



The Kingdom Perspective

Early Christians and the Care for the Weak

Hello! This is Pastor Don of Christ Redeemer Church. Welcome to The Kingdom Perspective!

Early Christians were known for their care of the weak and frail. This contrasted deeply with the callous culture in which they lived.

For example, the Law of the Twelve Tables, the earliest codification of Roman Law (c. 450-451 BC) required fathers to kill any deformed child. Though this Law was no longer in force during the rise of the church, its basic ethos continued to influence Roman culture. As a matter of fact, one historian notes that in one Roman village, “archaeologists found one hundred skeletons of infants less than a week old in the sewers under the Roman baths. The babies were ‘unwanted’ or ‘inconvenient’ and so were literally flushed down the drain” (*Why You Think the Way You Do*, p. 34).

Christians refused to participate in such practices. Following Holy Scripture, they knew that every human was made in the image of God, regardless of how weak, deformed, or “unwanted”. Moreover, since they held that God Himself had become a real human (bodily!) in Jesus Christ, the value they placed on the human body was elevated to previously unknown heights. The Gospel of Matthew speaks of the conception and birth of Jesus Christ saying: “that which is *conceived* in Mary is from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20). At the center of the gospel story is God Himself taking on human flesh, becoming a weak and helpless infant, even a hidden embryo.

This radically altered the way Christians viewed the weak and frail and, thus, drove them to reject not only the common practice of infanticide, but also the common practice of abortion.

As modern historian Rodney Stark put it:

“...perhaps above all else, Christianity brought a new conception of humanity to a world saturated with capricious cruelty and the vicarious love of death...”

“...what Christianity gave to its converts was nothing less than their humanity.”

~Rodney Stark as quoted on PBS Frontline: “From Jesus to Christ”

Something to think about from The Kingdom Perspective.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.”

~ **Matthew 1:18-23 (ESV)**

Sources to consider:

Law of the Twelve Tables

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Law-of-the-Twelve-Tables>

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The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History by Rodney Stark (Princeton University Press 2020).

The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbably Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire by Alan Kreider (Baker Academic 2016).

Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home by Glenn S. Sunshine (Zondervan 2009).

The Didache (Chapter 2).

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