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Reaping What We Sow–The Harvest of Moral Relativism

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America is now living on the tattered remnants of a post-Christian culture. The tapestry of permanent truths is not completely gone; here and there a fragment appears. But the moral fabric of this culture has been torn asunder by the clipping shears of moral revisionism. The threads now stand loose and bare, and American society has few defenses against the barbarians.

The story of the 20th century is framed by the overarching theme of moral relativism. Hitler, Lenin, Pol Pot, and a host of other moral relativists worked this theme thoroughly into the story of that century, but they have been joined by millions of modern Americans—relativists to the core—who are laws and gods unto themselves. Now, in the 21st century, we face unprecedented dangers posed by world terrorism and a threatening breakdown of the world order. At the center of these developments is the loss of any shared moral vision.

The clear dictates of Scripture are now commonly rejected as out of date and without authority. A society which denies God is not long held back by the prescription of His Word. Such a society soon learns that morality cannot be determined by democratic debate and majority vote, so it rebels against any moral code at all and retreats into the confusion of 250 million individuals—each with his or her own “values.”

G.K. Chesterton, whose moral compass was as solid as any in the last century, knew that Soviet totalitarianism was doomed to failure. But he feared the rise of a more enduring and peculiarly American form of moral relativism. “The madness of tomorrow,” he predicted, “is not in Moscow, but much more in Manhattan.” His prophetic words should humble the American heart, for he saw the future clearly. That future is now our present.

The devastating loss of moral absolutes is nowhere better seen than in America’s rejection of the sanctity of human life. No barometer could provide a clearer reading of our moral condition. In the past 31 years, over 40 million unborn babies have been sacrificed on the altar of human convenience. Much talk about abortion has been centered on the so-called “hard cases” which supposedly stand behind liberalized abortion laws, but the truth remains that the vast majority of abortions are performed for nothing more pressing than convenience.

The Alan Guttmacher Institute (a research agency of Planned Parenthood) has reported that 75 percent of persons seeking abortion stated that having the child would “interfere with their lives.” Other research indicates that over 95 percent of all abortions are performed just because the parents do not want to be inconvenienced by the child.

America now reaps what decades of moral decay have sown. Children are now seen as burdens to be avoided. The blessing of the womb becomes a “product of conception” to be terminated at will by the parents’ “freedom of choice.”

The new moral vocabulary itself reveals the depravity of our national soul.

Abortion must be faced for what it is—the rejection of human life as defined by the Creator in favor of a definition the human writes for himself. One cannot deny the sanctity of life, nor hide behind such theological or moral relativism, without denying the authority of God Himself, who created all things living and unliving, and who breathed life into dust, creating men and women in His own image.

Children—born and unborn—have become pawns in our national debate. Many children who escape the abortionist are treated as non-persons by their families and by society at large. Millions of American children live lonely lives of emotional and spiritual—if not physical—abandonment.

Public policy actually puts traditional families with children at a disadvantage in the marketplace and the tax system. The nuclear family is no longer acknowledged as the foundation of civilized society, but is castigated as patriarchal and oppressive. That which was ordained by God is now rejected and despised by His rebellious creatures. The sanctity of life is not settled by merely protecting the womb; it must be extended to all of life.

The same society which transformed abortion from a crime to a right now considers the ending of life its rightful domain. Physicians now debate their role in ending life. Length of days is to be defined by technology and convenience, not by the decree of the Creator. In the name of compassion, the new moral authorities would use their own definition of the “quality of life” to determine who should live and who should die. Again, the new dictionary betrays the reality: Voluntary euthanasia soon gives way to involuntary euthanasia and what is now piously described as the “responsibility to die.”

A host of other issues demand Christian moral attention. Medical research now targets the human embryo as an engine for the development of medical treatments through the manipulation of stem cells. Human cloning has moved from science fiction to active research and experimentation. A new form of eugenics targets those who fail to measure up to a devised standard of physical, intellectual, and genetic superiority.

A world which has in the last century alone witnessed the horrors of Auschwitz, the Soviet gulag, the Cambodian killing fields, Nazi “medicine,” and two world wars has no reason to trust its own “values.” Chesterton once remarked that the mark of the barbarian is “the sacrifice of the permanent to the temporary.” In the midst of a new barbarism, it is the church’s task to speak permanent truths to a rebellious world. The church, too, will reap what it sows.

