative. They make sheet sets and other home furnishings, and recently completed an order of graduation gowns for a local university.

For those who've lost their homes and most of their possessions, such work gives them more than income. It gives them routine and a sense of purpose. They learn to pray and care for one another, too.

The future of human dignity is always up for grabs, and at the same time always assured, not on what man does but on what God did, forming us from dust into his very image and spreading the love of Jesus abroad in human hearts. ★

Mindy Belz is an author and journalist.

REMEMBERING THE UNDERSERVED DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWNS

A DIFFERENT MINISTRY FOR
A CHURCH PLANTER IN SPAIN

Myriah Snyder



Donning full COVID-19 protective gear—two sets of gloves, a mask, a plastic face shield, and a hazmat-style jumpsuit—Rusty Ford, a church planter in Seville, Spain, entered a nursing home in crisis during the height of the pandemic in 2020.

He'd spend the better part of the next two months serving in any needed capacity at Joaquín Rosillo nursing home in San Juan de Aznalfarache (Seville).¹ This nursing home was deemed too dangerous for most people to enter.

Each evening as he came home to his wife, Jennifer, and four small children, they'd go to one side of the house while he put his potentially compromised clothes in the wash and showered before touching them.

By April 2020, nearly 80 residents of this home had been diagnosed with COVID-19. Twenty-four of the residents died due to complications from the disease.

Spain was under lockdown, as panic ensued. At this point, no one knew how the virus was spreading or much about it at all. As the country remained locked down for a total of six weeks, with people not being allowed out of their homes except for trips to the hospital, pharmacy, or grocery store, Ford knew he had to do something.

After going through the red tape to be allowed into this underserved facility, he was granted access.

AN OPEN DOOR TO THE UNDERSERVED

In the nursing home, he did a little bit of everything, he explained.

“I’d go into rooms and I’d help clean people. I’d help feed people. Basically, whatever needed to be taken care of, I was there to do,” Ford said.

Many of these elderly people already had limited mobility. During the first few weeks of his time there, the lockdown regulations didn’t allow them to move from room to room for meals or socialization. Residents were isolated.

But, in Ford’s capacity as a volunteer, he was able to go into the rooms and visit with the residents. In a country that is less than 1% evangelical Christian, it was crucial to offer some form of hope in the height of the crisis.

“I was getting chances to pray with people, because people are talking now,” he said. “Everybody I was dealing with has basically never heard the gospel. And I was also getting a chance to share the gospel with some of the coworkers.”

IMB president, Paul Chitwood, remarked,

Rusty is but one among more than 3,600 IMB missionaries who have continued to share the gospel around the world in the midst of a global pandemic. With literally thousands of short-term mission trips cancelled over the past 18 months, Southern Baptists have not been left without a witness among the nations. The risks and challenges our missionaries continue to face in light of COVID-19 are enormous, but they remain hard at work.

Eventually, the residents of the nursing home where Ford volunteered were allowed out of their rooms, socially distanced. The volunteer/intern manager approached Ford one day with an idea.

“Rusty, you’re a priest, right?” he asked. Since the country is predominantly Catholic, the idea of a pastor wasn’t familiar.

“More or less,” Ford answered. When the man asked Ford if he wanted to hold religious services, he jumped at the opportunity.

Within 20 minutes of the man asking Ford to speak to the residents, he was sharing the hope of the gospel with 12 residents before their exercise class.

“There was a ton of hopelessness because they’ve seen 24 of their friends die, and lots of people were sick,” Ford said. “I got a chance to share the gospel with around 10 or 15 people.”

After that first time, they decided to make the service a weekly thing. Every Monday at 10 a.m.,

he shared the love of Christ with the residents. The group grew to an average of 25 or 30. Of those, Ford could only identify one woman who was a believer.

GRATEFUL FOR NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE CHRIST

Eventually, his (or other volunteers) being inside the facility became too much of a liability for the facility, so the ministry ended.

Ford was thankful for the time serving in the nursing home, despite the risks involved.

He was thankful to simply get out of the house, he joked, since being on lockdown in a townhouse with four small kids wasn’t easy.



TOP: Rusty Ford, a church planter in Seville, Spain, is in full COVID-19 protective gear with colleagues at Joaquín Rosillo nursing home in San Juan de Aznalfarache (Seville). BOTTOM: Rusty Ford spent the early part of the pandemic as a volunteer in a nursing home ravaged by COVID.

He was thankful for the opportunity to share the gospel, weekly, with 25-30 people who didn’t know Christ.

But he was also thankful for the chance it gave him to expand his ministry out of the ordinary.

“Typically, in our strategy [as church planters] we wouldn’t focus on nursing home residents,” he explained. “It’s totally outside of the box of our normal ministry.”

But he was glad to intentionally share Christ’s love and hope where he wouldn’t have been under normal circumstances. ★

Myriah Snyder is senior writer/editor for the IMB.

1 <https://www.elmundo.es/an=dalucia/2020/04/06/5e8b2b52fdddff15aa8b4666.html>





THE PARADOX OF TECHNOLOGY AND GLOBAL AFFAIRS

LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS
IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Jason Thacker

ONE OF MY FAVORITE email newsletters I read is from *The Economist*. It has become a go-to resource for world news. Each morning, they send a rundown called the *Espresso*. It highlights stories from other countries that many U.S.-based news outlets rarely mention or go in depth about because of their focus on domestic affairs. Routinely, I read about social trends affecting populations around the world or the various ways that authoritarian regimes are suppressing basic human rights through technology.

Being exposed to all these events has helped me see the vastness and gravity of world affairs, to break out of the isolation of American news, and more importantly, to understand the plight of so many people internationally who are created in the very image of God. This simple newsletter has expanded how I see the dignity of all people, no matter where they live or what they believe. It has allowed me to have a broader global mindset in my prayers and work as I think about the thousands of missionaries who are sharing the gospel, often in hostile places.

But this same practice of news consumption also tends to bring with it unintended consequences that display the incredible power of technology to shape humanity. In our digital age, it is

difficult to think wisely about technology given how it forms us—often unconsciously—for good and ill. Media theorist and cultural critic Neil Postman describes technology as having these complex and profound effects on every aspect of our life at its core. He explains that “once a technology is admitted, it plays out its hand; it does what it is designed to do.” That is, all technologies have good and bad uses and are designed toward specific ends. Postman goes on to say that “our task is to understand what that design is—that is to say, when we admit a new technology to the culture, we must do so with our eyes wide open.”¹

But how do we honestly evaluate technology when it is so deeply embedded into our lives? And how does the Christian ethic shape our approach to the dignity of people around the world?

OUR DISTRACTED AGE

We all know that we live in a distracted age. We have access to countless gadgets, social platforms, and other technologies on any given day. We are inundated with information and simply aren't able to process the things we are exposed to daily or understand their gravity. One of the dangerous consequences of our current state of news consumption is described



by English professor Jeffrey Bilbro as the “macadamized” or distracted mind.²

Drawing on Henry David Thoreau’s insights, Bilbro describes how a macadamized road was one that was made up of many small stones that were easier to shape over time rather than larger stones that were used previously. Bilbro connects this concept to our modern-day information intake, where instead of focusing on larger concepts and ideas, we frequently take in small bits of “news” and information that tends to make it more akin to a spectacle than something morally upright and formative. We fail to think deeply on any one thing and give very little sustained attention to the thousands of things we see each day. Information overload, at times, may tempt us to feel like we are more informed, but in reality we are being formed for more shallow engagement and simplistic thinking.

Likewise, we are more easily shaped in ways that can be contrary to the biblical

ideals. In a sense, when everything is seen as breaking news and worth our time, the reality is that nothing is truly important. This common practice of news consumption can lead to us hearing about the devastating plight of people around the world, yet not being altered by it in what we do or how we think about those indignities. Our heads—and email inboxes—may be full of information, but our hearts and hands are idle or distracted by whatever is deemed to be more important at the moment.

While technology can have innumerable benefits for learning about issues of human dignity around the world, it can also deaden us to the realities and horrors of a sin-torn world. In our digital age, we tend to gloss over the travesties that our fellow image-bearers are subjected to as mere headlines. We fail to see past the stories and news alerts to the fact that these updates are about actual flesh-and-blood human beings. They are not bits of data to be consumed and then forgotten.

Behind this paradox is a call for authentic Christian engagement in world affairs that utilizes technology for good and acknowledges the bad. All of this is driven by the desire for nations and governments around the world to recognize the human dignity inherent in all people. But, most importantly, we are compelled by Jesus’ call to “love God” and “love our neighbor as ourselves” (Luke 10:27).

THE GOOD AND BAD OF TECHNOLOGY IN WORLD AFFAIRS

As already mentioned, technology is a good gift from God. One of the reasons is because it expands what we can know and how much we can learn. Take, for example, the plight of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, China. Through the use of social media and digital technologies, the world has been put on notice about the devastating human rights abuses by and the authoritarian control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Millions of religious minorities have been surveilled,

detained, and sent to “reeducation” camps where they are tortured and brainwashed to swear ultimate allegiance to the Communist regime.³ These image-bearers are subjected to forced labor and even forced sterilization. And much of what the world knows about this genocide and these crimes against humanity comes through the access to information that we have in the digital age.⁴ We simply would not know the extent of these abuses without technology such as social media, internet connectivity, and satellite surveillance. And we are now without excuse if we remain silent.

These authoritarian practices and abuses are not limited to the CCP. Through technology, we have learned about the massive censorship and political power grabs in nations such as Cuba, Belarus, Iran, Russia, and more over the last few years.⁵ These governments have routinely sought to oppress their people and wield unaccountable power through the widespread use of severe and dehumanizing measures.

Technology has also enabled these draconian regimes to gain immense control and power over their people through the use of highly-advanced technologies such as facial recognition, government surveillance, and expansive data collection by private actors.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND GLOBAL AFFAIRS

In conversations about global affairs, I usually notice two things: growing concerns about authoritarian impulses, but also a lack of empathy for those under these oppressive regimes. Our lives of decadence in the West make it hard for world news to puncture through the allure of modern conveniences,

especially because it seems to have no bearing on our daily lives. We may acknowledge that the plight of Uyghur Muslims is a travesty, but we fail to take actions that hold corporations and governments accountable for enabling or turning a blind to these atrocities.

One of the fundamental aspects of Christian ethics and discipleship is the call to “love our neighbor as ourselves.” Jesus knew full well that our tendency, in our sinful nature, is to focus exclusively on ourselves—and he calls his people to something greater. In the parable of the

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Good Samaritan, a lawyer questions Jesus about what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds by stating that he must love God and love his neighbor as himself. The scriptures then show us that the lawyer, “seeking to justify himself” (Lk 10:29), asks, “Who is my neighbor?” This simple question reveals the core of the biblical ethic and directly applies to Christian engagement in global affairs.

Jesus answers in a parable and asks the lawyer to point out who was a good neighbor to the one who was attacked. The lawyer responds, “The one who showed him mercy” (Lk 10:37). Jesus agrees and calls him to go and do likewise. This is our call as Christians. Loving our neighbor does not simply mean platitudes, hashtag

activism, or a knowledge of global affairs. While these things may have their place, we must seek to allow the Holy Spirit to break us out of our macadamized minds and transform us into people who seek mercy for our neighbors, no matter their perceived benefit to the world, location, or even religious beliefs.

We do this because they are made in the image of God and, even in their spiritual rebellion, are dear to their Creator. While many of the issues on the global stage are complex and can quickly become overwhelming, we still have a mandate to love our neighbors within the context God has placed us and urge that their God-given dignity be recognized. Not all of us are called to stand in the halls of Congress or advocate at the United Nations, but each of us can extend mercy to our neighbors. We can do this by using technology to stay informed about global affairs, making our voices heard at the ballot box, or loving the refugee family down the street and raising awareness in our own circles. The church, as the outpost of God’s coming kingdom, has the distinct calling and honor to demonstrate our love for him as we love our neighbors and extend mercy to all. ★

Jason Thacker is the chair of research in technology at the ERLC.

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STEWARDING THE GOOD OF OUR NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

CHRISTIANITY, DEMOCRACY,
& HUMAN FLOURISHING

Hunter Baker

The most important thing about Christianity is what it tells us about God and his Son, Jesus, the one true king. Through the revelation of the Bible, we learn that God is not embedded in nature like some kind of life force. Nor is he a reflection of the aspirations of communities, such as their desire to be brave or powerful.

Instead, the God of the Bible is transcendent in nature. He is not part of creation. He is above and beyond it. The biblical God is not a totem or a powerful supernatural ally. His will dictates the structure of reality as we know it.

But it is also important to know what Christianity tells us about human beings. We

understand that we are sinful, self-seeking, and disobedient toward God. However, we simultaneously understand that we have been created with the dignity that comes from being made in God's image.

Both of these features—the transcendence of God and the inherent dignity of human beings—loom large in the story of democracy and human flourishing in the history of the world. Together, they form a strong bulwark against governments founded on power rather than justice and give the people a place to stand, both when they support and when they resist governments of the earth.

WHEN GOVERNMENT GOES WRONG

The Roman empire is but one of many governments in world history that sought to wrongly unite the rule of a man with God's rule through emperor worship. Yet, the Bible tells us clearly that while God has given us government for our benefit, the various caesars of the world rule by authority that is only derived from God (Rom. 13:1). He is the true source of the right to rule. Leaders are only entrusted with the government. They are absolutely not the source of it. To the extent that their leadership varies from God's moral law, they essentially saw the limb upon which they sit out from under themselves.

So, while we "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's," we never forget that we must also "render unto God what is God's" (Mark 12:17). It requires no fine parsing to determine whose claims are superior in that equation. And while Caesar's image may be on the face of the coin, it is God's image which rests upon us (Gen. 1:27). Every would-be emperor should bear in mind that they are not free to violate image-bearers with impunity.

HOW DEMOCRACY DEALS WITH HUMAN NATURE

In contrast, the past three centuries have witnessed the flowering of

democracy throughout much of the world. While the Bible does not dictate a system of government, we have established earlier that it informs us about human beings. If we accept the reality of our sin nature, one major question is how to respond to it in terms of law.

While the earlier, dominant approach was to rely upon the virtue of a leader and church hierarchies to control human

In other words, our wealth goes beyond physical things to the ties that bind us and make life meaningful.

On one hand, the move toward democracy is self-protective. As an example, C.S. Lewis advocated democracy because he believed in the fall of man and concluded democracy was a necessary check on sinful ambition. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr mixed cynicism with optimism by saying that man's inclination for injustice called for democracy as a barrier, but also noted that man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible. So, yes, we decentralize decision-making to protect ourselves from tyranny, but we also engage in democracy as a way to seek justice together.

Among the powers with which God has entrusted human beings is the ability to reason. Democracy calls upon us to reason together about the nature of the good society and good laws to govern it. In this sense, democracy honors the dignity of human beings and goes beyond responding to the sinful will to power.

Let us take seriously the incredible responsibility we have to be stewards of our participation in the democratic process. It is critical that we always remember that human beings share in the brotherhood and sisterhood of men and women under the authority of God.

sin, we have perhaps ruefully realized that elites are also sinful and cannot be relied upon to transmit their purported goodness to the rest of us. The sad history of Israel's kings is not a bad reminder on that front. Instead, we have sought to enlarge the task of deliberation on public matters to essentially the entire adult population.

When we take that step, we acknowledge a real responsibility image-bearers have. God gave human beings the task of stewarding his creation (Gen. 1:28). While we may tend to limit such thoughts to how we interact with the resources of the earth, it is also the case that there is a moral and a social ecology. It is important to steward such things as family ties, marriage, moral responsibility, trust, the education of the young, and other elements of what is sometimes called "social capital."

There is nothing about being in the majority that means one is righteous. Tyranny can emerge from majorities in the same way it can from a monarch or a group of oligarchs.¹

A Christian anthropology helps us to understand that we are still fallen, even when we act with numbers on our side. If we are wise and remember this reality about ourselves, then we will be able to temper our passions, our self-flattering self-righteousness, and our disregard for understanding how others experience the world.

So, let us be grateful for the hedges we have against tyranny in the transcendence of God, the truth of Scripture, and our mindfulness that no mere man or woman can solve our sin problem on their account. And let us take seriously the incredible responsibility we have to be stewards of our participation in the democratic process. It is critical that we always remember that human beings share in the brotherhood and sisterhood of men and women under the authority of God.

Equally wonderful is the fact that Jesus Christ is the only king Earth has ever known truly worthy of the name. As we meditate upon these truths, we can turn aside from tribalism and partisanship and dispute with one another in such a way as to avoid cultivating lasting hatreds when a just peace is what we really desire. In such a situation, we will find our flourishing. ★

Hunter Baker is an author and the dean of arts and sciences at Union University.

¹ Tocqueville, Alexis de, 1805-1859. (1838). *Democracy in America*. New York :G. Dearborn & Co.



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THE YEAR NORTHERN IRELAND BECAME AN ABORTION CULTURE

AN INTERVIEW ABOUT THE HISTORY
OF THE LAW, VULNERABLE LIVES,
AND THE WORK AHEAD

Elizabeth Graham

Until recently, preborn lives in Northern Ireland (NI) were significantly more protected than they are in the United States. But that changed legally in October 2019. Both Lives Matter—an organization that seeks “to re-frame the abortion debate in Northern Ireland and beyond, advocate for better care in pregnancy crisis, and create a culture that values every woman and her unborn child”—was ready to stand for life, continuing the work they’ve been doing since 2017.¹

Dawn McAvoy, co-founder, and Marion Woods, services advocate, work tirelessly to change the way life is viewed and received in their culture. In the summer of 2021, several representatives from the ERLC, including myself, visited Northern Ireland and delivered an ultrasound through the Psalm 139 Project to Both Lives Matter. While there, McAvoy and Woods answered some questions about the state of abortion in NI and how the church in the U.S. can help them care for the vulnerable in their midst.

ELIZABETH GRAHAM: Can you give me a brief history of abortion in Northern Ireland and where things stand today?

DAWN MCAVOY: Up until Oct. 22, 2019, abortion was legal in NI, but it was, in the famous phrase, “safe, legal and rare.” It was legal, but it was very rare because the law put a very high bar on who could access abortion within the health service here. In legal terms, a woman could terminate a pregnancy if her life was at risk, which is very rare, but also if her mental health was at risk, defined by law to be in a way that was real, serious, long term, or permanent. The bar was set so high that abortions here were very restricted.

There was a certain amount of harsh language [in the law], but there was also compassion. We would have said that the law recognized and protected both lives, with abortion being very rare. On an annual basis, and compared to the rest of the United Kingdom, abortion rates in Northern Ireland were seven times lower. In the rest of the United Kingdom—England, Scotland, and Wales—abortion law had changed in 1967 in a way that effectively opened the door to abortion on demand.

We had a restrictive abortion law for 50 years. When our campaign launched in 2017, we did some research to see if the law makes a difference. We knew our law was restrictive. We knew abortion rates were lower. We knew some women went to the rest of the United Kingdom to access abortion. But what did that mean? Rather than thinking of it in terms of “lives ended,” we wanted to show that lives were being lived in Northern Ireland that otherwise wouldn’t have been.

We looked at abortion rates over those 50 years, and we were able to say with confidence that a conservative and plausible estimate was that 100,000 people were alive in Northern Ireland who would not have been if the law had been changed here in 1967.

We shared this on billboards, and that

campaign was challenged. It was reported to the Advertising Standards Authority in England. They investigated our research, upheld our claim, and rejected the complaints against us. So, we knew that the law here had made a difference. It recognized and protected both lives, and lives had been saved.

In 2019, all of that changed when Westminster (the U.K.’s seat of government) intervened in a devolved government in Northern Ireland [a situation caused when one political party refused to participate in the role of government, which then allows Westminster to dictate laws and procedures].² Westminster introduced an amendment to a funding bill related to NI’s government that decriminalized abortion [as well as permitted same-sex marriage]. This removed the law that we were operating under. For six months, we were in a position where there was no law on and no regulatory framework for abortion.

At the end of March 2020, the new regulations were published. We went from being one of the jurisdictions in Europe that was the most restrictive on abortion and was the most protective for both lives, to a place where we’re now one of the most liberal or permissive abortion

undiagnosed mental health basis up to 24 weeks. It’s being framed around the same legislation that operates in England, Scotland, and Wales.

What this means practically is that a woman just needs to be able to say, “My circumstances aren’t appropriate”—whether that’s a lack of finances, lack of emotional support, career pressures—and there will be no questions asked. If there’s somebody that will provide the abortion, you can have the abortion. You can receive an abortion up to birth in cases of a diagnosis of fetal abnormality, disability, or a terminal illness.

On top of that, we have limited conscience protections for doctors, nurses, and healthcare professionals who would object to being involved in an abortion. So, administratively, there are lots of questions as to who can withdraw from the procedure, especially now because it’s not just surgical, but chemical abortions.

A really concerning aspect of the new law has been how it addresses education, so that within the school system, how abortion is taught regarding the sanctity of human life or human dignity has all been impacted by what Westminster did in 2019. Abortion services haven’t been centrally commissioned yet from the Department of

Health; it’s not on paper. But time will tell how it’s implemented in reality.

EG: For our audience’s sake, help us understand the implications to the national health system, as well as the implications to the third-party abortion providers. What

are the differences between what we face in the U.S. versus what you all are facing in Northern Ireland?

DM: In the United Kingdom, we have a system called the National Health Service, which is medical care that’s free,

YOU CAN’T TALK ABOUT ONE LIFE WITHOUT THE OTHER. IT’S ALWAYS BOTH LIVES, PRE AND POST-BIRTH.

-DAWN MCAVOY

regimes on paper. There is no criminal sanction for a woman who wants to terminate her own pregnancy right up to birth. Within the regulatory framework, there is no restriction on abortion up to 12 weeks. There’s no need to provide a reason for a termination. You can access abortion on request and on an undefined,



at the point of need, for everyone. Some people will choose to go privately, but you don't have to. From childhood right up until death, we all have free healthcare.

When it comes to abortion, it is under the NHS. But the NHS does not carry out abortions. Only 1% of abortions are performed within National Health Service hospitals or clinics. Ninety-nine percent of abortions are outsourced to private providers. The vast majority are private providers who are paid for by taxes. You have Planned Parenthood in America. In the United Kingdom, we have the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. BPAS and Marie Stopes would be the two largest abortion providers.

EG: In the U.S., the conversation usually groups abortion as a part of women's reproductive healthcare options. In the United Kingdom, they've disconnected the abortion service from the national health care system. So, is it correct that

the woman who might seek a termination is not actually receiving any type of continuum of care unless there is a problem that arises from the third party who administers the abortion, whether it's physical or chemical?

DM: Technically it all comes within the NHS, but you're absolutely correct. A woman could go to her general practitioner (GP), discuss her options, and could be pointed from there to the abortion provider. But she doesn't have to do that. She could directly phone the abortion provider. This is one of our concerns. In the U.K. system, we all have a health-care number. There's good data collection on our medical records, but for the purposes of abortion, your medical records can be disconnected.

We know that abortions can be accessed under a false name, address, and doctor's practice. If a woman has an abortion, her medical records through their

GP's practice may not align. So, it can be difficult to prove the negative long-term impact of abortion on physical or mental health unless someone comes forward and says, "I had an abortion, and these are the side effects."

There is also the concern that the potential side effects are not being explained, especially with the rise of telehealth medicine and the chemical abortion pill. For example, if a woman experiences side effects, she would go back to the abortion provider in most cases. She may phone them and say, "I think I'm bleeding more heavily than I expected, or I have some more painful cramps than I expected." But if the bleeding or cramps are outside a particular standard, she would go to the emergency department at the local hospital. This means that the information wouldn't be linked to the abortion provider. If there's a serious side effect—and as many as 1 in 20 women experience significant side effects—it is generally dealt



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with back within the NHS and not necessarily connected to the abortion.

EG: And NHS is paying the abortion clinic for those services, but abortion clinics are not responsible for caring for her after her termination?

DM: No, not if it's what would be deemed to be a severe or serious side effect.

EG: How is Both Lives Matter working to influence the culture in Northern Ireland to value the dignity of every human life?

DM: When we launched in 2017, our vision statement was that we imagine a people in place who value the life and health of women and unborn children and pursue the well-being of both. We always talk about both lives, mommy and baby. So, we wanted to immediately challenge the perceptions that we don't care about the woman. For us, there is a beautifully unique biological and relational aspect to a pregnancy. You can't talk about one life without the other. It's always both lives, pre and post-birth.

It's also not just about saying no to abortion. The law said no to abortion in the vast majority of cases for 50 years. We could safely say that the 98% of abortions that happen in Great Britain for socioeconomic circumstances weren't happening in Northern Ireland. And less than the other 2% were, as well. It was good that the law said no to abortion, but that doesn't necessarily help a woman when she's facing a pregnancy crisis.

We want a trinity of provisions for both lives: laws that protect all life from fertilization to natural death; services that enable every life and enable women to choose life; and a culture that affirms all of life, regardless of the circumstances of conception and the sex, age, health, ability, or disability of the baby.

The other thing we wanted to do was challenge that it's a religious argument.

Both Lives Matter isn't a religious campaign. We are open to people of all faiths and no faith. Yes, the values that we operate on are faith-based. Within the context of a church conversation, we will talk about Scripture and a biblical argument for human dignity and being made in the image of God.

But when in the public square, talking to the media, and talking to community groups, we don't believe that you need to

to make abortion unnecessary. How can Christians and churches in the U.S. support the work that you all and other organizations are doing in Northern Ireland?

DM: I don't think there is a disconnect between the church in America and the church here. You've experienced a culture of abortion for nearly 50 years. You know what it has done to society. You know how it reshapes and changes how lives are

AS THE CHURCH IN AMERICA ADDRESSES THE SUBJECT OF ABORTION—WITHIN THE CHURCH AND THEN FROM THE CHURCH INTO SOCIETY—THAT WILL IMPACT WHAT THE ABORTION CULTURE IS LIKE HERE.

-DAWN MCAVOY

have our same beliefs. Science says when life begins. Medical science and lived experience tells us what every pregnancy means and can result in when it goes to its natural conclusion. So talking about those lived experiences, medical science, the difference the law makes, and the cultural agenda, we think we can reframe the abortion conversation to take it outside of the religious box and the anti-woman box it is put in, and talk about both lives.

It's a much more beautiful story for society than abortion, which results in the death of one life and very often harms the remaining life of the woman.

EG: We want to make abortion unnecessary and unthinkable while also working to restrict laws, because as we work to restrict laws, more lives are saved. But it doesn't change hearts, minds, behaviors, and actions. So we firmly believe that to make abortion unthinkable, an education has to happen while also serving women

considered and viewed, preborn and post-birth life. You know the impact that it has had on women because you've seen the rates of abortion. There's a lot that you've experienced that we haven't yet, so you can pray for us.

As the church in America addresses the subject of abortion—within the church and then from the church into society—that will impact what the abortion culture is like here. The impact of what America does with abortion actually ripples across to the U.K.

MARION WOODS: I like the collaboration in the church in America. That sets a very important example for the churches here. It is one of our hopes and dreams for Both Lives Matter that our churches collaborate on this issue. And the more that we work together on this issue, the more it shines a light on the fact that ultimately, as people who are following Jesus and rooted in the Bible, human dignity comes to the forefront.

Being made in the image and likeness of God reminds us that, regardless of denominations, we are all protecting the gift of life that God has blessed us with. We remind people in churches that Jesus himself spent time as an embryo. Regardless of the church background we might come from, we can unify around the truth that life is a gift given to us because God is our Creator, and we are his creation.

EG: Is there any encouraging information or story of hope that you could just share with us today as we're wrapping up our time together?

DM: We haven't had an abortion culture. We haven't had abortion clinics, so we haven't had the need for pregnancy resource centers as you would know them in the states. But, it's always been our heart as an organization. The gift of the sonogram machine [through the Psalm 139 Project] and seeking to love us—the church and mommies and babies—in the name of Jesus and bring glory to God has been such an encouragement during a time of darkness and a season of lament, grieving, and pain. I think we're still trying to come to terms with and understand it.

The gift of this sonogram machine will expose the lie that there is no life [inside the womb]. It will reveal the truth of new life. That has been one of the most hopeful, encouraging, and tangible expressions of a community of a collaboration—all in the name of both lives—that we have that we have felt in the past year and a half, which has been so dark. So, thank you. ★

Elizabeth Graham is the vice president for operations and life initiatives at the ERLC.

Dawn McAvoy is co-founder of Both Lives Matter.

Marion Woods is services advocate for Both Lives Matter.

1 <https://bothlivesmatter.org/>

2 <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/explainer-whats-happening-in-northern-ireland/>





CHILDREN OF COVID-19

THE PANDEMIC'S DEVASTATING
EFFECTS AND HOW WE CAN RESPOND

Jedd Medefind

Among the most tragic ironies of COVID-19 is the disparity between the direct and the indirect impact of the virus upon children. The former has been remarkably modest, the latter catastrophic.

A study in July's volume of the *Lancet* estimates that 1.1 million children¹ were orphaned by COVID-19 in the first year of the pandemic—losing at least one parent or custodial grandparent. In every country surveyed, more fathers were lost than mothers—at least by double. In some countries, the ratio was 5-to-1.

The rates at which children were orphaned varied widely between countries. For example, at the time of the study, only 1 in every 1,666 children in England and Wales had lost a parent or primary caregiver. That number was 1 in every 286 children in Mexico; 1 in 196 in South Africa; and 1 in 98 in Peru.

Differences in the development levels of countries, including their health systems and economies, no doubt played a part in these disparities. But the causes of variances defied easy explanation. Some of the starkest differences came between countries sharing many apparent similarities. For example, South Africa's rate of orphanhood was more than 10 times that of neighboring Zimbabwe. Likewise, children in Peru were more than four times as likely to be orphaned than those in neighboring Columbia, even though Peru exercised some of the strictest lockdown policies in the world.

There is reason for concern that this impact will grow worse before it gets better, especially in the developing world. At first, COVID-19 hit hardest in wealthy and/or industrialized



countries. That center of gravity has shifted decisively. Now the highest death rates are consistently in developing countries.²

This comes on the heels of a year and a half of local lockdowns and global stagnation that devastated the economies of many developing nations. For more than a half century, the income of these countries has risen steadily. Since the advent of COVID-19, however, it has fallen for the first time in 60 years.³ And while economic growth has lifted millions from poverty in recent decades, the UN now predicts that the economic impact of the pandemic could pull as many as 420 million people into extreme poverty (earning less than \$2/day).⁴ Even with rapid vaccination—which appears to be a near impossibility in the poorest parts of the world—the impact of both COVID-19 and public response to it will continue to create severe economic and social fallout for years to come.

COVID-19's indirect effect on children has been no less striking than in the United States.⁵ A new study released just last month projected that more than 120,000 American children lost at least one parent or primary caregiver.⁶

As an immense range of studies confirm, children who've lost their parents consistently stand among the most vulnerable individuals in their society. Even when a surviving parent or relative is able to care for an orphaned girl or boy, the child faces a dramatically higher statistical likelihood of virtually every ill—from exploitation to poverty to mental illness to homelessness.⁷

This tragic reality reminds us why Scripture emphasizes so often the call to provide special protection and care for orphans: not only those who've lost both parents, but also those who've lost one parent—often referred to in the Bible as “the fatherless.”

Of course, COVID-19's ripple effects upon children weren't limited to those whose parents died. From deep educational losses and rising obesity to doubled rates of youth anxiety and depression, few children came out unscathed from school closures and other isolation-prompting policies.⁸ For children in the U.S. foster system—many of whom already lacked stability and strong social ties—the effects have been particularly harsh.⁹

Wherever one looks in the world, a remarkably similar reality seems to have played out across vastly differing continents, countries, and communities. Even as child vulnerabilities rose, protections for children diminished. As a study in the journal *Child Abuse & Neglect* concluded after reviewing an array of both high- and low-income countries worldwide, “Risk factors for children appeared to increase while there were often substantial deficits in CPS responses . . .”¹⁰

All of this confirms a simple, age-old truth: in any crisis, vulnerable children are most always among the hardest hit.

AN INVITATION TO CARE FOR CHILDREN

That reality, however, is not only a cause for heartbreak. It’s also an invitation. This sorrow that is as old as time also includes a timeless call. As the prophet Isaiah enjoined more than 2,500 years ago, “Defend the cause of the fatherless.” When a person responds to this call, they join God in work he is already about. As expressed in Psalm 68, “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling. He sets the lonely in families.”

Faithful followers of Christ are doing this in vibrant ways all over the world. I interact daily with organizations, churches, and families around the world who’ve stepped up dramatically over the past 18 months—both serving locally and supporting work globally. This ranges from churches and nonprofits pioneering new models of virtual foster parent recruiting, training, and support in the U.S. to groups creating compelling new approaches to support for children and families in the thick of the pandemic worldwide.¹¹ These and countless others are living the call to generosity and service that Christians at their best have modeled amidst crises all throughout history.

How can the rest of us join in, too? Here are three ways anyone can make a difference.

1. Pray. Lift up the most vulnerable children in your community and around the world—orphans, foster youth, and others who lack the protection and care of family. Ask that every hurting child and struggling family will experience God’s tangible love through his people.

2. Support. Especially in times of crisis, small gifts can go a long way. From ministries engaging local foster care to trusted organizations serving children and families around the globe, you can be a part of work both near and far.

3. Hands-on engagement. As we often say at CAFO, not everyone is called to foster or adopt, but everyone can do something.

Help foster, adoptive, and kinship families with meals, babysitting, errands, or other support. Aid and encourage struggling biological families. Serve as a mentor or CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) for a foster youth. There are few things more rewarding than getting personally involved.

In any crisis, vulnerable children are among the hardest hit, and the current pandemic is no exception. For Christians, these tragedies around us carry both challenge and opportunity. The local

WHEREVER ONE LOOKS IN THE WORLD, A REMARKABLY SIMILAR REALITY SEEMS TO HAVE PLAYED OUT ACROSS VASTLY DIFFERING CONTINENTS, COUNTRIES, AND COMMUNITIES. EVEN AS CHILD VULNERABILITIES ROSE, PROTECTIONS FOR CHILDREN DIMINISHED.

church in every nation has both the calling and the community capable of making a world of difference—restoring broken families, strengthening struggling families, welcoming children into new families whenever needed, and sharing the hope-filled news of the gospel. That’s what Christians at their best have done amidst crises in every era. I’m confident we’ll do it again in this one. ★

Jedd Medefind serves as president of the *Christian Alliance for Orphans*.

1 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)01253-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)01253-8/fulltext)

2 <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/covid-resilience-ranking/>

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A SPECIAL EDUCATION OF OUR OWN

Contending for the lives of people with Down syndrome and other disabilities

Juliana Wootten *with Jordan Wootten*

Everywhere we turn, it seems the sanctity of life is under constant assault. While society continues to turn this way and that, its consistent trajectory is undeniably toward the autonomy and supremacy of the individual—the all-important self. But not every individual is granted the same dignity.

As the pro-choice narrative has continued its cultural advance, the argument for aborting preborn babies has devolved into what has become the supposed absolute right of an individual to choose the

fate of another life based on something as fickle as that person's preference. The prizing of one individual's choice has resulted in the lawful termination of scores and scores of little boys and girls.

POLICIES TARGETED TOWARD THOSE WITH DISABILITIES

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the conversation developing around the dignity and viability of people with Down syndrome, particularly babies in the womb. In the past several years, for

example, a regulation was passed in the state of New York that required insurance plans to cover abortions, stating that health plans cannot “limit or exclude coverage for abortions that are [deemed] *medically necessary*” (emphasis added), an umbrella term that includes a lengthy list of disabilities.¹

In the U.K., language is written into the country's Abortion Act that permits abortion when “there is substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from physical or mental *abnormalities* as



to be seriously handicapped” (emphasis added).² In each of these examples, the language being used, ambiguous as it may seem, gives lawful allowance for taking the lives of preborn boys and girls with Down syndrome.

A SPECIAL EDUCATION

For years now, as an educator who teaches special education within the public school system, I (Juliana) have had the privilege of seeing firsthand what many proponents of these heart-wrenching abortion policies fail to see: the very real contributions that children with Down syndrome make to society. Too often, our advocacy for people with disabilities, while well-intended, stops short of recognizing that these individuals are not only worthy of life, but are an integral part of a healthy, functioning society.

During my time as cheer sponsor of an inclusion cheer squad, for example, wherein female students with various

disabilities were invited to join the varsity cheerleading squad, I watched as these students contributed to the culture and morale of the team. And I witnessed them carry out the role of a cheerleader with skill and competence. At an even greater magnitude, the same proved to be true in my experience as co-head of the delegation for our local Special Olympics chapter and our district’s Special Olympics club. These are people who have much to give and teach us.

I am the one who has learned the most as I’ve taught and led students and student-athletes with Down syndrome over the years. Often, it was them leading me, showing me what it means to love, work hard, empathize with others, overcome challenges, and always do it with joy. You might say I received a special education from them.

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

The inherent value and dignity of people with Down syndrome is not dependent on their contribution to society, of course, but on the fact that they bear the image of God as fully and irrevocably as every other person. And in the face of broadening abortion policies, Christians are to set ourselves apart as those who welcome babies and individuals with Down syndrome because they are created by God in his image.

But that’s not where our responsibilities end. Because people with Down Syndrome—babies and adults alike—were made in the *imago Dei*, they can and should be welcomed into the task of the cultural mandate, helping to bring about the sort of relational and societal flourishing reminiscent of the garden in Eden (Gen. 1:28; 2:15). They are just as equipped for this work as anyone.

This means that the people of God should lead the way in opposing abortion measures targeting babies with disabilities, care for these babies and their mothers, lead the charge in advocating for their integration into their

communities, and show the watching world what a healthy, functioning society looks like by recognizing their abilities and giving them opportunities to contribute to its flourishing.

PEOPLE OF LIFE

It is no overstatement to say that our secular society is on a campaign to stamp out individuals with Down syndrome and other disabilities. Disguised as an act of compassion toward the preborn baby and his or her mother, the right to choose has become an exercise in extinguishing these young, unique lives and depriving mothers of their children. And it is a choice often applauded by society at large.

But Christians, informed by the Word of God and empowered by the Spirit of God, are called to an altogether different mission—one of true compassion, where the dignity of people with disabilities is acknowledged and where their lives are contended for from womb to tomb, in the courts and the delivery rooms and the classrooms across this country.

People with Down syndrome, born or preborn, should not be seen as candidates for termination because of an extra chromosome. Instead, they should be seen as persons, made by God, loved by God, bearing his image, and fully capable of carrying out the cultural mandate right alongside the rest of us. And certainly, as we work shoulder to shoulder as co-laborers in the call of God, we will learn a few things from them. By God’s grace, we’ll be the ones who are recipients of a special education of our own. ★

Juliana Wootten is a special education teacher in the Dallas/Fort-Worth area.

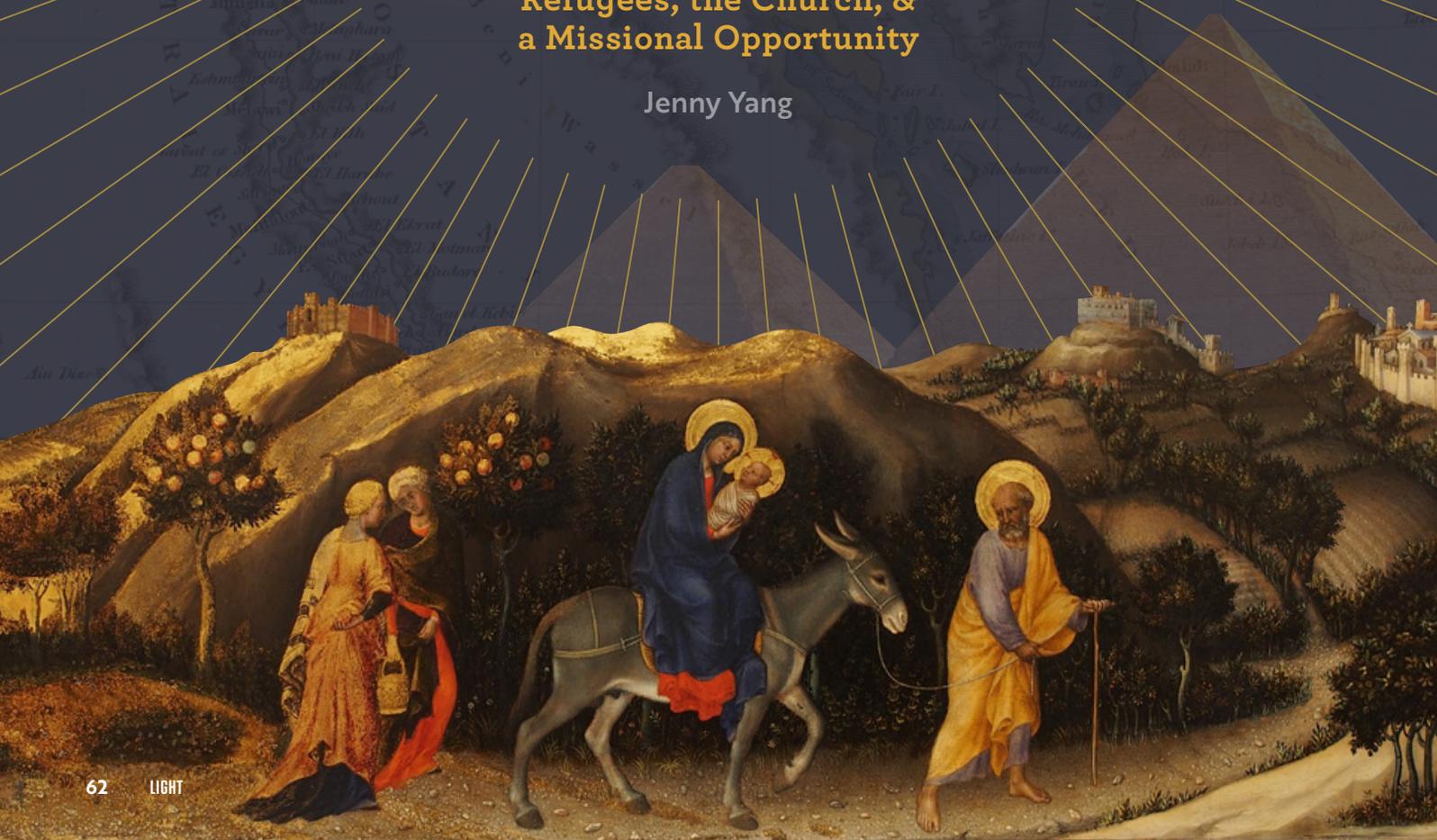
Jordan Wootten is a channel editor for the ERLC.

1 https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/20/20-1501/180185/20210526121754439_20-1501ac-TheChurchOfJesusChristOfLatter-DaySaints.pdf
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HELPING THE DISPLACED FIND A HOME

Refugees, the Church, &
a Missional Opportunity

Jenny Yang



MY FATHER WAS A YOUNG BOY AT THE START OF THE KOREAN WAR IN 1950. WHEN HE WAS JUST A FEW YEARS OLD, HE REMEMBERS HEARING A KNOCK AT THE FRONT DOOR OF HIS HOME IN SOUTH KOREA. THE COMMUNIST FORCES, TARGETING MEDIA PERSONNEL, WERE LOOKING FOR MY GRANDFATHER, A YOUNG NEWSPAPER REPORTER.

My grandfather was pulled out of his home, never to be seen by my dad again. A few years after my grandfather disappeared, my grandmother became gravely ill and passed away, leaving my dad orphaned at the age of 8.

My dad went to live with his extended family, but as an orphan, he didn't feel a sense of home. He ran newspaper routes to earn enough money for school and food, wearing worn down shoes, and riding his bicycle around the community. He learned English from American missionaries who had set up a church in his neighborhood and began dreaming of immigrating to the United States.

My dad became very good at fixing cars. After he won a national car repair competition, one of the judges asked my dad to join his family immigrating to the U.S. The Ford Motor Co. eventually sponsored him to come to the U.S. He settled in the Philadelphia area, where my brother and I were born and raised.

When I was growing up, my father would often recount to me the significant trauma and loss of living through war. He is well-acquainted with its devastating effects and the longing to find greater opportunity elsewhere. There are millions of people like him around the world who are experiencing horrible conflict that has

led to the death of family members and a desperation to find safety elsewhere.

The World's Worst Displacement Crisis

We are living through the world's worst displacement crisis in recorded history.¹ An estimated 82 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide.² The conflict in Syria has raged on unabated for over nine years now and produced the greatest number of refugees. And in South Sudan, the youngest country in the world, families continue to face stinging poverty and political instability. Eighty-six percent of these displaced individuals are hosted in developing countries, which means countries already grappling with poverty are now welcoming the vast majority of refugees.³

Most recently, the U.S. has seen an influx of refugees in light of our withdrawal from Afghanistan. Many of us were stirred in August of 2021 by the images and videos of desperate Afghans trying to flee their country as the Taliban took over. I started receiving calls from many people who were desperate to leave Afghanistan and had hopes of being evacuated by the U.S. government. Many of these individuals had fought alongside U.S. troops, risking life and limb to help

the U.S. in our mission. And while the majority of these individuals were left behind, those who were able to be evacuated—around 60,000—are being resettled in communities throughout the U.S.⁴

The arrival of thousands of Afghans presents an incredible opportunity for the church to welcome and serve them. Afghans and other refugees are all made in the image of God and are deserving of dignity and respect. They carry the weight of the trauma of war, but with a resilient hope that the future will be better for them and their families. Many have never met a Christian before or walked into a church building. The support of local communities and churches can be critical in helping our newest

BY LOVING OUR IMMIGRANT NEIGHBORS THROUGH WORD AND DEED, WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO FULFILL THE GREAT COMMISSION AND TO CARRY OUT THE SECOND GREATEST COMMANDMENT—TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS AS OURSELVES.

neighbors flourish as they work through trauma, loss, and pain in order to rebuild their lives from practically nothing.

The Biblical Story of Migration

What we're witnessing today in the movement of people is not new. God often uses people's migration to accomplish his missional purposes on Earth—and we see this throughout the Bible.

Abraham is perhaps the earliest example of an immigrant in Scripture. He was called by God to leave his home and go to another land, not knowing where he was

going or what to expect (Gen. 12:1). But he experienced God's faithfulness when he moved. Joseph was a victim of human trafficking, sold into slavery by his brothers and transported across different nations (Gen. 37:28). And Ruth fled famine with Naomi and was a migrant worker when Boaz fell in love with her (Ruth).

Ger, the Hebrew word closest to "immigrant" in English, appears 92 times in the Old Testament alone. God is clear about how the immigrant is to be treated. Leviticus 19:33-34 (NIV) tell us: "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

In addition to immigrants, God often reminded the nation of Israel to take care of other vulnerable populations including widows, orphans, and the poor, since these groups didn't have families or resources to support them. In doing so, Israel was a reflection of the character of God: "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing" (Deut. 10:18).

In the New Testament, we see that the greatest immigrant of all in Scripture is Jesus himself. His family had to flee persecution when he was a newborn because King Herod issued an edict that all Jewish babies under the age of 2 were to be killed. His parents escaped into Egypt as refugees in order to survive (Matt. 2:14). Furthermore, the persecution of the early church meant people were forced to flee from location to location—and this was the fuel that led to the spreading of the gospel (Acts 8:4).

Philoxenia, one of the words used for hospitality in the New Testament, literally breaks down to mean love ("philo-") of stranger ("-xenia), which is the opposite

of xenophobia. Hebrews 13:2 even states that some have “entertained angels without knowing it” when they showed hospitality to the stranger. And Jesus reminds us in Matthew 25 that when we look after the stranger, especially among believers, we are looking after Jesus himself.

A Missional Opportunity

Christians are well aware that Jesus commands us to “make disciples of every nation” (Matt. 28:19). Today, we merely have to walk across the street to find people from all over the world who may not have heard the good news. By loving our immigrant neighbors through word and deed, we have the opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission and to carry out the second greatest commandment—to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37–40).

Acts 17:26–27 reminds us that migration is not an accident. God uses all manner of things, including displacement, to draw people to himself. Paul stated it this way: “From one man [God] made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this *so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him*” (Acts 17:26–27). If we believe this to be true, we will see the incredible opportunity that lies before us.

The church leading in moments of humanitarian crises, with compassion, humility, and love, can change the world.



For a world that is broken and hurting, the hard work of building inclusive and welcoming communities begins with us. If there should be a people who step up to give and serve sacrificially, it should be the church. And as we do, we have the privilege of inviting our neighbors to find an everlasting home in Christ. ★

Jenny Yang is vice president for advocacy and policy at World Relief.

1 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/06/18/graphic-the-worlds-refugee-crisis-is-the-worst-in-recorded-history/>

2 <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/>

3 <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

4 <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/13/politics/afghan-refugee-resettlement-united-states/index.html>

Defending the Dignity of Every Life

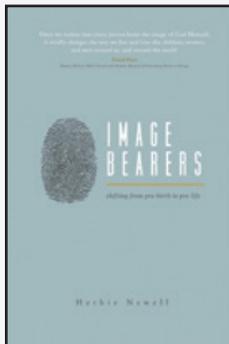
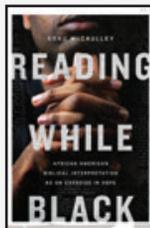


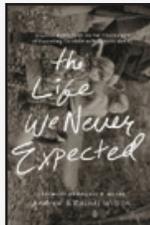
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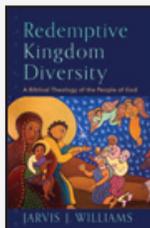
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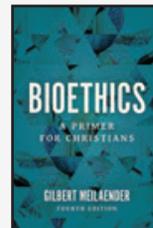
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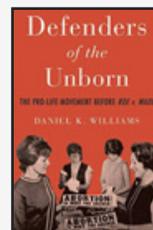
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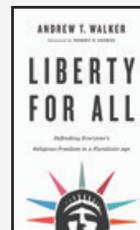
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