

Godliness and Dignity in Society

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[0 : 0 0] Well, our subject this evening is godliness and dignity in society. It comes from a verse that we actually read this morning during prayer.

1 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 2, is it? First of all, says Paul, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and for all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

This is good and is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. So really tonight is something quite different from normal.

I'm not going to be expanding a passage of the Bible, but I want to think about this subject. Our response as Christians in our society to issues of public policy, to in particular ethical issues, things which have an important bearing on the health of our communities locally and of our nation as a whole.

Just the other day I was reading the magazine of the Christian Medical Fellowship, which is really a very good magazine. Some of you will read it, I know, some of you medics. I should read it more often.

[1 : 2 6] But some of the articles struck me in it. First of all, there was an editorial about the defeat of the recent bill by Lord Joffe in the House of Lords, a bill that was seeking to introduce assisted dying, assisted suicide by physicians.

And it was very heartening to read that that was roundly defeated in the House of Lords. But then I turned to an article which wasn't nearly so cheering, and it's entitled this, Cloning and the Kirk.

Let me read you some excerpts from it. The Church of Scotland has made a dubious mark for itself by approving the cloning of human embryos for research, swimming against the moral tide of the likes of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the World Council of Churches, the United States, and the Roman Catholic Church.

The Church of Scotland is now on a collision course with almost all other expressions of Christian opinion around the globe. It goes on to talk about the United Nations Declaration on Human Cloning, which has been ratified by the vast majority of European states.

It goes on to say the United Kingdom and Belgium are the only two states refusing to sign the convention because of their very liberal bioethical stances. In this regard, they are beginning to be seen by the rest of Europe as ethically rogue states, in which any number of moral principles can be disregarded if they become a hindrance to scientific research.

[2 : 5 5] And in this, in conclusion, the Kirk, that is the Church of Scotland, has betrayed its responsibility and spiritual calling and become an ethically rogue church that encourages the rest of society to slip down the slippery slope to a brave new world where godly principles are dismissed as outdated.

Lastly, and briefly this, probably the most significant reason for the majority vote, that is in our recent General Assembly, is the strong utilitarian influences that have now established themselves in the Kirk.

Christian Medical Fellowship, summer 2006. Now that phrase really struck me. The main reason for the majority vote is the strong utilitarian influences now established within the Church.

I went to my dictionary and looked up utilitarian. Quote, Having utility, often to the exclusion of values.

Thesaurus. Utilitarian. Advantageous. Beneficial. Convenient. Desirable. Effective. Expedient.

[4 : 17] Feasible. But you see, without consideration of values. Morality. Right and wrong.

Well, I felt it was pretty tragic for this to be a position of our denomination. I'm sure you do as well. We're reading the scriptures that we're called to be light in society, to influence for righteousness in a place of decay.

When we're called to pray for society, that people can live lives of godliness and dignity in every way. Instead, it seems that we're swallowing the spirit of the age and worshipping utilitarianism and expediency.

Jettisoning values. At least the abiding kind of moral values given us by God. But you see, that is the spirit of our age.

That is what's all around us in society. And that is what is affecting our thinking, whether we are conscious of it or not. And it's affecting our thinking on all kinds of ethical matters.

[5 : 21] Matters of sexuality, of bioethics, cloning and that sort of thing. Abortion, euthanasia and so on. So if we're to meet our responsibilities as Christian believers in our society today, and as Christian churches, so as to influence our society for good and for God, well, we need to both understand the way the world around us thinks about these sorts of things, and we need to understand the impact that that kind of thinking is having on specific ethical issues, medical and otherwise.

And I suppose also, we need to know how we can respond effectively, both in public and in private, to seek to influence for good in our society. It's surely our responsibility.

Recently, as some of you will know, there was a very important vote at the British Medical Association's annual conference, reversing the BMA's neutral stance on assisted suicide.

And from now on, they are agreed to oppose all such legislation, like Lord Joffrey's bill. Now, that's something that's very, very important for the future of our nation. And the reality is that the British Medical Association was heavily affected there by the influence of the Christian Medical Fellowship and other Christian bodies.

So we do have responsibilities, and we do have opportunities to make the case for godliness and dignity in society. And we all have our responsibilities, not just if we're in the BMA.

[7 : 00] So to help us in our thinking a bit about this, I want tonight to think through some of the issues involved. We can only scratch the surface. But first of all, I want to just give a little moment or two to the thinking of our, of what we call post-modern world.

And then to think about the impact that that kind of thinking is having upon ethics, and particularly on medical issues, because with the Lord Joffrey Bill and these things, they are very topical.

And then just a few thoughts on how we need to respond, perhaps by way of a particular example. It'll help us to make it concrete. So first of all then, let's think about the way our world thinks, the philosophy, if you like, of our post-modern society, as it's called.

Well, the first thing is, what is post-modernism? Well, in some senses, it's very boring. People are going on and on about this kind of thing. But we do need to give it some little thought, because it is the way that people think today.

Here's one definition. How does this grab you? Incredulity towards meta-narrators. Anyone know what that means? Well, that's the definition by the French thinker Jean-Francois Lyotard.

[8 : 16] Didn't really help me very much. But here's another more simple way of putting it. Post-modernism just means that there's no big story. There's no great scheme of things into which everything in our thinking fits, our beliefs, our ethics, our practices.

Generally speaking, from the time of the 17th century onwards, from the time of the famous philosopher René Descartes, remember him? Cogito ergo sum, I think because I am, therefore I am.

Really, since that 17th century period, we've had what we call the age of reason. If you like, the modern era, the era in which sciences and so on have flourished. And generally speaking, throughout that era, people have had a world view, an integrated way of thinking about life and the universe and everything, into which their beliefs and their actions are fitted.

And there are all sorts of different world views that we've seen come and go. Marxism, for example, is a big story, a big picture world view, just as fascism is, or capitalism.

Or if you like, Bibleism, the Judeo-Christian world view that has framed our Western society's culture for many centuries. But from, I suppose, the mid-1960s onwards, although the antecedents were before that, all of that kind of idea began to be deconstructed.

[9 : 43] In fact, there was a whole school of philosophy called deconstructionism. It began with another French philosopher, Jacques Derrida. And the basic thing here is that people have gradually come to think that, well, we can no longer really state such a thing as the truth.

There's no such thing as universal truth. All truth and all values are just things that are common to one particular culture, or language, or time, or people. And no one is any better than the other.

And that's really what's grown into the kind of hodgepodge of the way that we think today in a kind of relativistic world, a post-modern world. Now really, when we think about it, that's just what we know is around us all the time today.

It's the sort of thing people say to you when you're talking to them about your faith. Well, that's alright for you. You can believe that. It's true for you. But it's not true for me. It doesn't work for me. I'll live according to my morals.

You live according to your morals. I'm happy with your morals as long as they're yours. Just don't try and shove them onto me. That's the sort of thing. And that's just the world that we live in.

[10 : 57] Well, you see, that kind of view of the world now has many implications. First of all, it has implications for the whole realm of reason. The whole age of reason, the modern world, was dominated by a sense of design and of purpose.

It was possible to discover truth. Science flourished because we could get to the bottom of things. But gradually, those kind of views are giving way, at least among social thinkers, to simply thinking about chance and anarchy.

There is no real meaning in these things. There is no great truth. There's only desire and satisfaction. It's had a huge impact on the whole sphere of interpretation.

interpretation. If there's no single truth, if truth is all dependent on where you come from and the way you've been brought up and all of that, if it's tribal and not universal, then the way you interpret anything anybody says or anything anybody writes is thrown into total confusion.

You can really make it mean anything you want. And that's true for the Bible just as it's true for anything else. You make your own definitions for the language that you're using.

[12 : 10] One of the famous ones, surely, was President Clinton's definition of sex. I did not have sex with that woman, he said. Well, he just reinvented his interpretation of the question that was being asked.

It's had huge impact in the whole realm of jurisprudence and law because increasingly we have left behind the idea of any universal higher law.

what used to be called natural law or natural justice or conscience or what the Bible calls the law of God. There's no moral consensus anymore.

Law, in that sense of absolute law has no longer any part in ethics and into the gap we have something called positive law. That really means it's law that's made up by the majority, the dictates of government according to what might be advantageous or convenient or expedient or utilitarian.

Now you see, we need to see the danger of this. The whole history of our western free societies in fact hinges on higher law. Just think of the American Constitution.

[13 : 18] Just think of the things that are enshrined in British law, the independence of the judiciary and so on, the freedom of all under God. All men are created equal under God, says the American Declaration.

But now you see, if there is no such thing as a higher law to which we can appeal, if law is increasingly just made by Parliament and solely by Parliament, if there's no longer any sense of accountability above ourselves to something higher, it becomes very hard to see, doesn't it, how freedom and democracy, as we understand it, can actually survive.

It's an open question when you begin to probe the consequences. We don't have time to probe the consequences of all of these things tonight, but I just want to make a few comments about the impact of that kind of philosophy, the way we think today, on ethical issues and especially on issues in medicine.

Medicine gives us an important case study, really, because historically medicine has been the profession that has most plainly mirrored Christian values.

the key principle from the earliest days of medicine has been the sanctity of human life. And medicine, in that sense, gives us a microcosm of the way that this kind of new thinking affects every other aspect of our life.

[14 : 48] The sphere of medicine, in a way, mirrors society. And it's a microcosm in which we can look at the conflict of Christian values with the post-modern world.

So, let's think of an example. If you take medicine, and if you think about the chief tenets of what we might call old medicine, the way we used to think about things, the chief tenet was sanctity of human life.

Not that we always had to try everything to save life always at all times, but that there was a sacred duty to protect all innocent life.

Now, that understanding which underlies medicine historically is something that runs through all of Scripture. The doctrine of the creation sees us as made in the image of God.

All the way through the Old Testament, there's a supreme value placed on human life. The Mosaic Law always has a huge emphasis on the sanctity of human life, the absolute sanctity.

[15 : 54] That's why in Genesis 9, when you read about the very first mention by God of the death penalty, he is requiring human society to take murder seriously, precisely because human life is so sacred.

There must be public justice, says God, to show just how serious a thing it is to violate the principle of the sanctity of human life. And the New Testament deals with life in exactly the same way.

We're to love our neighbour. Our neighbour is precious. His life is precious. Our own lives are precious. We're bought with a price, says Paul. And God says that for the good of society, God gives the powers that be sanctions, including the sword, he says.

the power of capital punishment. There are many arguments about capital punishment. We can't get into that tonight. There may be very many cogent arguments for arguing why capital punishment shouldn't be an issue in our society today, or whether it should.

But you certainly can't argue against capital punishment on principle from the scriptures. Absolutely plain. A life for a life. Because life is precious. It must be protected.

[17 : 10] So you see, the world view of old medicine is in line largely with the view of the Bible about the sanctity of human life.

But that's changed greatly in our postmodern world. The sanctity of life as life is no longer the chief thing. What has superseded that as the most important criteria is simply the relief of suffering and the application of compassion.

Compassion has become the supreme virtue that seems to dictate everything. But you see, that's a grave mistake because compassion is neutral.

Compassion is an emotion. The crucial thing is what action or compassion leads to. Compassion can be very misguided, can't it? You can be very compassionate but quite deranged.

As somebody has put it, the issue is not whether we have compassionate medicine or uncompassionate medicine, but whether we have compassionate medicine that will not let go of the sanctity of human life and that which will in the interests of some perceived greater good.

[18 : 26] That's the confusion that swayed the debate in our General Assembly actually. Somebody stood up and gave a sob story about a child with diabetes and said, how can we refuse research into stem cells that would possibly cause a cure to this child and relieve their suffering?

It was an outpouring of compassion that grabbed the heart of the Assembly and totally obscured the fact that what we were being asked to do was to sanction the abolition of another life in order to relieve the suffering of this life.

You see, what a huge sea change has taken place in our thinking. A move from the absolute sanctity of life, that life itself is absolutely valued, that's given way to just a relative respect for life and its perceived quality or value with comparison to other lives.

That's a fundamental shift that's taken place in our thinking. Before it was an appeal above us to God and to something absolute. now it's an appeal only within ourselves and between ourselves, something relative.

And what we've lost in medical ethics is just an example of what we've lost in society as a whole. What we've lost is in fact the very foundation of free democratic society, if only we'd really understand that.

[19 : 55] Think of the horrors of the communists and the fascist regimes of the 20th century. It's absolutely no accident that these regimes were presaged and spearheaded by the jettisoning of the sanctity of human life and medical experimentation.

It's a fact of history. So to help us see where that kind of fundamental shift in worldview is going to take us, let me just take a particular example from medicine.

The whole issue of the legalization of active euthanasia. That's the Lord Joffe Bill, physician-assisted suicide. What are the arguments for euthanasia?

And we're talking, remember, about voluntary active euthanasia only, nothing else. Well, popular sympathy for the argument is based really on two misconceptions.

The first is that all dying is horribly painful and uncontrollable. And therefore, especially if you've got a terminal illness. The process of dying is so awful. Surely, euthanasia must be the best way out.

[21 : 06] And the second thing is the idea that doctors will always, under every circumstance, try to prolong life, however undesirable it may seem to be. Of course, neither of these two things are true.

It suits the pro-euthanasia lobby to promote these ideas. Horror stories always help a cause. And language itself is used very cleverly as a weapon in this debate.

What used to be called the voluntary euthanasia society is now called, guess what, dying with dignity. Implying that if you oppose that point of view, you're wanting people to die with indignity.

Language is used so carefully against us, isn't it? So skillfully. The word homophobia. Listening to the radio yesterday, the word Islamophobia. You see, all the problem is yours.

If you're scared about being blown up in a plane, flying to the United States of America, it's because you're Islamophobic. Not because some wicked person is going to blow up the plane. So dying with dignity is the only sensible position for any normal person.

[22 : 19] But the reality is that there is a head-on clash of philosophy and world view as we've seen it. The pro-euthanasia case rests on various things.

First of all, on an appeal to mercy and compassion to escape that suffering, that indignity. Then on an appeal to individual autonomy. It's my life, it's nobody else's, I should decide.

Thirdly, on an appeal to pluralism. We shouldn't impose any laws on others because of religious beliefs. Let religious people do their thing, let the rest of us do our thing. We're in a pluralist nation.

So the argument goes like this. If a person desires and requests to be killed, if the person assisting is a willing helper, and third, if no third party rights are violated, if no one else is harmed, then voluntary, active euthanasia, assisted suicide must be acceptable, and it must be legalised.

In fact, not to do so, they say, is a violation of our own right to our moral autonomy, to define and express our own values. It's a violation of our, what you call prudential autonomy, our right to make up our own mind on critical decisions about our lives.

[23 : 37] It violates us. Well, that's the argument. How are we, as Christians, to answer these claims? How are we to seek to influence society for good against these things?

Well, first of all, I think we need to recognise the right approach. We can't expect a Christian state. We can't expect a theocracy. We're not looking, as Christians, for a Christianised version of the Islamic Sharia law to be imposed on everybody.

There are some Christians who think like that. There's a movement called Theonomy, particularly in the United States, that would want to do things in a way, something similar to that.

But I think we know that Jesus is clear. His kingdom is not of this world in a physical sense. It's not the way it was in the times of the Old Testament. The New Testament tells us we are citizens of the kingdom, but we're also citizens of this world, with responsibilities for this world and in it for good.

We're to be salt and light. Above all, Jesus says, our ethic is to be that we love our neighbours. And therefore, we must have a responsibility, mustn't we, before God, to promote and to strengthen a society that promotes real dignity and real peace and justice, as defined by God.

[25 : 01] We know that God's ways are the best. We know that righteousness righteousness exalts a nation and sin causes it to fall into disaster. So we want to see godly laws, right laws in our society.

But as John Stott says, in a democracy, that means we've got to persuade a lot of the people on a lot of points a lot of the time, or else lose. So we've got to be sharp, haven't we?

We've got to think. We've got to engage in debate with clear arguments, just like Christian Medical Fellowship did within the BMA and won the day. Now some of us have particular responsibilities in our own professions, in this circumstance, the medical people particularly, the lawyers.

But some of us have particular responsibilities in teaching others, in teaching in schools and colleges. We all have members of parliament, we have responsibilities to engage as citizens, to write to them.

Some of us ought to be thinking about actually playing active places in public life, becoming an MP, becoming a member of the council, thinking about these sorts of things.

[26 : 14] We need godly Christian people, motivated by the right things, of course, not the wrong things. But all of us have responsibilities, and we must begin by thinking ourselves, getting our minds clear.

And one place to begin is by showing where the arguments used against us are found wanting by exploding some of the myths that are bandied about. We need to point out some of the inconsistencies in the arguments.

I mean, for example, on the euthanasia issue, the fact is that the current state of the law gives plenty of room for autonomy. We've got many, many ways already that we can shape our own dying if we want to.

We can refuse chemotherapy to prolong our lives if we don't want to have that for cancer. drugs for pain relief can be given, even if an incidental causes that they might hasten the end of life and not prolong it.

We've all got the right ultimately to kill ourselves without asking anybody else to be involved. There's all kinds of latitude. Do we really need so much more in the law? Another myth and a falsity is that moral and prudential autonomy, our freedom to decide everything for ourselves is never absolute.

[27 : 30] We all recognise that. Nobody's an island. The law places all sorts of limits on us to protect the rest of society. There are all kinds of things that are banned for the sake of everybody.

Certain drugs are controlled. You're not allowed to settle a difference with somebody by dueling to the death with pistols at dawn. It's illegal. You're not allowed to donate vital organs.

If you've only got one kidney you're not allowed to take your kidney out to save somebody else's life. Human sacrifices illegal, all sorts of things even if it's consensual.

Now the kind of retort of course that you get from the pro-euthanasia lobby are things like this. But euthanasia is different. It doesn't harm anyone. All these other things are different.

Other parties are involved. Euthanasia they say, in fact, if it's for terminal illness, is in the best interest of everybody. Actually, that's the crucial point upon which the whole argument for assisted dying turns.

[28 : 38] But we must challenge that kind of argument. Is it true that it's in everyone's best interest? Just allow for a moment that it could ever be in the best interest of the patient.

That's something I think Christians could rarely if ever agree with. But even if it were, is it true that nobody else would ever be harmed by such a law? Well, this is where we need to seriously question the likely consequences of these kind of pieces of legislation.

Because if it can be shown that in fact it's not for the benefit of everyone, if it's really to the detriment of others, then it can't be sanctioned. It doesn't matter how desirable somebody's moral autonomy might be.

We've got the fundamental interest of all sorts of other people to protect. And we recognize that. We all recognize limitations on our freedom. Nobody on Thursday was arguing that their own moral autonomy was being infringed because they couldn't take hand luggage onto a plane.

Might have been a few frustrated people, but everybody took that for granted. We all accept legislation against smoking in certain places because of health and safety of others.

[29 : 48] Some people might think the laws now are so draconian, they're a bit over the top. You see these poor people huddled outside the doors in the city. But nobody objected to banning smoking on the London Underground after the King's Cross fire.

That's where it first came. Of course they didn't. We all recognize that there are many curbs on our autonomy. These things are essential to society. They are constitutive of a civilized society.

things. But we need to show up in consistency in these arguments. But we also need to show up the likely consequences of changes in the law.

Now these are not primarily theological arguments. These are not about the sanctity of life. Of course we differ in enormous ways there, but we must interact in the way that the world talks about these things.

So is it possible, we need to ask, that legalizing assisted suicide could really bring benefit, assuming for a minute, just for the sake of argument, it could possibly be beneficial for the person who is dying, which we wouldn't concede, but just assuming it were, is it possible to bring in legislation that would have absolutely no adverse effects on anybody else at all, affect nobody else?

[31 : 09] Or is it in fact much more likely that any perceived benefit would be totally outweighed by all kinds of bad consequences that will inevitably result from that kind of legislation?

That's the question. Now there are two kinds of consequences we need to think about. The first, sometimes called negative fallout consequences. That is, inevitable repercussions that will happen and be undesirable.

They may be unintended, they may be unforeseen, but they're real. Even if the law isn't extended to anything else at all, these things will happen. Negative fallout.

The second set are called slippery slope consequences. In other words, if one thing is allowed then it will inevitably lead to other things being allowed by the law. That can happen logically, so if we legalise X, then by logical argument we also must legalise Y.

Now that's exactly what happened in the legislation lowering the age of consent for gay sex, for example. On the grounds of logic, when the age of consent was lowered from 21 to 18, it was argued well logically on the grounds of equality we must also lower it to the age of 16.

[32 : 27] And that's precisely what happened. Not always just logic though, sometimes it just happens empirically. If we allow this thing, then it goes without saying that before too long we'll just accept the other thing as well.

No logic, but it's just what's going to happen. That's what happened with abortion. Once it became legalised, well it was just a matter of time before virtually abortion on demand is the state of play in our laws today.

And the change since 1967 in the Abortion Act that David Steele pushed through the House of Commons has been really such that initially you had to give a very good argument to justify doing an abortion.

Now you almost have to give a very good argument to justify not performing an abortion. Just empirically the slippery slope has gone on.

So let's just think about the arguments just on this particular case of assisted suicide. Just a helpful exercise to help us learn to think. We have a responsibility to love our neighbours.

[33 : 32] We have a responsibility to think through these things and be able to interact in society. So what's the possible negative fallout of Lord Joffrey's Bill becoming law, legalising only voluntary euthanasia for those with terminal illnesses, nothing else?

Well the first obvious negative fallout is that there would be an increasing loss of voluntary character. Any appeal for voluntary euthanasia must depend crucially on being able to separate that from involuntary euthanasia.

It's all too easy to see isn't it how the social atmosphere can be manipulated consciously or unconsciously so that people begin to see somebody with a terminal illness costing an awful lot of money to be looked after.

Well becoming a burden to the family, to the community, to the state, to a public purse. Surely all such cases really would be far better off undergoing euthanasia, especially with the cost of the care of elderly for today.

You can see it. Second negative fallout would be the impact it would have on those who choose not to die. Become harder and harder, wouldn't it? Feelings of guilt.

[34 : 53] Well maybe I should. I'm such a burden. Feelings of resentment. Well I think my family wish I would. I'm such a burden to them. Thirdly, it would euthanasia increasingly be seen as the answer to hard cases.

And the more and more liberal becomes the definition of hard cases the less and less care we would begin to provide for the dying in other ways. That's what's happened with abortion. It's now the first answer virtually to unwanted pregnancy.

Some parts of the world have the main means of contraception. Why bother? It's the best answer. That's what's happened with euthanasia in the Netherlands.

No surprise that since euthanasia was legalized in Holland long ago, it's the country with perhaps the least developed palliative care system in the whole of Europe. Fourth negative fallout would be the anxiety and the fear promoted among people with terminal illnesses.

Surely dying must be so dreadful, so awful, that maybe I'd better choose euthanasia. If euthanasia is seen as such a good answer, it must be because my condition is so terrible.

[36 : 10] And that's despite the fact that today palliative care medicine is almost universally excellent in our own country here. Five doctors less and less hesitant to administer fatal doses if they think it's best.

You can see how doctors increasingly would freelance take their own decisions. Never mind the legal red tape. This is mercy. It's compassion. That's inevitable when a culture of euthanasia becomes the accepted norm.

The situation in the Netherlands is absolutely staggeringly frightening. As long as it was 1991, an official government report told that the majority of euthanasia deaths in the Netherlands were now involuntary.

That's nearly 15 years ago. These are just some of the negative fallout arguments. There are all sorts more. But there are also the slippery slope things.

If A, then in fact B will certainly follow because either logic will demand it or, well, it'll just happen. The first thing will, of course, be euthanasia for the non-terminally ill.

[37 : 21] Well, we're autonomous beings. We can choose. Why not? That's happened in Holland. In 1993, a landmark ruling allowed euthanasia for psychological reasons.

A physician was cleared of helping to kill a 50-year-old woman who was perfectly healthy but was having a bout of depressive illness and wanted to die. Second, euthanasia surely for degenerative diseases, for dementia for example.

We have advanced directives now. We can say the treatments that we want. Well, one day in the future somebody else will put into action the order that you're killed. Euthanasia by substituted judgment.

Oh, it's what they would have wanted. Now that's something that's already established in law. Some of you might remember the famous Diane Blood case a number of years ago. She was a lady whose husband died and she successfully argued that she should undergo artificial insemination by her husband's frozen sperm because she wanted a child.

It's what he would have wanted. Even though he was dead, he'd given no specific consent. I don't want to go into that. That's another issue altogether. But as far as euthanasia is concerned, it's easy to see how that doctrine could be applied, isn't it?

[38 : 40] And the more we see euthanasia as a benefit, well, the more we're going to give people the benefit of the doubt, aren't we? Surely it's what they wanted. Easy to think that, especially if you see your inheritance draining away in the nursing home fees, isn't it?

Then euthanasia for the mentally handicapped, the mentally ill, for infants, for children. These things are virtually routine in the Netherlands today. Shades of Nazi Germany.

It is extraordinarily ironic because, you know, during the Second World War, Holland was the only occupied country in Europe where the doctors refused absolutely to have anything to do with the Nazi euthanasia program.

Malcolm Muggeridge wrote, it took only a few decades to transform a war crime into an act of compassion. Isn't that staggering? Now I could go on and on.

I just want to bring us back to this main point. This issue of euthanasia, just one example of this main point. We need to see clearly that it is our society's relativist view of the world that is the root of all of these things.

[39 : 57] Once the appeal to absolute sanctity of life is gone, there's absolutely no anchor at all. Once an appeal to a higher law, a law above, is gone, then the way is open for all kinds of oppressive, positive laws to be made, with all the negative fallout, with all the slippery slopes, to keep on marching down as a society.

Medicine is, in that respect, just a reflection of the whole of society. We could say the same things about sexual ethics, about marriage, about our views of the family, about absolutely everything.

Somebody's put it this way. The truth is that civilization collapses when the essential reverence for absolute values which religion gives disappears. Rome had discovered that in the days of her decadence.

Men live on the accumulated faith of the past as well as on its accumulated self-discipline. Overthrow these, and nothing seems missing at first. A few sexual taboos, a little of the prejudice of a cato, a few rhapsodical impulses, comprehensible, we're told, only in the literature of folklore.

These have gone by the board. But something else has gone as well. The mortar which held society together. The integrity of the individual soul.

[41 : 19] And then, the rats come out of their holes and begin burrowing under the foundations. And there's nothing there to withstand them.

That's really what we're seeing in the United Kingdom today. So how are we to respond? Well, there was Elijah on Mount Carmel, speaking the truth against the many truths, standing for the Lord God against the Baals.

It's just the same today. The truth against many imaginary truths. But we know that the truth delivers, and that idols are dumb and impotent.

And we know that the world needs the truth, even if the world doesn't know it needs it, or even believe it. There is such a thing as the truth. So here's three things.

First, surely it's more important than ever that the world sees the truth demonstrated. We need to live the truth. We have the truth.

[42 : 29] The Bible's a map in this pluralistic world of ours, but maps are not just for reading, they're for following. They're for putting into practice. It was Leslie Newbigin who said that the church, church, is the hermeneutic of the gospel.

It's the visible interpretation in the world of the Christian gospel. And our passion for the truth must lead us as the Christian church to live out the truth, to show the way to others, to be salt and light.

Some people won't read maps, certainly won't read the Bible map. They need to be shown the way. By the witness of the church church that lives according to the map.

There's never been a greater need for our individual lives, for our community lives, our church lives, to speak to the world of the truth that is the power of life. Our marriages need to preach to the world the truth of God, our families, the way we cherish life, the way we care for life.

All of these things. We need to live the truth. But we also need to speak the truth. We can be confident in it in a shifting world.

[43 : 42] We know the truth. And our society needs prophetic voices speaking the truth of God, pointing the way to the law that is above everything else. The law to which we will one day be accountable, but also the law which is the way of blessing today in our lives, in our families, in our society.

In the field of medicine and bioethics, well, that's a particular challenge for Christians. Many Christians are working there. We need to pray. We need to pray for them that they'll live and work according to the truth.

But we all have a responsibility. We all need to take that seriously. We may need to think what our particular responsibilities are here in this place, as this congregation.

What are we living and speaking of the truth to the city of Glasgow on these things? What can we do? What can we do within our denomination, with all its utilitarian views and its shameful stand?

Makes us ashamed in the world. Can some of us get involved? Can we do things? Can we speak? We need to speak the truth. We may need to suffer for speaking the truth.

[44 : 54] Remember Daniel and his friends. But we do have the assurance that our God is the God who hears, the God who answers.

So thirdly, of course, above all, we need to pray. We need to pray Elijah's prayer, don't we? That's the prayer we need in our society today.

O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God, that we are your servants speaking your truth. Answer us, O Lord, answer us, that this nation may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning hearts back to you.

We are a kingdom of prophets, but also a kingdom of priests, interceding for our society, interceding for the world. Living the truth, speaking the truth, and praying for answers from the God of truth.

Well, these are just some thoughts that may help stimulate our minds. But let's end tonight by singing, asking God to help us as we think how to respond.

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