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The Gospel of Life versus the Culture of Death

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Doctor Death and Judge Dread

The late-modern Western world has a sordid history when it comes to the weak and the sick. Before the advent of Darwinism in the mid-nineteenth century, there was no significant debate in the European countries regarding the sanctity of human life – it was taken as a given and deeply entrenched in European thought and law.¹ Not only the churches but classical liberals under the influence of Christian faith enshrined the ‘right to life’ as a basic right for the individual. The ideas and forces that brought about a change in this perspective are complex, but as modern European historian Richard Weikart notes:

A rather uncontroversial part of the law code for the newly united Germany in 1871 was the *prohibition against assisted suicide*. Only in the late nineteenth and especially early twentieth century did a significant debate erupt over issues relating to the sanctity of human life, especially infanticide, euthanasia, abortion and suicide. Darwinism played an important role in the debate over the sanctity of life, for it altered many people’s conceptions about the value of human life, as well as the significance of death. Many Darwinists claimed that they were creating a whole new worldview with new ideas about the meaning and value of life based on Darwinian theory. Darwinian monists and materialists initiated public debate and led the movements for abortion, infanticide, assisted suicide, and even involuntary euthanasia. Many of them also considered suicide a private matter beyond the scope of morality.... Recent scholarship on the history of American and British euthanasia movements also emphasizes the

pivotal role Darwinism played in *devaluing human life* and giving birth to the euthanasia movement.ⁱⁱ

The first leading advocate in Germany for killing the 'unfit' was the Darwinist Ernst Haeckel. He favoured abortion, infanticide for the congenitally disabled, involuntary killing of the mentally ill, and since newborn infants were in an evolutionary stage equivalent to animal ancestors, they have no soul and killing them, he argued, was no different from killing an animal and cannot be equated with murder. Like our contemporary justices who don't like the term assisted 'suicide' and prefer 'assisted death', since they think the term suicide is derogatory, Haeckel objected to the German term for suicide meaning 'self-murder,' because he believed suicide and assisted suicide were not murder but what he perversely termed 'self-redemption.' In fact, Haeckel argued we are *morally obligated* to help people find 'self-redemption.' He wrote:

We have the right – or if one prefers – the duty, to end the deep suffering of our fellow humans, if strong illness without hope of recovery makes their existence unbearable and if they themselves ask for 'redemption from evil.'ⁱⁱⁱ

To 'safeguard' these practices from abuse Haeckel proposed that a *commission of physicians* make the final decision in each case. Thus, Germany's leading Darwinist put his scientific stamp of approval on the murder of the terminally ill and disabled. His books were widely read and deeply impacted future generations of the intelligentsia. The view was growing that man was little more than an advanced animal, not a creature made in God's image, and that assisting people killing themselves was an act of virtue in helping them achieve redemption.

It was not long before Haeckel's proposed commission of physicians were enthusiastically pursuing this course in Hitler's Germany. It is a startling fact to note that medical doctors were among Hitler's strongest and earliest supporters – history shows they were over-represented in the Nazi Party.^{iv} The idea that our courts give us any comfort in assuring us of their 'safeguards,' that killing will be humane, voluntary and only after review by physicians, offers no reassurance to those familiar with twentieth century history. Germany's euthanasia program and Nazi death camps were largely manned by medical doctors and scientists. Bergman notes that "Fredric Wertham, in a study of Nazi eugenic programmes concluded that doctors, 'were directly responsible' for the 'unprecedented occurrence of mass violence and the deliberate killing of large numbers of mental patients.'^v There were so many intellectuals and academics that supported mass killings that the Nuremberg war crimes tribunals held a separate trial for those involved in torture and murder. One of very few physicians who opposed the Nazis even before they came to power was Julius Moses, a Jewish doctor. On reading the calls of the National Socialist Welfare Organisation for the killing of the disabled, he gave the chilling warning in 1932 that this program of killing would be left to the physician: "it is the physician who must carry out this extermination.... He is to be the executioner."^{vi}

So what have we learned from that murderous century about the application of the godless ideas of intellectual elites to matters of life and death? Clearly not very much, for we are again being told by judges, intellectuals and the political class in Western society that it can be an act of lawful kindness for state actors (state-funded and regulated *physicians*) to kill people, or help them kill themselves (voluntary euthanasia), and that not to recognise this is to rob them of certain 'rights' or 'freedoms' basic to *human dignity*. In the name of well-being, doctors must again become executioners. Dignity

on this view is rooted not in the biblical view of man as the *imago dei*, but in radical human autonomy, where man is not God's creature but a product of mindless evolution.

In the United Kingdom, on September 11th 2015, Parliament will hear a second reading of a bill to legalise assisted suicide, and MPs will vote on the matter. Canada is once again ahead of the U.K in this social trajectory. In *Carter*, the *Supreme Court of Canada* issued a unanimous judgment declaring section 241 (b) and section 14 (banning assisted suicide) of the criminal code of *no force or effect* because those sections allegedly infringe section 7 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Those who cannot kill themselves are now *entitled* to constitutionally mandated assistance from a physician.

By the humpty dumpty logic of modern intellectualism, the court concluded that “*the right to life protects personal autonomy and fundamental notions of self-determination and dignity, and therefore includes the right to determine whether to take one's own life.*”^{vii} In the name of freedom, security of person, dignity and life the historic ban on physician-assisted suicide in Canada that sought to *protect life* and the most vulnerable has been lifted, and Parliament has just a few months to decide how it will regulate the practice and how permissive the law should be. For these justices, there is no difference between suicide and assisted suicide and the right to life somehow means an *entitlement* to kill oneself – with the help of a doctor if you can't manage it yourself. This notion of radical autonomy means that one's life and liberty are supposedly infringed by laws for the protection of life. The interests of God, a person's family and loved ones, and the common good of society are all callously overlooked in favor of secular individual sovereignty. For over 2000 years, consistent with the Hippocratic Oath, any form of deliberate euthanasia (originally meaning 'good death' by palliative care, but now meaning intentional killing) was never considered a 'treatment' and physicians have thus been largely prohibited from killing.

Given the shocking fact that in Canada only 16-30% of patients who need palliative care actually have access to it^{viii} – despite all our boasting about our tax-funded and state-controlled health care system – and even though we also know that many people who ask for euthanasia change their minds, none of this seemed to penetrate the ideological mindset of our leading jurists; for them, the right to life can be waived...period. Yet if in 70-85% of cases very ill people are not receiving proper pain relief, rather than killing them at their request, isn't true medicine, true compassion, about relieving their suffering to give them a better quality of life? How would we want to be treated? How would we want our children treated? Of course, whilst actively undermining it, the court *paid lip service to the sanctity of life* and the freedom of conscience of a physician not to participate in killing patients (saying this freedom was protected by the Charter), but they did not provide any specific language regarding freedom of conscience, religion and the right of faith-based healthcare institutions to maintain theological integrity and Christian identity.^{ix} As such the court's assurances are empty, because now, if a physician refuses to participate in killing a 'qualifying' patient they are actually interfering with that patient's *Charter* right, which is currently not the case with abortion. And we know what happens in the hierarchy of rights when freedom of religion comes up against radical autonomy in the courts. How long will it be before a case is brought against a physician on just such a charge?

To illustrate the vacuity of such assurances, currently physicians' regulatory colleges in Ontario and Saskatchewan have introduced draft policies that would require physicians, who on grounds of

conscience object to abortion, to take *active steps* to refer patients to a physician with no scruples about murdering the unborn. In fact the Saskatchewan draft policy requires physicians to *violate their faith and conscience* in the interests of the patient's 'health or well-being.' If this stands in the case of abortion (a non-Charter entitlement), what is potentially coming regarding physician-assisted suicide? The truth is, the genie is out of the bottle; all the implications of this decision may not be felt for some time, but we can be sure that it will affect not just how people die, but how Christian chaplains and ministers are permitted to interact with the sick and dying, and how Christian counselors are officially permitted to deal with depressed and troubled people. We are presently not free to stand peacefully outside Canada's child killing facilities (abortion clinics) to speak with those entering without risking arrest. For how long will Christian pastors and chaplains have access to the suicidal in our state facilities of 'health'? The Physicians Colleges' draft policies already presuppose that the Christian faith is inimical to the 'health and well-being' of those considering abortion. How long before Christian doctors and pastors are considered a health hazard?

Euthanizing God

In the mid-twentieth century, American Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes noted that "*the essence of religion is belief in a relation to God involving duties superior to those arising from any human relation.*"* He was right. Man is not autonomous but God's creation and image-bearer. As such he sustains a relationship to God that involves obligations that transcend personal desires, filial relationships or human social contracts. This means that **even if I want to kill myself, my family supports it and the state will gladly do it, I am not entitled to do so, because I belong to God** – self-homicide is still a form of murder. However, Western courts in recent decades have been primarily committed to legal positivism, which denies legal and moral absolutes and is essentially relativistic. The locale of justice for the social order itself is shifted from God to man and the humanistic state. This has been a long process and not one whose fruit was immediately apparent. Robert Strausz-Hupe has observed:

The Renaissance released not only the speculative mind from dogmatic fetters but also the urge to power from religious scruples. The Prince could now persuade himself that he incarnated the State: he *no longer held his power as a sacred trust, but possessed it as he possessed his body*. The secular theory of the State did not allow for the existence of independent social units, members that, so to speak, were not attached to the body. The centralizing tendencies that swept the bits and pieces of the crumbling medieval order into the hamper of the secular state, found in scientific analogies their convenient rationalizations. Just as the limbs obey the command of a central and superior organ – presumably the brain – so the body politic must naturally obey the Prince.^{xi}

This is a revolutionary faith, one that our courts now reflect. Power and authority is no longer a sacred trust under God, but something the state and its actors embody in themselves. God is dead for them. There can be no independent units like the church and Christian institutions that are not under the government and authority of the secular body politic. This faith calls for the de-Christianization of the world and so the de-humanization of man as God's image-bearer. The libertarian police state and its reasoning is the measure of all things, even life and death, and since their reason is the source of legitimacy, they assert the right to govern and command in terms of human law.

The results of the disregard for God's sovereignty today are startling. We do not need to look back to Nazi Germany to see the evil of autonomy. In the Netherlands, where euthanasia was legalised in 1984, the *Remmelink* report of 1991 found that 5,450 patients were killed without their consent. The *New England Journal of Medicine* revealed that one in ten deaths in the Netherlands in 2005 resulted from some form of suicide or euthanasia. In the same year 20% of cases of assisted suicide or euthanasia went unreported, despite the legal obligation to do so. Palliative care has been neglected in the Netherlands to the point that people feel the need to justify why they should not be killed, and the social attitude toward sickness, suffering and aging has radically changed from compassion and care to convenience and killing. In 2012 a major report found that euthanasia had increased in the Netherlands by 73% in just eight years. From March 2012 *mobile euthanasia units* planned to administer death to people with chronic depression, disabilities, dementia and loneliness across the country.^{xii}

Sinful man may want to euthanize God himself, but his dream is an impossible one. When the human authorities cooperating in all the machinations of Satan had killed the Lord of glory, he simply shattered death and the grave, and saints long passed away were seen in the city, for Jesus Christ is life. One obvious feature of the ministry of Jesus in the gospels is that dignity and kindness never included killing vulnerable innocents! Instead we find the Lord Jesus sacrificially healing, restoring, delivering and cleansing people in seemingly hopeless situations – this was his constant work. **Amidst all the human misery Christ encountered, he never helped any hopeless soul kill themselves**, never euthanized a sick or infirm person, and never put anyone out of their misery by taking their life. This should alert us to the fact that there is something very wrong with the idea that we participate in the preservation of human sanctity, well-being or dignity when killing someone who says they want to die, slaughtering the unborn, or euthanizing someone whose life society says is not worth living.

It is particularly wearisome to listen to many Christians today who seem ambivalent toward, or even tacitly supportive of abortion or assisted suicide and euthanasia, in part on the grounds that this is merely a matter of politics and that the defense of life is simply a 'right wing' issue – as though this constitutes an argument. It should be no shock to any biblically literate Christian that the sovereign God and his word are not subject to human political definitions or limitations. **The omnipotent, immortal and invisible creator God sits neither on the left or right, but on the throne of the universe**, and his word is the binding standard of judgment in all things. When the triune God speaks, his word has personal, familial, social, judicial, political, cultural and universal implications. Our concern should never be whether God's word on a given matter veers to the modern political left or right, but rather how we might submit to and apply God's word in all spheres of life.

Sovereignty and the Logic of Life

At the heart of the gospel is the reality that Jesus Christ is Lord, or *sovereign*. Indeed, the most common title in Scripture for Christ is that he is the *Lord*. Absolute sovereignty means ultimate rule, power and authority in every sphere and over all things. When we are introduced to the person of Christ in the New Testament we are told that he is the creator and author of life (John 1:1-18), with authority over death as the self-existent 'I am' who spoke with Moses at the burning bush (John 8:52-58). Jesus' unprecedented ministry of healing, his authority over creation in the calming of the seas, turning water to wine, and even raising the dead by a simple word demonstrated to his disciples that

he was 'the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matt. 16:16). As such, St. Paul tells us it is through Christ (contra Haeckel) that we have redemption and salvation, for the sovereign Lord not only made all things – thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities, – they were created *for him*, and it is *by him* that all things visible and invisible continue to consist or hold together (Col. 1:13-20). It is by the same sovereign Lord alone that all things can be made new and whole in the fullness of redemption (2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:5), as all things are brought into subjection to him (Heb. 2:8). Consequently, there is no understanding the good news of the kingdom without recognition of this foundational truth. **The gospel is *predicated* on the identity of Jesus Christ as *sovereign Lord*, the creator and redeemer of his people and the King of all.** Hence, St. Paul declares that the triune God is "the blessed and *only sovereign*, the king of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:16). This God has an absolute right to govern life and give law, and all the nations and their judges and rulers are subject to him (Ps. 102:15), including the British Houses of Parliament and the Supreme Court of Canada.

In Jesus' teaching about himself, he claimed to be the great and good shepherd – that is, the true ruler, protector, provider and savior of his people. The coming of the sovereign Lord therefore heralded something new in history, prefigured in the great King David – the visible presence of life and truth in the shepherd King and his kingdom. Jesus characterized it this way:

All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to *steal and kill and destroy*. I came that *they may have life* and have it abundantly (John 10:8-19).

As the Lord of life, Christ came to *give life and life in true abundance*. However, Jesus also points to false claimants to sovereignty – imposters masquerading as shepherds of the sheep who in fact come only to steal, *kill and destroy*. **A mark of the Christian gospel is its orientation toward life under the Lord of life, whereas a mark of anti-Christianity is an orientation toward death under false sovereigns** (Prov. 8:36). In every aspect of life, the gospel is a principle of life. Rebellion invokes the principle of death. This is inescapable, for if the gospel is true and Christ is the light that leads to life, then to turn against him is to move toward death and darkness. As our culture has steadily abandoned the true sovereign and his word of life, thieves or counterfeit sovereigns have declared their own word of death and destruction, advancing a culture of killing in the promotion of abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia and other destructive 'freedoms.' In a very real way, this is a *fruitless* pursuit; the generation that kills its children will be killed by its children. It is only within the framework of the gospel that we see the biblical *logic of life*! Being pro-life is inescapable for the Christian, from womb to tomb, for even at the graveside, resurrection life and hope is declared over the departed because the sovereign Lord has conquered the grave.

Thieves of Sovereignty

The recent dramatic progress of activists, judges and elites in advancing killing of the unborn, infanticide (live birth abortion), the aged, disabled and sick, **must be understood primarily as a consequence of *underlying beliefs* about the source of sovereignty.** The prevailing attitude in any culture toward human life is not merely incidental but *religious or ideological*. We see this clearly in the differences between how the pagans regarded life and what God required of Israel in the ancient world. To disregard or abuse the poor, needy and the sick was a sinful disgrace for a Hebrew (Prov.

14:31; Ezek. 34:3-4) and to participate in the death cults of surrounding nations meant severe judgment. One of many evil kings in Judah and Israel, Manasseh, built altars to a pagan state deity Baal (meaning lord), and *burned his own son in the fire* as an offering (2 Kings 21:1-6) in keeping with pagan worship. He consulted mediums and necromancers in search of an alternate word and source of meaning. Judah's rebellion against God's law in doing 'more evil' than the heathen peoples within Canaan meant unavoidable judgment. King Josiah in contrast to Manasseh and in obedience to God, tore down the altars to Baal and various false gods, and "*he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the Son of Hinnon, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech*" (2 Kings 23:10). God's sovereign law meant life, antinomianism meant death.

In our time *sovereignty* or rule and authority has again been transferred from God to man and *democratized* for the masses – a crowd all too often manipulated by media and a cultural, political elite. As such, sovereignty and law is something that *emerges from* and expresses the general *will of the people*. The 'people' are thus typically 'embodied' in the state actors or ruling elite, sovereignty being delegated to them by the society. Consequently, law is disconnected from objective morality and the new arbitrary will of man becomes the sovereign arbiter of life and death. Yet, in the Christian faith that decisively shaped the Western world and our institutions, the identity of *Christ as sovereign Lord* meant the rule of law governing all men, law that was profoundly informed by the revealed law of God. Here law, justice and morality were religious matters and involved in each other. The reason for this is that the word of a sovereign is a law-word and binding on the subjects. The lord or sovereign is the *source of law* in any society so the de-facto 'god' of any social order defines law and thus defines life.

In our history, under the influence of the gospel, kings and parliaments steadily recognized their subordination to Christ and acknowledged his Word and sovereign supremacy. This meant a high regard for the *sanctity of human life*, since God's law makes clear that people are made in God's image (Gen. 1:27) and to attack that image by *lawless killing* is to strike at God himself (Gen. 9:5-6). According to Scripture, all of life belongs to God (Ps. 24:1) and so life and death are in God's hands alone (Ps. 31:15; Job 12:10). No one therefore has the right to usurp the sovereignty of Christ and become an *autonomous arbiter* of life and death. For the state, in the name of the people, to arrogate this power to itself or equate it with man's autonomous will is evil and blasphemous. For judges and courts to legislate whose lives should be protected and whose may not be worth living is to reduce human life and personhood to a subjective legal definition and juristic interpretation – by this means anyone might be declared a non-person or 'useless eater,' and fit to be killed in a brave new world where evolution is cultural and state orthodoxy.

But it was with the falsely labeled 'Enlightenment' that a kind of scientism began to reorder people's thinking into believing that reason and law were somehow *inherent in the universe* and so man's self-consciousness steadily became the ultimate point of reference in defining reality. By linking physical law and natural law, people were increasingly viewed as social atoms and politics seen as a social experiment to bring about an ideal order. This has led emphatically to the dehumanization of man – a fact that clearly marked the atheist states of the twentieth century. History proves time and again that if human beings are stripped of sanctity as God's image bearers, precious lives under his sovereign law and sway, and are instead reduced to animals in a chain of being, units of collectivist society, existing only under the sovereignty of the humanistic state, the elitist tyranny of coercion is the

imminent threat. In this view nature is the substantive reality, so why should eugenic ideas and practices not prevail? Abortion is carried out today under the euphemism of reproductive *health*, and killing the sick, depressed, elderly and infirm is done in the name of *mercy and dignity*, proving that “even the merciful acts of the wicked are cruel” (Prov. 12:10). It is by the assertion of autonomy that modern man has sought to wrest sovereignty from the hands of God, and when this is pursued people suffer the terrors of the self-righteous. The courts profess to value human life and its sanctity, politicians assert their reverence for life, and yet their actions contradict their confession as they run with the elite group.

The tender mercies of the modern intellectual, of humanistic man, mean tyranny and death. The noted historian Paul Johnson in his study of secular intellectuals from Rousseau to Chomsky leaves his readers with a telling warning:

It is just about two hundred years since the secular intellectuals began to replace the old clerisy as the guides and mentors of mankind.... We have examined their moral and judgmental qualification for this task...the way they treat their friends, colleagues and servants, and above all their own families.... What conclusions should be drawn...? One of the principal lessons of our tragic century, which has seen so many millions of innocent lives sacrificed in schemes to improve the lot of humanity, is - beware intellectuals. Not merely should they be kept well away from the levers of power, they should also be the object of particular suspicion when they seek to offer collective advice.... Taken as a group, they are often ultra-conformist within the circles formed by those whose approval they seek and value. That is what makes them, *en masse*, so dangerous, for it enables them to create climates of opinion and prevailing orthodoxies, which themselves often generate irrational and destructive courses of action. Above all we must at all times remember what intellectuals habitually forget: that people matter more than concepts and must come first. The worst of all despotisms is the heartless tyranny of ideas.^{xiii}

When man seeks to usurp the sovereignty of God, and replaces God’s word with his own idea for humanity, irrationality and destruction follow, and people suffer. The modern antinomian idea of *radical autonomy* in a secular society governed by the ideas of a new priesthood of cultural elites has seen the West ‘legally’ destroying marriage and family, murdering millions of unborn children as non-persons, and increasingly killing the depressed, sick and infirm – all in the name of life and kindness. This irrational evil is the despotism of fallen man’s vain imagination that sets itself against the knowledge of God. Only a return to Christ the sovereign Lord, to his law and gospel can bring life and hope again to our self-centred and dying age. “*Come back to me and live*” (Amos 5:4).



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ⁱ Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 57.

ⁱⁱ Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 145-146

ⁱⁱⁱ Haeckel cited in Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 148

^{iv} See Jerry Bergman, *Hitler and the Nazi Darwinian Worldview* (Kitchener, ON: Joshua Press, 2012), 133

^v Bergman, *Hitler*, 134

^{vi} Cited in Bergman, *Hitler*, 143

^{vii} Cited in Gerald Chipeur, Q.C., 'Carter Case Comment,' *Christian Legal Journal*, June 2015, Vol. 24, Issue 2

^{viii} Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care, "Not to be Forgotten: Care of Vulnerable Canadians," *Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care*, November 2011, 21, accessed September 2 2015, <http://pcpcc-cpspsc.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/ReportEN.pdf>.

^{ix} See, Albertos Polizogopolous. "Defending Life at the Supreme Court", *Christian Legal Journal*, June 2015, Vol. 24, Issue 2, 12.

^x Rosco J. Tresolini, *Justice and the Supreme Court* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1963), 95.

^{xi} Robert Strausz-Hupe, *Power and Community* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956), 97.

^{xii} See John Scriven, *Belief and the Nation* (Exeter, U.K: Wilberforce Publications, 2013), 256-259.

^{xiii} Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals: From Marx and Tolstoy to Sartre and Chomsky* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 342.

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