

The Culture of Death and the Word of Life (from the April 2005 FBF Newsletter)

Dear FBF family,

As I write, Terri Schiavo remains among the living, but barring unanticipated developments will soon succumb to dehydration. She may well be gone by the time you read this.

As she passes, so will her story. The news media will soon find a new fixation, and the name of Terri Schiavo will be forgotten by most, like Nancy Cruzan and Karen Ann Quinlan before her.

Nancy Cruzan was 25 years old in 1984 when an auto accident left her face down in a ditch. Her brain was deprived of oxygen for 12-14 minutes, and suffered severe damage. Though she remained unconscious, she did become able to ingest nutrition orally. Still, a feeding and hydration tube was implanted with her husband's approval. After rehabilitation efforts proved unsuccessful, Nancy Cruzan's parents and co-guardians, entered a three-and-a-half year legal battle to remove their daughter's medically assisted nutrition and hydration, a case that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Though the Supreme Court upheld the Missouri state court's ruling that the nutrition and hydration tube should not be removed since Cruzan's wishes could not be known, other witnesses came forward and the lower court eventually reversed itself. The tube was removed in December 1990, and Nancy Cruzan died two weeks later on the day after Christmas.

Before Nancy Cruzan it was Karen Ann Quinlan. She was 21 years old when she collapsed at a



party on April 15, 1975 after ingesting alcohol and Valium. Convinced that their daughter's condition was only worsening, Joe and Julia Quinlan asked the hospital to disconnect Karen Ann's respirator. After at first agreeing, the hospital later reneged and the Quinlans sued. The New Jersey Supreme Court sided with the parents, appointed Joseph Quinlan sole guardian, and ordered that his wishes be carried out.

Karen Ann Quinlan was removed from the respirator, but continued to breathe on her own. She was moved to a nursing home in June, 1976, and continued to breathe on her own until she eventually died of pneumonia ten years later on June 11, 1985.

So how far have we come (or, how far have we fallen down the slippery slope) in the past 30 years? It cannot be comforting that the state now argues against life instead of for it. Neither is it encouraging that "quality of life" arguments now regularly win the day over "sanctity of life" arguments in the minds of many and perhaps most Americans.

But in the final analysis,

though men may undervalue and disrespect the gift of life in themselves and others in a thousand ways, nothing man does can thwart the purposes of Him who "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11). The God of the Bible says of Himself, "There is no god besides Me, I put to death and I bring to life" (Deuteronomy 32:39).

King David knew better than to blame a sovereign God for his own bloodletting deeds, and he paid a heavy personal price for his violent ways. But he could also write, "In Your book were written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them" (Psalm 139:16).

So in the end we are at the same place we have always been – living as children of God "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15).

Those who do not believe that we have a Creator have no starting point for understanding the sacredness of human beings made in His image. Those who do not respect His prerogative to

take, give, and alter the conditions of every life will not be shy about making their own judgments in these areas.

What Christians believe should be done in difficult and heartbreaking cases of people like Karen Ann Quinlan, Nancy Cruzan, and Terri Schiavo flows directly from what they believe about God, about His image in each and every person, and about His word that gives us guidance for facing both life and death. We do not welcome a culture of death because our lives are guided by the Word of Life.

So, ultimately, there is only one way to win this cultural debate – only one way to persuade others that each human life has a sacredness and value that is independent of an individual's cognitive abilities or capacity for pleas-

ure. And that is to preach the gospel; to tell others whenever and wherever God gives opportunity that God desires a relationship with them through His Son Jesus Christ; and that their life has a purpose and value beyond what they have ever dared to imagine; and to live a life that commends our message.

Someone has well said, "There is not enough darkness in the world to extinguish the light of one candle." Darkness always gives way to light, so *"let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16).

Yours in the Savior,
Pastor Chris

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