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Prayer Requests

- We encourage you to pray fervently for the children of the world who are waiting for their families to find them.
- Pray for the adopted children and their families, particularly as they go through the sometimes-painful process of getting to know each other and becoming a family.
- Pray for The Shepherd's Crook Ministries: that God would bless us financially and allow us to continue doing this important work in His name

From the Director

Those of us in the pro-life Christian community designate the month of January each year as Sanctity of Human Life month. January is chosen because of the infamous Supreme Court decision of January 22, 1973, in the case of *Roe versus Wade*. Perhaps more infamous than the ruling itself have been the various interpretations and implementations of that decision since then. In any case, it is, in my opinion, altogether fitting and proper for us to affirm the concept of the sanctity of human life against the backdrop of *Roe v. Wade*.

Sanctity is a word we often use but, I think, don't often think about. Merriam-Webster tells us that *sanctity* means "the quality or state of being holy or sacred." So when we talk about the sanctity of human life, we are proclaiming that human life is holy or sacred. I'm afraid, though, that such a definition doesn't help as much as we'd like, because the words "holy" and "sacred" both carry meaning and nuance that, mostly, elude us. We talk about holy, and about sacred, but if we're asked to define the terms, we usually come up a bit short. I'll take a stab at clarifying, by drawing on the words and wisdom of others more qualified than I. For the sake of simplicity, I'm going to limit myself to the word "holy," with the understanding that sacred is sufficiently similar as not to require separate treatment.

Holy. What exactly does that word mean? According to theologian R.C. Sproul, "The difficulties in defining holiness are vast. There is so much to holiness and it is so foreign to us that the task seems almost impossible. There is a very real sense in which the word *holy* is a foreign word. . . . No dictionary is adequate to the task" of defining it. Sproul continues, "The primary meaning of holy is separate." [1] Wayne Grudem explains, "God's holiness means that he is separate from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor." [2] Thus, the kernel of meaning within all of the uses of *holy* and *holiness* is 'separate' or 'separated from.' Something that is sanctified—or particularly identified as holy—is separated *from* both normal usage and from the taint of sin, and is separated *to* a usage and purpose, defined by God.

Thus, when we speak of the sanctity of human life, we are addressing the fact that humans are unique among the created order, separated by design from all other creatures. Humans, we are told in God's word, are created in the image of God. [3] This is said only of humans, as the pinnacle of creation. We may not fully understand the ways in which we bear God's image—though there have been many ideas put forward to explain this mystery—but the fact is, we know we are made in God's image because He tells us that we are made in His image. And this image-bearing is what makes us unique. We are set apart from all other creatures and every other created thing, and we should never forget it.

We also learn from a study of Scripture that human life begins within the womb, not at the moment of birth. God affirms that, even while still not yet born, He knows us, He values us, and He has plans for our lives. Many would argue that human life begins either at the moment of birth or at some arbitrarily defined point of viability before birth. But that interpretation is untenable in light of the clear teaching of God's Word. Space doesn't permit a full development of my thoughts on this topic, but perhaps in a future column. Suffice it to say, for now, that human life begins at conception.

Thus, the emphasis on the sanctity of human life is an acknowledgement that all humans, the born and the pre-born, the able-bodied and the disabled, the young and the old, the orphan and the member of a family, are *all* created in God's image, *all* have inherent worth because of that, and *all* should be—must be—respected, protected, and honored within the context of scriptural principles and precepts. We invite you to join us in reaffirming our commitment to the sanctity of all human life, and to use the means God provides for proclaiming this truth and fighting on behalf of those unable to fight for themselves.

Soli Deo gloria!

Footnotes:

- 1) R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1985), 55–56.
- 2) Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Inter-Varsity Press/Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 201.
- 3) Gen. 1:26, 27; 9:6, etc.

Spotlight: India

By Greg Godwin, Administrative Assistant

Often while I am working on chores around the house or running errands around town, I listen to podcasts, and one of my favorite speakers is Ravi Zacharias. Originally from India but now residing in Georgia, he and his team of apologists travel the globe to defend Christianity in what Ravi terms "the marketplace of ideas." In his talks, he often speaks of his home country with a tender heart, longing to see the Gospel make further inroads there. This passion of his brought India to mind as I was searching for a topic for this month's article. And even though we have had waiting children from India listed on our website for quite some time, I was surprised by some of what I learned while researching this country in the context of adoption.

We all know that India has one of the world's largest populations, but let me try to put that into perspective for us. India is second only to China in population, reporting 1.2 billion residents in their 2011 census. That population is almost four times that of the entire United States, and yet the geographical size of India is only one-third that of the U.S. [1] Just try to imagine that for a moment. Four times the people in a third of the space. Incredible! But the numbers are not only staggering; they are also tragic.



According to the most recent UNICEF statistics that I could find (from 2009), it is estimated that there are thirty-one million orphans in India (i.e., children who have lost one or both parents). That's almost as many orphans as in all of Sub-Saharan Africa! [2] Orphan Outreach quotes a slightly different number, but it's close enough that their claim that 9% of all children in India are orphans seems quite plausible. [3] Now, this does not necessarily mean that all thirty-one million children in India need to be adopted, but many—and perhaps most—of them do. At the very least, these figures suggest that circumstances in India make it difficult for children to thrive in a full family setting. Indeed, poverty is commonly recognized as a widespread problem for India [4], and the comparatively low literacy rate of its people [5] indicates that education is probably not as widespread as it should be, and these two factors certainly have an impact on households and families. UNICEF suggests that in light of these considerations, we think "less on the concept of orphanhood and more on a range of factors that render children vulnerable." [6] Now, it might well be the case that working to improve the general conditions in India—e.g., decreasing poverty, improving and expanding education—would lead to a lower number of orphans (whether "single orphans" or "double orphans"), but that is no reason to turn our attention away from the children who are in need right now. It doesn't matter that not all thirty-one million need to be adopted. There are a lot of orphans in India who have no home, and they should not be overlooked in the name of societal progress. Anything that asks us to give general help without paying attention to the individuals presently suffering isn't in line with Scripture, as it doesn't match with the lesson of God's sympathy for us as expressed in the Incarnation (ref. Heb. 4:15). Consider this: from 1999 through 2011, there have been 4,979 adoptions completed from India to the U.S. That is an average of only 383 adoptions per year, and, as with too many other countries, we are seeing a steady downward trend in the number of adoptions completed each year. [7] I have to say that I was surprised that the number of adoptions wasn't higher. I was also surprised to see that only five Indian children have come home through The Shepherd's Crook. I would love to see more of these children find their forever families in the coming years.

So, what specifically can we do? Well, right now we need to pray that India will begin processing international adoptions again in the near future. While Russia has rightly garnered a lot of our attention recently, India's moratorium on adoptions has not received as much press. On December 1, 2012, India's adoption authority (Central Adoption Resource Authority, or CARA) stopped receiving new applications for international adoptions because they are working to catch up on a backlog of cases. [8] This has happened at least once before. In July 2011, India stopped receiving new dossiers for the same reason, [9] and it wasn't until January 20, 2012, that they started processing new applications. [10] Obviously, the shorter that this delay lasts, the better it will be for the orphans in India and for the families who are adopting them. This should also move us to pray for increased efficiency in the adoption process, not only in India but throughout the world. Anyone who has completed an adoption knows the amount of paperwork involved, and probably has stories of incredible frustration as they raced to compile all of those documents. A certain amount of paperwork is undoubtedly necessary, but it is also the case that it could be more straightforward than it is. The principle of entropy doesn't apply only to thermodynamics, but seemingly to all of life. Something closer to the orderly, efficient work of God in creation would be a welcome change.

So, let's pray for these things:

- that the orphans in India who need families would be adopted;
- that the general conditions in India would improve and that the number of orphans would consequently decline;
- that the current moratorium on new international adoptions would end soon;
- that we would see increased order and efficiency in the adoption process in India and around the world.

Thank you, as always, for your prayers on behalf of the least of these.

In Christ,
Greg

- [1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India>
[2] http://www.childinfo.org/hiv_aids_orphanestimates.php
[3] <http://www.orphanoutreach.org/countries/india/>
[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty_in_India
[5] <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/285248/India>
[6] http://www.unicef.org/media/media_45279.html
[7] http://adoption.state.gov/about_us/statistics.php; I have not found a reliable resource that lists the total number of orphans adopted from each country, so I can only speak to the number of adoptions completed to the U.S. The U.S., however, is typically one of the leading countries in international adoptions each year, so it is safe to extrapolate a little bit from these data.

Completed Adoptions

The following children have come home to their adoptive families since TSC began in 2000. We include them as representatives of all of the children who have come home. Their faces provide just a glimpse into how significantly these lives are changed, as the children transition from the hopelessness and aloneness they once knew, to the comfort and security that come from belonging to a family. Thank you for helping us make these dreams realities, both for the adopted children and for their families.



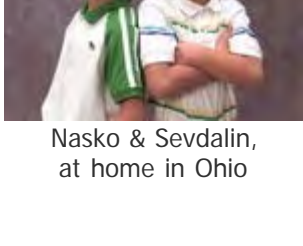
Nathan,
in Korea



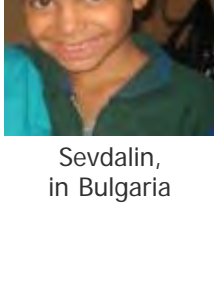
Nathan, at home
in Texas



Nasko,
in Bulgaria



Nasko & Sevdalin,
at home in Ohio



Sevdalin,
in Bulgaria