

Enduring Principles Series

Worth of All Persons

by Andrew Bolton

My journey with Community of Christ began with the love of German church members. I was a young Englishman working on a tree and-shrub nursery near Hamburg. I spoke bad German, and some German workers occasionally bullied me. I understood this mistreatment of foreigners, although it was not nice. I knew it also happened to foreigners in England, particularly if they spoke poor English.

However, the German congregations treated me with kindness and love. People were patient with my bad German. They treated me as a person of worth. I since have lived and worked in three other countries. That gives me empathy to stand up for the worth of all immigrants. In their faces as strangers I see Jesus.

If God numbers all the sparrows and knows when one falls to the ground, how much greater is God's awareness of one human's suffering. I oppose torture because it violates the worth of all persons. I oppose the death penalty for the same reason.

The worth of all persons is not just the worth of good, law abiding people. It is much bigger. It is the worth of all persons, no matter what a person may have done, no matter how rich or poor.

Great is the worth of all persons. There are no exceptions—not me, not you. This is at the heart of our convictions as members of Community of Christ. The following passage from Doctrine and Covenants was brought to Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer in Fayette, New York, USA, in June 1829:

Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God; for behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all [persons] that all [persons] might repent and come unto him. And he hath risen again from the dead that he might bring all [persons] unto him on conditions of repentance. And how great is [God's] joy in the soul that repenteth. Wherefore you are called to cry repentance unto this people.—*Doctrine and Covenants 16:3c–e adapted*

What It Means

- God views all people as having inestimable and equal worth.
- God wants all people to experience wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships.
- We seek to uphold and restore the worth of all people individually and in community, challenging unjust systems that diminish human worth.
- We join with Jesus Christ in bringing good news to the poor, sick, captive, and oppressed.

Oliver Cowdery wrote to Hyrum Smith with enthusiasm about this revelation.

This passage begins with the conclusion “Remember the worth of souls.” It then justifies the conclusion by summarizing the story of Christ's crucifixion. This revelation was given nine months before the “Church of Christ” organized. So it was before the foundation of Community of Christ.

The love of God for sinners embodied in the cross of Jesus is the theological basis for the worth of all persons. You and I may have lost the image of God in our soul, but God in Christ has not given up on us, the lost, fallen, and ugly in sin.

This is the gospel, good news for sinners. All of us have a chance to be restored to full humanity. Christianity is the religion of the second chance, the third chance... forgiveness and restoration to wholeness and right relationships. The opportunity of repentance is the greatest opportunity of all.

The theme of the worth of all persons runs throughout the Bible. We are created in the image of God, male and female (Genesis 1:27 NRSV). We are made a little lower than God and crowned with glory and honor (Psalm 8:5 NRSV). We are commanded to love

About this Series

The Enduring Principles are at the heart of how we express ourselves. When they become the descriptors of our behaviors—rather than mere ideals—we truly will become the Community of Christ that God is calling us to be. Follow the Commentary Series, August 2009 to April 2010, in the *Herald* and e-Herald, [online](#) and by [e-mail](#).

For Further Reflection, Discussion, and Discernment**Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

Foundation

Article 16: *Right to marriage and family*

Article 1: *All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights.*

Article 17: *Right to own property*

Personal Rights

Article 18: *Freedom of belief and religion*

Article 2: *Freedom from discrimination*

Public Freedoms and Political Rights

Article 3: *Right to life, liberty, personal security*

Article 19: *Freedom of opinion and information*

Article 4: *Freedom from slavery*

Article 20: *Right of peaceful assembly and association*

Article 5: *Freedom from torture and degrading treatment*

Article 21: *Right to participate in government and in free elections*

Article 6: *Right to recognition as a person before the law*

Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

Article 7: *Right to equality before the law*

Article 22: *Right to social security*

Article 8: *Right to remedy by competent tribunal*

Article 23: *Right to desirable work and to join trade unions*

Article 9: *Freedom from arbitrary arrest and exile*

Article 24: *Right to rest and leisure*

Article 10: *Right to fair public hearing*

Article 25: *Right to adequate living standard*

Article 11: *Right to be considered innocent until proven guilty*

Article 26: *Right to education*

Rights in Relationship between People

Article 27: *Right to participate in the cultural life of community*

Article 12: *Freedom from interference with privacy, family, home and correspondence*

An International Order for the Realization of Rights

Article 13: *Right to free movement in and out of the country*

Article 28: *Right to a social order that articulates this document*

God with our all and equally our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37–40 NRSV).

To worship God with our whole being means worshiping God in everyone we meet, no matter how the divine image may be hidden. Serving the hungry, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and welcoming the strange is to meet Jesus personally (Matthew 25:35–36 NRSV).

I like how Outreach International works. It takes seriously the dignity and capacity of the poor to solve their problems in nonviolent ways. My Oblation offering and my local and global mission tithes also are regular commitments to restoring the worth of all persons spiritually, socially, and materially. In the politics of all countries, including the USA, ideologies—left or right wing—divide, oppress, and violate people.

This hostility can spill into church. It is important in church to root our values in the good news of Jesus Christ, not in right- or left-wing ideologies.

So we leave ideologies and embrace the Enduring Principles as our core values. No value is more important than the worth of all persons. The big difference between a faithful church and the world is this: The church declares in word and deed that all are human, and all can be reclaimed. Left- and right-wing ideologies say some are of worth; others are not.

Injustice occurs whenever the worth of persons is violated, for example, through sexism or racism. Restoring the dignity of a person is justice. Changing cultures and human systems so the dignity of all humans can flourish is the cause of Zion. Modeling gender equality and welcoming all races and ethnicities is being a congregational signal community.

Human rights, although a secular declaration, also are about honoring the worth of all. A human right is something you are born with. It cannot be taken away, sold, or given up.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, published in 1948 and now the most-translated document in history, can help us be practical and comprehensive in ministries supporting the worth of all persons.

We have heroes among us in the work for human rights. I think of Kathy and Jeff Bachman from Oregon in their leadership of Amnesty International USA. I remember Ed Guy campaigning against genocide in Guatemala; Rod Downing of Vancouver, Canada, working for those suffering in Darfur; and Rupa Kumar working for battered women in Chennai, India.

It takes courage to stand for human rights. In some places we must face persecution, even the cross.

The worth of all persons is rooted deeply in the good news of Jesus Christ through his ministry and suffering on the cross. To proclaim Jesus Christ is to proclaim the worth of all persons. I cannot do the one without the other.

To be an apostle is to be a special witness of the Lord Jesus and the worth of persons. In an apostolic church everyone is to witness this way. Our ultimate example of living out the worth of all persons is Jesus from Nazareth. We join with Jesus Christ in bringing good news to the poor, sick, captive, and oppressed.

This is the mission of God expressed in Jesus: restoring our full humanity so the image of God can shine in each of us.

Let us join with God and each other in that task.

Article 14: *Right to asylum in other countries from persecution*

Article 29: *Community duties essential to free and full development*

Article 15: *Right to a nationality and the freedom to change nationality*

Article 30: *Freedom from state or personal interference in the above*

*Abbreviated text adapted from “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” booklet published by Human Rights USA Resource, 310 Fourth Avenue South, Suite 1000, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415-1012. Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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