



The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

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**Description:** The Dignity of Human Life is a foundational document articulating value and sanctity placed on human life as interpreted from Scripture. Most other social challenges today are directly connected to the value placed on human life. The PAOC believes, God identifies human life as sacred and anything that devalues human life is sin.

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## **Dignity of Human Life**

### **Preamble**

We are Christians. As Christians we seek to live by the principles found in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the teachings of Jesus Christ and his earliest followers. We believe that these principles provide a sound foundation on which to build attitudes, values and behaviours for life in this world. We believe that our Canadian society is facing difficult moral, social, economic, and political dilemmas and that, as Christians who are also citizens, we must humbly accept our responsibility to participate in the search for solutions to these dilemmas. Further, we believe that our most effective participation in this search has three aspects: first, to provide help and comfort for those who are marginalized, broken, or disadvantaged; second, to offer in the ongoing discussion the principles which govern our lives in the belief that they are viable means for bringing healing and wholeness to hurting individuals and groups in our society; third, to share our perspective regarding the manipulation of human life through technology. The most intractable and profound of dilemmas facing our society is the cluster of issues which focus on the nature and value of human life. The following represents our understanding of the principles involved in these issues.

### **1. The Human Person: Created in the Image of God**

We affirm that each person is created in the image of God. The language used by the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament to state this idea features the twin emphases of representation and manifestation. Unique in creation, humans are first charged with the task of representing God in the world. Second, because they are created in the image of God humans are differentiated

from all other created, living beings. Humans differ not only in degree but in kind from animals. They are not the highest species produced by a process of evolution but rather, humans have been specially created to manifest or show the nature of God in the world. The implications of these tasks have been discussed for centuries. Three implications are central to the meaning of the image: first, each human has the capacity to know and to love God, to live in relationship with him; second, each human is given the responsibility to care for and to nurture the created order which is his/her home; third, each human is a social being meant to live and to love in community. Therefore, each person must accept responsibility for his/her actions directed to God, to the rest of creation, and to human society. The image of God is an intrinsic and inseparable aspect of humanness, present in each person from conception to death. Regardless of the way in which the processes of conception, prenatal growth, postnatal life, and death can be observed and manipulated by technology, we affirm that this image is a gift from God, present throughout the course of each person's life. Therefore, it follows that each individual possesses dignity and value at all times during his/her life which, because of the divine origin of the image, cannot be measured in human terms. As creatures, all persons are subject to limitations which stem from their relationship to God, their Creator. For example, we are not to usurp God's prerogative of determining the limits of human life.

Therefore, active involvement in the termination of life must not be an option. We recognize however that the development of technology and growth in knowledge has greatly increased the range and complexity of individual circumstances. Our limitations as creatures are balanced by our God-given creative nature. In God's image each human has the ability, no matter how diminished, as may be the case in some who are mentally challenged, to interact with the world and to shape new things. As each individual is different genetically and experiences life in a unique manner, every person has the potential to express human creativity in a singular way. The right to live, to learn, to express this creativity, and to be the recipient of the creative actions of others, must be affirmed for each individual at all stages and in all circumstances of human life. However, we recognize that this creative power can be used in evil ways.

Therefore each individual and societies as collectivities bear responsibility for their acts of creation. As they are held accountable for their actions by God, they should also be held accountable by legitimate means of government.

## **2. Humans as Whole Beings**

The understanding of humanity found in the Hebrew Scriptures and affirmed in the New Testament is centred around the idea that each person is a total being. Jewish thought was incapable of rigid compartmentalization of the individual into strict categories such as body, soul,

and spirit which was characteristic of other systems of thought. Since the individual cannot be reduced to components which could be of unequal value we affirm that the whole person has dignity and value. Accordingly, care and concern must be expressed for all aspects of each individual's life. Further, given the complexity of human life, response to individuals in need should be multi-dimensional including family, government services, special interest groups, churches, and care from individuals to individuals.

### **3. The Dignity of Conscience**

Since all persons are in the image of God, each individual has been given the gift of conscience whereby attitudes and values are present which stem from this image and are consonant with it. In other words, through conscience each individual has a "law written on his/her heart." This law enables each individual to hear the voice of God urging them to do good and to reject evil. Through conscience Christians are joined to all others who seek truth and justice and who work to solve the difficult problems in our society. Since conscience is of divine origin, social and governmental structures should regard the exercise of a person's conscience with great respect. Considerable flexibility should be granted by all social agencies to allow individuals to express opinions and to make decisions based on their conscience. While seeking to protect the good of other individuals, social agencies should endeavour as far as possible to permit choices on the basis of personal conscience even if in the opinion of the majority, those choices are wrong. However, since an individual's conscience can be damaged so that it does not function as God intended, we recognize that destructive actions can be attributed to conscience. In circumstances in which this is perceived to be the case, refusal to permit behaviours which are ostensibly grounded in conscience should be based on the relationship of those behaviours to human life: actions which demean individuals or groups and which demonstrate a lack of regard for the dignity and value of human life should be prohibited.

### **4. The Gift of Freedom**

We affirm that the ability to choose and the desire to express that ability are God-given attributes of human nature. Through the agency of the will, each person is able to make choices in many realms of human life, not the least of which is the realm of morality. The dignity of human life is emphasized when individuals, in spite of powerful influences to the contrary, freely choose courses of action which demonstrate love and compassion for others. Social structures and law should always be designed to allow the greatest display of freedom possible by individuals in society. Any attempts to suppress or to restrict freedom unjustly should not be allowed. Since freedom is essential to human nature, the expression of human freedom should be protected and encouraged. For example, freedom to choose the manner in which one worships or declines to

worship God, freedom to choose the kind of education one's children will have, and freedom to maintain ethnic or racial customs should be both protected and nurtured by society.

### **5. The Reality of Evil**

While each individual has worth and dignity, experience in the world quickly confirms that evil has entered the human condition. Humans can and have bowed to the temptation to use their creative abilities for selfish ends. Freedom has been used to hurt and to oppress others through many different means in many different contexts. We believe that every human is tainted with the propensity to think and to act in evil or sinful ways. This tendency is so powerful that humans have become enslaved to it. In popular culture, in the work of philosophers, and in the writings of the Bible the theme is recurrent: "humanity is in chains". No matter how each individual seeks to govern his/her behaviour, everyone knowingly commits evil actions in the ongoing course of their lives. In order for the creative potential of all members of society to be realized, we recognize that a variety of agencies is needed to curb evil behaviour in the world. Government agencies, the education system, religious bodies, police, and with regard to foreign affairs, a standing army for defense, must all be partners in the provision of an atmosphere in which citizens can live in safety. However, we observe that even these institutions are peopled by sinful individuals and so sufficient checks and balances must be maintained to prevent abuses of power.

### **6. The Problem of Death**

The immediate consequence of the reality of evil in the world is that torn between the mandate to represent and manifest God and the inner compulsion to do evil, all humans, both in their individual lives and corporate relationships, have become engaged in a struggle between good and evil. As a result of this struggle, humans experience suffering. Tragically, not only are humans the subjects of pain in this world, they are also subject to the mystery of death. Instinctively, humans recoil from death and seek to prevent it as long as possible. This reflexive reaction to death is due to the innate sense of the eternal which is present in each person because they are in the image of God.

### **7. The Source of Hope**

As we observe the suffering around us and the fear of death present in each life, our ultimate contribution to discussions concerning the nature and value of human life must be to offer hope. We affirm that our hope is grounded in the person of Jesus Christ who we believe is God and who came to the world taking on the nature of humanity.

Through his sinless life, sacrificial death, and resurrection he provides the way out of the final dilemma of death. Through faith in him each individual can be released from her/his enslavement

to evil, strengthened in their struggle with suffering, and go forward with hope towards the resurrection that is promised to each individual who expresses trust in him.

**Conclusion**

We conclude therefore that each human, through being created in the image of God, possesses meaning and value beyond that of other created things. Accordingly, in the ordering of society paramount importance should be placed on the nurture and protection of human life at all times and in all circumstances. Further, the gifts of creativity, conscience, and freedom should be fostered and guarded by all for all. As Christians we commit ourselves to the service of our fellow humans by living according to these principles.

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