

A Great Place ...

What has made Australia a great place to live?

The Canberra Declaration maintains that, *“the many freedoms, advantages, opportunities, values and liberties which characterise the West owe much to the growth of Christianity with its inherent belief in the dignity of the human person as created in the image of God and the code of behaviour that flows from that belief.”*

Only a generation ago the vast majority of Australians indicated in the national census that they were Christians. There was a general consensus that Australia was a ‘Christian’ nation. When you filled out a form you were asked for your Christian name! While many were not practising Christians there was an underlying Christian worldview that held society together and caused it to flourish.

What has happened since then?

The Decay of Western Civilisation

In post-modern Australia, as with all of the Western world, much has changed. In recent decades secular humanism has replaced God with man. Moral relativism has rejected the existence of absolute truth. And so we have seen things in our present generation once unthinkable such as the abortion of babies on demand, the strong push to redefine marriage, and the curtailment of some of our freedoms. Many believe we are seeing the decay of Western civilisation.

The USA, for example, began as a nation rooted in Biblical principles. But as society became more pluralistic, with each new wave of immigrants, proponents of a new philosophy of secular humanism gradually came to dominate debate on policy issues. Humanists place human progress, not God, at the centre of their consideration. They have pushed American culture in all manner of ungodly directions.

The West’s Greatest Discovery

What was it that caused Western civilisation to flourish the way that it did? Dr. Vishal Mangalwadi asserts, *“The belief in the unique dignity of human beings was the force that created Western civilisation”*.



Even secular professors teach that the secret of the success of Western civilisation was the ‘discovery’ of human dignity. But they taught that it was the Renaissance writers of 500 years ago who discovered this concept in the Roman and Greek classics.

Mangalwadi refutes this stating, *“this is a myth. Although classical writers held many noble ideas, the inherent value and dignity of each human being was not among them. This unique idea came from the Bible.”* The inherent dignity of the human person as created in the image of God was not a new discovery but a re-discovery of truths found in the Bible and early Christian writers such as Augustine of the third century AD.

The Ultimate Proof of Human Dignity

The dignity of humans flows out of the doctrine of their being created in the image of God known as *Imago Dei*. We read in Genesis 1:27 *“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them.”*

But the reformation theologians such as John Calvin, Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards did not derive their view of humanity from only one verse in the Bible. They found human dignity affirmed most supremely in the Bible’s teaching on the incarnation of Christ.

The Bible teaches that God loved human beings enough to come to this earth as a human being to save them. So He sent Jesus Christ - the perfect *“image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15)* to rescue humanity from sin. The image of God in humans had been damaged by sin at the Fall. By giving His life Jesus opened the way for the image of God to be fully restored. This is the ultimate proof of the dignity of human beings.

The fatalistic worldviews of Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and other civilisations failed to appreciate the value and dignity of human beings. This is why these civilisations did not flourish in the same way and fell behind.

Common Sense?

Yes, there are many in our society today who do not point to the Bible or to theological creeds to justify that humans can create a different and better future for themselves. To them it is ‘commons sense’.

Luc Ferry, French atheist and former Minister for Education in France described how Christianity burst into the ancient world, and turned the ancient world’s view of civilisation on its head. He wrote *‘Christianity was to introduce the notion ... that men were equal in dignity – an unprecedented idea at the time, and one to which our world owes its entire democratic inheritance.’* In other words, the idea of all human beings being equal may seem self-evident to us, who live in a society heavily impacted by Christianity but in a pre-Christian world, this seemed like utter nonsense. Ferry wrote *‘We see today how civilisations that have not experienced Christianity have great difficulties in fostering democratic*

regimes, because the notion of equality is not so deep rooted’.

People in general are not fully aware that it is the Judeo-Christian belief of what people were created to be and saved to become, that became the ‘common sense’ view of the West.

Francis Schaeffer wrote that, *“we must understand that the question of the dignity of human life is not something on the periphery of Judeo-Christian thinking, but almost in the center of it (though not the center because the center is the existence of God Himself). But the dignity of human life is unbreakably linked to the existence of a personal God.”*

Sovereign God, You are the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Majestic is Your holy Name. Long ago You spoke through Your servant David *“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One”* (Psalm 2:1,2). Indeed, the nations of the earth that once gave You pre-eminence and knew Your hand of blessing have rejected You and Jesus Christ, the One You sent to show us the way to heaven. Just as the tower of Babel was a monument to humanity rather than to You, secular humanism seeks to create a civilisation that usurps Your glory and give it all to humans. We come against this stronghold that denies that people were specially created in Your image to have fellowship with You and to bring glory to You. We look to You that our nation may flourish under Your hand once again. Help us to communicate the truth of the dignity of humans in love and with great boldness. In the mighty name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

About ‘Image of God’ Leaflets

In the Bible we read that God *“created man in His own image”* (Genesis 1:27). Many maintain that all human history revolves around this truth. The Judeo-Christian belief in the unique dignity of human beings is at the very foundation of Western civilisation.

The 2010 Canberra Declaration therefore states:
“We believe that all human life, being made in the image of God, has intrinsic and equal value from conception to life’s natural end.”

‘Image of God’ leaflets relate the doctrine of humanity as created in the image of God to various issues we face in Australia today.

The 21 leaflets in SERIES ONE are dedicated to Sophie Scholl who was martyred at the age of 21 in World War II for writing and distributing leaflets.

You can download other ‘Image of God’ leaflets at The Canberra Declaration website.

Please:

READ & SIGN

**The Canberra Declaration
to Protect**

- ***Religious Freedom***
- ***Marriage and Family and***
- ***Human Life***
in Australia

Website: www.canberradeclaration.org.au

Email: info@canberradeclaration.org.au

© Canberra Declaration

Date last modified: 8 September 2017

SERIES ONE

Leaflet 7

WESTERN CIVILISATION



and the
**Image of
God**