

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Adult Christian Education: An Introduction to Christian Ethics

In considering Christian ethics we need to define what an ethical choice is and what issues are presented for ethical choice, and we need to define to what authority we look for guidance. Note that we do not say that we look *first* to choice or first to authority, or *vice versa*. God's will is not just a "condition" of our lives, either as individuals or as a society. God's will is sovereign. The real question becomes, therefore, how is God's will revealed, and what actions are required of us in specific factual situations, in order that we may live out God's will? How are we to live and act as God would have us live and act?

In this course, we are going to review issues that are contemporary with us. They are issues because they require us to take action, and they are issues because they require us to determine what God's will is in relation to each choice presented. In this respect, the ethical choices we face are different from choices which relate to our obligations to God. The first four of the Ten Commandments specify our duties to God; they do not present any ethical choices. Whether we choose to honor the sabbath or not does not pose an ethical issue, but does define our identity as servants of the Lord. But, once we look at the next five commandments, we are presented with ethical choices, for ethical choices involve how we act in relation to our fellow men. What about the tenth commandment, the commandment not to covet? It can be argued that this commandment specifies both duties to fellows and to God, for to covet anything is to fail to honor God as our supreme good. The tenth commandment thus serves as a "bookend" with the first, to remind us that the Lord of all is personal to each one of us.

Ethical choices are thus defined as choices about how we will act in relation to our fellow men, but these choices are informed by our identity as servants of God. The two cannot be separated, although in much of human history (and especially today) people and societies did and do seek to separate the two. Our culture would define ethical choice as involving a human frame-of-reference only. What is "good" and what is "true" are defined with reference to human will and human choices. The ultimate circularity and subjectivity of this process seems to trouble few outside of the Church. In the Church we believe that what is good and what is true are each defined by a standard that is objective, that is outside of us. Ethical standards are objective because they have been established by God, who transcends all human choice and all human frames-of-reference. Hence, our title: *What does the LORD Require?*, and we use the word "require," for God has revealed to us that failure to follow His will has consequences.

1. *Where do we look for guidance?*

This is the same as asking "What authority exists to support or condemn a given choice?"

As Anglican Christians we say that our faith is informed by the "three-legged stool" of Scripture, Reason, and Tradition. Let's define some terms. By Scripture we mean *all* of the Bible. (We'll come back to this topic.) What about Reason and Tradition, both of which inform our understanding of Scripture?

Reason should not be understood to mean how we think, as cognitive reasoning. As used in theology, Reason refers to a sort of participatory knowledge. To know something is to experience it, to share or participate in something. It is not just about how we think. Hence, Scripture and Reason inform each other, with Reason allowing us to experience some of the revelation of God (His “general revelation”) in nature, in how we can come to know some aspects of God through our experience of the world. Equally, there is a mutual, inward hold that Scripture makes upon us and we upon it. As such, Reason may be best understood as a practical wisdom. It is in this sense that Scripture, Reason and Tradition inform each other.

Tradition is also misunderstood. It is *not* just about “how we have always done things in the Church,” for in truth most of what we do in ceremony and order has changed. Tradition, understood properly, is defined under the so-called “Lerintian canon” of St. Vincent of Lerins (5th C.), who defined Catholic doctrine as “That which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.” When we consider the dogma, doctrine and discipline of the Church *as defined in ecumenical councils of the Church*, we speak of Tradition. In other words, when the Church has gathered in council and defined belief (*e.g.*, in the Creeds), that constitutes Tradition. Tradition is about the content of belief, not just about practice. Universally in Anglicanism, the first four general councils (Nicaea I, Constantinople I, Ephesus, and Chalcedon), in which the Creeds were agreed, are recognized as authoritative. Most Anglicans recognize the first seven councils; many recognize others.

Now, notice something about Reason and Tradition: Neither provides any guidance in defining and deciding ethical issues! Reason and Tradition allow us to better understand Scripture, but the revelation of what God would have us do in our relations with fellow human beings is not revealed in the teachings of the Church but in the teachings of God’s holy Word.¹ Scripture is *the* revelation of what the LORD *requires*; Reason and Tradition inform us in how we are to live and act in the light of this revelation, and Jesus makes it clear at John 12.48, when He says of those who reject Him, “... the word that I have spoken will be [their] judge on the last day.”

a) *Special Revelation*

In discussing Reason we mentioned “general revelation,” the interplay between our God-given powers of observation, investigation and synthesis, and the created order. We can learn about the nature of God by observing and participating in His Creation. But, what we can learn about God through observation only is limited, for if we compare God (who exceeds all Creation as its Author) to anything, the comparison falls immeasurably short. We can make only very limited comparisons, either about what God is like or what He is not like.

Where God chooses to reveal His nature to us is in special revelation, revelation involving a specific message. This is in Scripture.² The history of creation and salvation, as described in the Bible, is where we look to learn about the nature of God, but for purposes of this course we will concern ourselves with what special revelation teaches about how to respond to the question “How are we to live and act as God would have us live and act?”

¹ Tradition may act to synthesize the revelation found in Scripture. For example, the so-called “Seven Deadly Sins” relate to what the Church teaches about ethical norms as revealed in Scripture. A copy of this teaching is attached.

² Special revelation is also found in Tradition, in the Creeds.

One of the first things we notice is that God makes it clear that He *has* and does reveal His will. Let's look at Luke 16.19–31. Jesus tells the story of a rich man and a beggar, known traditionally as the story of Dives and Lazarus. In torment in hell, the rich man calls out to Abraham that Lazarus might come to him, to relieve his suffering. When he is informed that this is impossible, he then asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers, to warn them lest they too come into torment. The reply is given that the brothers "... have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (16.29), and that "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead" (16.31).

In telling this story, Jesus makes it clear that how God would have us live and act is made clear to us. Moses (the Law) and the prophets reveal God's will; Jesus reveals God's Good News, that the price of our falling short of the Law is paid, and that we are justified (worthy to stand before God) by our faith in His sacrifice and in Him. Our faith is informed by Scripture, and Scripture informs us not only of who God is, but of who and what he wills us to be. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3.16-17).

2. *Ethical Conduct and Salvation*

Ethical conduct and salvation do not relate to each other in a strict "cause and effect" equation, but they are very much related. Notice that the rich man in Luke 16.19-31 is not condemned for any bad act. He has done nothing positively wrong against Lazarus. He has, however, ignored him and his needs. He has lived in a way which ignores God's concern that we care for one another, expressed powerfully by Jesus at Matthew 25.40, when He reproves the *failure to act* with the words, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of these my brethren, you did it to me." When we put together Jesus' teaching at Luke 16.29–31 and Matthew 25.40, it becomes evident that our duties to God and to each other cannot be separated (hence the "bookend" structure in the Ten Commandments?), and that when we violate God's will in how we treat our fellows and how we conduct ourselves, we are separating ourselves from God.

In the first chapter Romans, Paul describes the fallenness of humanity. Failing to honor God, men have "... exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped the creature rather than the Creator ..." (Rom. 1.25). Paul continues, "*For this reason* God gave them up to [their conduct]" (1.26). , and

They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who deserve such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them (Rom. 1.29–32).

The unrighteous conduct catalogued by Paul is not a provocation of God, it is a list of symptoms of fallenness. People who live in sin are suffering judgment *already*; they have separated themselves from God and His will for us, and so have rejected salvation.

a) *Ethical discernment and eschatology*

Eschatology is the theology of last things, of judgment and the afterlife. Repeatedly in the gospels Jesus enjoins us to live each day as if it is our last, to be prepared for judgment at all times, for it may come like a “thief in the night”. “Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day the Lord is coming” (Matt. 24.42). This message is repeated by the apostles (*e.g.*, at 1 Cor. 16.13; Col. 4.2; 1 Pet. 5.8). Ethical discernment must be eschatological. It must involve working out how to live lives free from bondage to sin without presuming to be translated prematurely into a condition that is free from the “sufferings of this present time” (Rom. 8:18).

This eschatological frame-of-reference for ethical decisions is not something new in the New Testament. Strictly speaking, biblical Hebrew does not have a future tense in verb construction. In grammar, the future tense is a verb form that marks the event described by the verb as not having happened yet, but expected to happen in the future (in an absolute tense system), or to happen subsequent to some other event, whether that is past, present, or future (in a relative tense system). Hebrew has an entirely different tense system from those understood in the Indo-European language family. There is no future tense as such. Instead, verbs express completed action or uncompleted action. The future (as a “qal imperfect” construction) is an uncompleted action. Greatly over-simplified, biblical Hebrew has two inflected verb tenses, the perfect for past actions and the imperfect for actions continuing into the present or future. This may be modified by the so-called “waw-consecutive,” in which the waw-consecutive perfect has future reference, and the waw-consecutive imperfect is a narrative past tense. Thus, whether a sentence is translated as “David will give thanks to God” or “David gave thanks to God” will depend on context.

Now, what does this detail of grammar reveal? Try reading the psalms and Proverbs in this way: Every time a future tense is used, read it as a present tense. For example, look at Ps. 9.17 (changes in parentheses): “The wicked shall be (*are*) given over to the grave,/ and also all the people that forget God.” Or what about Ps. 34.19, “Evil shall slay (*slays*) the wicked,/ and those who hate the righteous shall be (*are*) punished.” Is this starting to sound a little bit like what Paul is getting at in Romans 1? Cf. Prov. 11.19, “He who is steadfast in righteousness will live (*lives*),/ but he who pursues evil will die (*dies*).” If we do evil, we separate ourselves from God; we separate ourselves from life. We fail to allow the kingdom of heaven to break into this world.

b) *Judgment “then” and judgment now*

Eschatology speaks of “last things,” of the final judgment at Jesus’ second coming. Paul makes it clear that judgment happens now; that if we separate ourselves from God we live lives under judgment now. The way Hebrew works provides further indicators of this, for time and eternity are blended in how the language works. But, what does Jesus have to say about this?

Jesus actually speaks quite a lot about judgment and about damnation. He refers to damnation as including an “outer darkness” (Mtt. 8.12) and a “furnace of fire” (Mtt. 13.42) where the damned “will weep and gnash their teeth” (*ibid.*, cf. Luke 13.28). He makes it clear that damnation is real, but perhaps the most telling reference he makes is at Mtt. 22.13.

In the parable of the wedding banquet (Mtt. 22.1–14) Jesus makes it clear that both the “bad and the good” (22.10) are invited to the feast, are invited to the kingdom of heaven. But who gets singled out when the king arrives? It is the man “who had no wedding garment” (22.11). The king confronts him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment,” and the

man is speechless (22.12). The king then instructs his servants to bind the man, hand and foot, and cast him out, into the outer darkness (22.13). What's going on here? The lack of a wedding garment means the man is not fit to enter the feast and to share in the blessings of the king. In other words, the man lacks in *righteousness*, he is "clothed" in something else.

When we abuse our free will to make wrong choices, when we deny the clear mandates of our Lord's will, we clothe ourselves in such a way that our Lord judges us. But, thanks be to God, we can still be clothed in righteousness, we can be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ when we have faith in Him and follow Him.

The man without a wedding garment in the parable of the wedding banquet has never put on the righteousness of the Lord. He is still sitting there in his "street clothes," unwilling to change, comfortable where he is, not recognizing that he is called to something better. The judgment that we experience now when we accommodate to the world is a judgment which becomes eternal when we choose the world and not the kingdom.

3. *The Great Commandment*

In summarizing the Law, Jesus teaches:

The first [commandment] is, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12.29-31; cf. Mtt. 22.34-40; Luke 10.25-28).

Note that Jesus here quotes from the Law, in the first instance from Deut. 6.4, and in the second from Lev. 19.18. When we couple this definition of the message of the Law with our Lord's description that He has come to fulfill the Law (Mtt. 5.17), it becomes at once evident that our relationship with each other (defined in ethical choices) is defined by our relationship with God. Before we look, then, at specific ethical issues, let's revisit the nature of the covenant with God, first given to Israel.

a) *The Ten Central Themes of the Five Books of Moses*³

The Pentateuch (the Law) represents not only a collection of narratives and law, but reflects a worldview which differs greatly from our own. It is useful, therefore, to identify the themes which are returned to again and again in this earliest collection of Scripture. The following are salient:

1. Creation Establishes a Good World: When Genesis 1 affirms that God created all things by speaking a word, it means that all is ordered by the divine plan and works together in harmony. After Creation was completed, God looked upon it and "found it very good" (Gen. 1.31). Thus, no matter the evil and failure that follow in world history, we are to recall that goodness will prevail.

³ Adapted from L. Boadt, "The Pentateuch," in *The Catholic Study Bible*, D. Senior, et al., eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), RG 36-55.

2. God has Blessed Human Life: An important corollary of a good world is divine blessing upon it. Twice we are told in Genesis that God blessed the human race (Gen. 1.28; 9.1). Later, the blessing of Abraham (Gen. 12.2) is highlighted, as are those of Sarah and Isaac (Gen. 17.16), Jacob (Gen. 27.27-29), of the whole people by Aaron (Num. 6.24-26), of the nation by Balaam (Num. 23.20), and, as the finale of the Pentateuch, of each tribe by Moses (Deut. 33.1-29).
3. Humanity has a Tendency to Sin: Much of the biblical narrative centers on the disobedience and sinfulness of God's creatures who refuse to heed or obey the divine will. In turn, many of the laws center on atonement (particularly in Leviticus), and on the need for repentance and turning back to God (in Deuteronomy in particular).
4. God Delivers from all Evil: If humanity tends toward rebellion, God is focused on forgiveness and mercy. God spares Adam and Eve, Cain and Noah, and others in order to give the human race a new start each time after it sins. God is revealed above all else as a liberating God in the Exodus. This becomes the heart of Israel's praise for God in the Passover celebration.
5. God Fulfills His Promises: The Pentateuch stresses again and again the fulfillment of the promise made to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses that God will make them into a great people. The LORD has no characteristics of an ancient "god" patterned on the recurrent cycles of nature, but always the God of the future who calls forth in Israel a trusting hope that must expect new and greater divine acts still to come.
6. The Covenant Binds God to Israel: All peoples believe their gods relate to the world somehow, but only between Israel and the LORD do we find a union based on love and loyalty pledged to each other in permanent union that actually respects the role of the human partner. The covenant is the heart of biblical faith because it expresses a unique bond between God and people, built on past deeds but committed to future collaboration.
7. The Law Expresses Israel's Bond to God: The covenant establishes a relationship, but the laws of the Pentateuch show how that relationship is to be lived out by the people. *The Law is not a set of restrictive rules, but a dynamic way of life that expresses faithfulness to God in actions as well as words, always with a flavor of joy (in worship and praise).*
8. Worship = Praise = Thanks: To pray is to praise, and to praise is to thank God. The Pentateuch constantly points out what God has done for Israel, and the laws point to a spirit of rejoicing and thanksgiving on Israel's part in giving back to God a part of the gift to them: namely, praising the divine goodness in all things. (This theme is later reflected very prominently in the psalms.)
9. Religious Life is Life in Community: Israel is a people, not a collection of individuals. Discovery of the divine will and proper praise can only be given by human voices joined together. God's many revelations can be appreciated only when memories are shared and mutual goodness is shown in action to one another.
10. God Directs all History: The natural conclusion to be drawn from the attributes of God described above is that all things fall under divine providence. The central faith of Israel that there is one, and only one, God leads to the recognition of the divine lordship over all peoples and all events. God both blesses and punishes, sets obstacles as well as shows the way to pass through them. All things are in the hands of God, and so no course of action may be contemplated except to walk in the ways of the LORD.

4. *New covenant/new commandment*

At Jer. 31.31-34 the prophet has the LORD declare, “Behold, the days are coming ... when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ... I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts ... [and] they shall all know me ...” From the earliest days, the Church has understood herself to be the people of the New Covenant (*see* 1 Pet. 2.1-10). Jesus Himself refers to the Blood of the eucharist as “the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22.20; *cf.* 1 Cor. 11.25), or as “the covenant” (Mark 14.24), and Paul describes believers as “ministers of a new covenant” (2 Cor. 3.6).

As Christians we are discharged from the Law (Rom. 7.6) because Jesus is the end (that is, summation and fulfillment) of the Law (Rom. 10.4). We are, therefore not bound to the terms of the old covenant (the Law), but the old covenant never went away. In fulfilling the Law, Jesus fulfills the old covenant for us, and we are justified (deemed righteous before God) by virtue of His righteousness and our faith in Him. Jesus focuses, therefore, on *how we are to live* in fulfilling the great commandment of love of God coupled with love of neighbor, and He sums this up at John 13.34, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

Jesus couples love of God with love of neighbor. “He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to Him” (John 14.21).

a) *Choosing the Kingdom*

Immediately prior to describing that He will manifest Himself to those who love Him, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to those who keep His commandments (John 14.15). He describes the Spirit as One whom “... the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.” We need to couple this distinction between the world (which neither knows nor obeys God) and believers. Repeatedly in the gospels, Jesus admonishes that the kingdom of heaven “has come near” (*e.g.*, Luke 10.9, 11; 11.20). Jesus does not deliver the kingdom; He offers it. The people who follow Him after the miracle of loaves and fishes seek the “kingdom” (defined in terms of human wants) now, but Jesus does not supply an ongoing provision of physical sustenance. He offers the kingdom by His Good News, and the kingdom is something that we must choose. We choose the kingdom by loving our Lord, and by living out this love in how we live, by loving our neighbors as ourselves. Thinking of self last involves taking up our cross, and by this we gain the kingdom. In other words, as we will discuss more fully at the end of this course, all ethical choices involve *community* (love of neighbor) *cross* (self-sacrifice) and *new creation* (choosing the kingdom, and thereby allowing the kingdom to break into this world).

5. *The Human Person*

Scripture offers repeated injunctions of a positive duty of regard and care for the poor and the oppressed, the stranger, the widow and the orphan. Legal provisions are made for the protection of the poor (*e.g.*, Exod. 23.6, 11; Lev. 12.8), and oppression of the poor is defined as a positive evil throughout the prophetic texts and Psalms. (Isaiah 58 makes clear that righteousness involves care for the oppressed.) In the New Testament, the Gospel of Luke and the Letter of

James stand out as examples of the special regard of God for the poor, and how we are enjoined not to show partiality. Indeed, Luke does not have Jesus say “Blessed are the poor *in spirit*” (Mtt. 5.3) but “Blessed are the poor” (Luke 6.20).

The duty of care is extended to widows and orphans, and the stranger is to be welcomed. The evil of partiality is specifically condemned by James (2.1-13, 25-26), with care of the oppressed again being identified as a work of faith, but partiality itself (and thus invidious racial distinctions) is condemned.

It is important to note this positive duty of regard and care (which is a corollary to “love of neighbor”). In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37), Jesus makes the point that “neighbor” includes the foreigner and stranger. The lawyer in the story replies to Jesus’ question as to who in the parable was the injured man’s neighbor by identifying the neighbor as “The one who showed mercy ...,” and Jesus’ reply is in the nature of a command: “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10.37).

What’s different here? The concept of “person,” of an individual having individual self-worth, and not being defined solely by gender, race, class, nationality, language, etc. is a belief which arose specifically in the context of Judaism and Christianity. The Bible makes clear that each human being is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1.26) and that each individual is of value to God (Matt. 10.31; Luke 12.7). This is not the way of the world, either in the ancient world or today. To the extent that modern and postmodern thinkers claim that faith leads to intolerance, their thinking is contrary to the evidence that the most repressive regimes in history (National Socialism and Soviet Communism) have been militantly secular, valuing the “people” or the “revolution” over the “person”. The Bible makes clear even in the context of the community defined as Israel and/or the Church, God values the person, and we are to do the same.

Specific Issues: So far we have looked at the decision-making process. Now we will look at specific issues.

6. *Gambling and Greed*

Our Lord teaches us that we are not to be anxious about ourselves, and that love of riches is in conflict with service of God. Notably, Jesus offers this teaching right after He has taught the model prayer for disciples. Compare Mtt. 6.9-13 (the “Lord’s prayer,” including “Give us this day our daily bread ...”) to Mtt. 6.19-21 (“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”) He continues that we cannot serve two masters (God and riches) (Mtt. 6.24; Luke 16.13), and that we are not to be anxious about our own provision, but to trust in God (Mtt. 6.25-34; Luke 12.22-31).

At a social level we recognize many evils in the inequitable distribution of wealth and in the social pathologies attendant on gambling and speculation. In other words, we recognize problems using a secular calculus. But what about when we seek define what’s wrong from a Christian perspective? Here we see that a focus on riches expresses three areas of conflict with how God would have us act:

- i) A focus on riches reflects a lack of trust in God’s providence. We are to use the gifts He has given us to work hard, to provide for ourselves and our loved ones in community, but a focus on accumulation in excess points to some doubt that we will have

enough. In other words we are *not* thereby loving the LORD our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength (Deut. 6.4; Mark 12.29-30).

When we focus on wealth we do not choose the kingdom; we focus on this world, and we become that which we desire. (“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,” Mtt. 6.21.)

ii) Such a focus reflects that we are not loving our neighbor as our self (Lev. 19.18; Mark 12.31). The necessary corollary to accumulation is neglect of the positive duty of regard of and care for the unfortunate.

iii) Such a focus diminishes our regard for the sovereignty of God. If my focus is on how I can accumulate and enjoy wealth, I am engaging in the pride which holds that I am more important than God’s will; that I can define my own world. Speculation based on randomness, artificially contrived risk and mere chance (*i.e.*, gambling) honors and places trust in a “power” different from God. This “power” may be mere mathematical randomness, but the more I place faith in “luck” the more likely it is that I am placing faith in a principality or power of this world (Eph. 6.12), a power whom we are to recognize that Jesus Christ triumphed over (Col. 2.15).

a) *We are/become what we think about.*

Centering our lives on worldly possessions is to center ourselves on that which will decay (Mtt. 6.19-20) at the expense of those things which are eternal (2 Cor. 4.18; 1 Pet. 1.4). Wealth in itself is not evil. “[E]verything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving ...” (1 Tim. 4.4). It is prudent to make provision against want (Prov. 6.6-8), and a failure to make provision for ourselves is condemned (1 Tim. 5.8), but if I value riches more than God then I am putting my hope in wealth, not in God (1 Tim. 6.17) and I cannot serve both wealth and God (Mtt. 6.24; Luke 16.13).

b) *We are/become what we fix our eyes on/what we become slaves to.*

Jesus teaches:

Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light; but when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness (Luke 11.34-35; *cf.* Mtt. 6.22-23).

This illustrates the problem with focusing on wealth, and with the coveting of money expressed in gambling. We define ourselves in ways that turn us away from God, into being concerned with the external and material. We deny that God is in charge of all life.

c) *We are/become what we care most for.*

Jesus teaches us not to be anxious about life (Mtt. 6.25). The word used in the original of Matthew is from the verb *merimnao* (“to worry, be anxious”), used also by Luke to describe Martha being distracted by her serving tasks while Mary sits at Jesus’ feet for His teaching (Luke 10.40-41). This is the same word used by Paul when (right after enjoining us to rejoice in Lord) he writes:

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4.6-7).

In English the word “worry” derives from the Old English *wyrgan*, meaning “to strangle” (as an active verb) and giving rise to the Middle English word for “to choke” (as a passive verb). As demonstrated by Martha’s distraction, anxiety about this world is in conflict with contentment and trust in the Living God. Worry is incompatible with seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mtt. 6.33a), but when we seek this kingdom, then what we need (“all these things”) shall be [ours] as well (6.33b).

7. *Media, Entertainment, and Pornography*

At Phil. 4.8-9 St. Paul enjoins:

[W]hatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.

When we combine this with Jesus’ teaching (quoted above) that “the eye is the lamp of the body,” it is evident that how we seek information and entertainment matters. We become what we consume, and if this is concentrated on snippets of information rather than on knowledge and wisdom; if this is concentrated in temporary happiness to the neglect of God-given joy; if this is to participate in the debasement of self through the objectification of others, then we become a person far away from the one created in God’s image and likeness, “knit ... together” by God and “marvelously made” (Ps. 139.12-13). If our thoughts and preoccupations are impure, we become impure (Mtt. 6.21).

We are bombarded by media daily, and our worldview becomes worldly if we allow the medium to become the message. Examples abound of broadcast news media “making” a story to the point that it consumes attention, and the internet adds to this feeding frenzy of consumption. The message is managed. Just think of how language is used. An “abortionist” becomes “pro-choice,” and if a moral argument against a societal ill is allowed, the “Christian opinion leader” sought out on an issue tends to be either a person with a very narrow, Biblical Literalist, condemnatory viewpoint, or a person who effects a worldliness that denies a bedrock area of faith (*e.g.*, as when a retired Episcopalian bishop is trotted out to “explain” that a “real Christian” does not believe in such things as the resurrection of our Lord!)

The media are focused on a worldly message. Whether this is couched as being a message in favor of personal freedom or pluralism, it is not a message of love of God first. It is a message which ignores God except insofar as belief in God is a societal condition that needs to be accounted for in addressing issues and agendas. “Religion” is portrayed as something which is restrictive, not liberating, and “liberation” involves the continual pushing of human boundaries, with the result that the audience over time becomes *desensitized*. What would have been labeled as “smut” in the 1970’s is now part of commercial advertisements aired during prime time

television broadcasts; what would have been deemed to be gratuitous violence and cruelty is now depicted in graphic detail

a) *Sex and violence*

Sex and violence tend to go together in popular entertainment. Rap and Hip Hop music make this explicit, celebrating the objectification of women as “bitches” to be exploited, and celebrating the self-centered macho personality of the man who can control others through brute power.

Pornography includes any written, auditory or visual material deliberately designed to elicit a sexual response. The response is independent of a loving relationship between a man and a woman in Holy Matrimony. In other words, the sexual response is not intended in any way to involve mutual giving and joy, as intended by God. The infamous Marquis de Sade (1740–1814, from whose name we get the word “sadism” to describe the inflicting of pain on another for personal pleasure) wrote: “It becomes incontestable that we have received from Nature the right indiscriminately to express our wishes on all women ...” These words reflect not only a profound perversion in personality, they reflect a perversion of the created order. Notice that de Sade looks to “Nature” (not God) for authority. He speaks of “right,” not of anything involving duty, humility, or, indeed, of love. He speaks of the expression of wish rather than of the living of God’s will, and he speaks of women as objects rather than each as a person created in God’s image and likeness. Objectification of the person (something our media are good at) makes the use of violence acceptable and makes the exploitation of the person allowable, by denying God’s role in creation and our dependence upon God.

At 1 Cor. 5.1 Paul condemns *porneia* (the Greek word from which we get “pornography”). This word is variously translated as “immorality” and “impurity,” but the meaning is closer to unchastity or fornication. It derives from the verb *porneuō*, “to practice sexual immorality or prostitution; to commit fornication.” Derivations of this verb appear 55 times in the New Testament. Paul uses the term 21 times (15 times in 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians alone), and the word is found 19 times in Revelation. In other words, discussion of *porneia* comes up in the context of Paul teaching about confrontations with the pagan world, and in the context of the revelation of final judgment. In each case the context is the person’s relationship to God.

b) *A new mindset*

Notice the references above to Phil. 4.6-7 and 4.8-9. Paul is speaking about new creation, a new mindset in Christ. As outlined by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.,⁴

1. We must rejoice in the Lord (4.4-7)
 - a. Four admonitions
 - i. Do rejoice: *Jesus enjoins that we are to rejoice, for our “names are written in heaven” (Luke 10.21).*
 - ii. Use self-restraint and gentleness: *Restraint of self connotes self-giving. Our respect for others reflects our respect for God.*

⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *What Does the LORD Require?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 61. The textual commentary inserted in Italics in the outline as used here is editorial comment used in this course.

- iii. Do not be anxious: *Do not allow the worries of the world to strangle you. Trust in God.*
 - iv. Present your requests to God: *God will provide.*
 - b. Applications: *Applications flow from a spiritual state in which God is first, others second, and ourselves last, a state in which we do, indeed, take up our cross to follow our Lord.*
- 2. We must fill our minds and practices with all that is excellent (4.8-9)
 - a. Six ethical terms plus two injunctions
 - i. Whatever is true: *Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14.6). When we are Christ-centered we fill ourselves with truth.*
 - ii. Whatever is noble: *By seeking what is higher we are raised above what is base.*
 - iii. Whatever is right: *Clear ethical guidance is given to us in Scripture.*
 - iv. Whatever is pure: *We are to focus on what is clear in nature and transparent in purpose, that our character may not be stained.*
 - v. Whatever is lovely: *God has given us beauty, and we are to “Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Ps. 96.9).*
 - vi. Whatever is admirable:
 - 1. Anything that is excellent
 - 2. Anything that is praiseworthy: *When we focus on whatever defines the six ethical injunctions just given, we find excellence and that worthy of praise. Filling our minds and hearts with these things honors God and armors us against what is base (Eph.6.10-20).*
 - b. Four practices
 - i. Whatever you have learned
 - ii. Whatever you have received
 - iii. Whatever you have heard
 - iv. Whatever you have seen: *Paul is not boasting in using these verbs. He is enjoining imitation of himself as an apostle, to the extent that he lives in imitation of Jesus Christ.*

A final note: Gambling, greed, and the impurity of spirit which attracts a person to pornography and violence, can represent “besetting” sins, sins that won’t go away but become the default choice of the person. A besetting sin may represent a demonic oppression (*not* possession). As the apostle writes, in enjoining us to put on the whole armor of God, “For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6.12). By focusing on our Lord’s will, we arm ourselves for the struggle.

8. Adultery

Adultery consists of voluntary sexual activity, and voluntary thoughts of sexual activity (Mtt. 5.28), between a married person and another person who is not his or her spouse. Even with the definition restricted to include only voluntary sexual activity, surveys of American behavior indicate that up to one third of married men and up to one fourth of married women have had an extra-marital affair. When we consider the large percentage of Americans who self-identify as

Christians, we must conclude that the cadre of the unfaithful includes many millions of people who claim to be faithful to their Lord despite their demonstrated lack of faithfulness to their marriage partner.⁵ Up to 65% of those who engage in an adulterous affair will at some point subsequently divorce.

Adultery is never passive. While it is probably rare that any person simply decides one day to have an affair, it is certainly true that an act of individual will is required. Temptations abound, but even the most “innocent” adulterer must at some point decide to pursue the temptation. All human beings can be tempted. Practically speaking, it makes far more sense to focus on avoiding *near temptations to sin* than to avoid sin. For example, a married man who is invited to the hotel room (“for a nightcap”) of a woman he meets on a business trip, is kidding himself if he believes that he can “behave honorably” if he goes to the room. He needs to resolve not to go to the room.

Adultery is also self-deluding. The issue for the adulterer is not who he or she lies with, but who he or she lies *to*, because a necessary ingredient of all adultery is secrecy. There is not a motel room or rendezvous into which our Lord does not see, but the adulterer can be self-convinced that there is no evil “as long as no one gets hurt,” while ignoring that secrecy will always grow to consume a relationship, a relationship intended by God to be that of two who “become one flesh”.

Marriage requires work; it requires giving of self. Living “happily ever after” is not a realistic expectation, but we can expect to live in a blessed union when we strive to participate in God’s blessing. One way to do this is to always recall that in marriage there is a third Party to the contract. When the parties exchange vows they say that they take each to be spouse “In the Name of God”. Breaking a vow of fidelity to a spouse necessarily includes breaking a solemn vow made to God. God takes adultery seriously. That’s why it is prohibited in the Ten Commandments, just like murder. Sexual fidelity demonstrates the purpose of the Law: mankind’s welfare. Sexual infidelity is evidence of a fundamental breach of relationship not only between the spouses but between the offender and God.⁶

a) *Proverbs 5.15-23: Marital Love must not be Compromised*

God takes sexuality seriously. It is His gift. Immediately upon the creation of man and woman, He instructs that the two are to “cleave” to each other and become “one flesh” (Gen. 2.24). The Church takes sexuality and the body seriously, as things that are positively good. That is why standards are high. This high standard is illustrated in Proverbs 5.15-23.

This passage from Proverbs is in the form of an allegory, in which the verses begin (again, emphasizing sexuality as a positive good), “Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well” (Prov. 5.15). Beauty is to be found in the enjoyment of relationship, and in the faithful and exclusive preservation of this relationship. This relationship must be protected (5.16-17), maintained as private and exclusive, and we are to rejoice in our spouse (5.18), to take delight in our spouse and be captivated by his/her love. This relationship is exposed to the gaze

⁵ While the trend lines increase for adultery, they decrease for active participation in worship, illustrating once again the close connection between our relationship with God and our relationships with each other.

⁶ Note that Jesus refers to the people to whom He comes as “an evil and adulterous generation” (Mtt. 12.39; 16.4; Mark 8.38), and that Israel’s breach of the covenant with the LORD is described by the prophet Hosea as the people’s adultery.

of God (5.21-23), as are all our ways, and wickedness entraps us in the self-delusion that separates us from God.

Drink water from your own cistern,
 flowing water from your own well.
Should your springs be scattered abroad,
 streams of water in the streets?
Let them be for yourself alone,
 and not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be blessed,
 and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
 a lovely hind, a graceful doe.
Let her affection fill you at all times with delight,
 be infatuated always with her love.
Why should you be infatuated, my son, with a loose woman
 and embrace the bosom of an adventuress?
For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD,
 and he watches all his paths.
The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him,
 and he is caught in the toils of his sin.
He dies for lack of discipline,
 and because of his great folly he is lost.

9. *Cohabitation and Fornication*

The corollary to God taking His gift of sexuality seriously, of God blessing the marriage bond, is that sex outside of marriage is a form of idolatry, in which the parties place their own pleasure and need for affirmation above their relationship with God.

Cohabitation (living together without benefit of marriage) and fornication (sex between unmarried persons who do not live together) is a norm in much of our society, particularly but not exclusively in younger age cohorts. Couples may cohabit and yet still have children, but it is more common for cohabiting couples to not have children, and the increase in the prevalence of cohabitation and fornication bears a direct relationship to the availability of effective contraception. Indeed, the advent of the so-called “sexual revolution” coincided with the advent of simple oral contraception, and the principal change in behavior in the sexual revolution has been in the behavior of women, not of men. As long as there has been a necessary connection between sexual pleasure and pregnancy or the risk thereof, people have observed stricter boundaries in sexual behavior, but the more humans have been able to control (through technology) conditions of life that where theretofore considered absolute, the more the concept of an absolute itself (as in “thou shalt not”) has eroded.

Notice again the idolatrous nature (in this case self worship) of the pursuit of pleasure. A much higher proportion of couples who “live together” eventually divorce if they do marry, because the relationship remains about self-interest. It is because of this selfishness (*i.e.*, this lack of concern for or with God) that Scripture condemns cohabitation and fornication as immoral, for the Way in which our Lord leads us is one in which to gain our life we must lose it (Mtt. 10.39).

Sexual immorality is condemned in Scripture as *porneia*. Those who practice immorality will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6.9), for they serve themselves, not God. The body is made for God's purposes, and we are to shun immorality (1 Cor. 6.13-18; *cf.* Gal. 5.19; Eph. 5.3; Col. 3.5). Sex outside of marriage ignores the purpose of oneness, mutuality, exclusive loyalty, and intimacy intended by God (Gen. 2.18, 24; Eph. 5.21-32), and all too often blinds the participant to what real intimacy is, while he or she pursues physical pleasure only.

The prevalent thinking in which behavior is OK, "so long as no one is harmed, and consenting adults are involved" ignores that any such couple has a Maker, and God's intent is for intimacy and mutuality to be in an exclusive bond in which He participates. That is why God provides for the proper expression of sexual desires (1 Cor. 7.2-5). "... God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore, *whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you*" (1 Thes. 4.7-8).

10. *Divorce*

From all that we have discussed above, it is most clear that God takes marriage very seriously. His intent is that the relationship be life long (Gen. 2.24-25), and the vows that are made in marriage are quite explicitly *unconditional* with respect to better or worse life circumstances, sickness and health, wealth or poverty (*see, e.g., Book of Common Prayer* 427). Jesus explicitly upholds this intention of the Creator, that marriage is indissoluble (Mtt. 5.31-31; 19.3-9; Mark 10.9; Luke 16.38; *cf.* 1 Cor. 7.10-11). He recognizes that Moses allowed that a man could write a "certificate of divorce" (Deut. 24.1-4), but we must be careful to note that this certificate, allowed "for your hardness of heart" (Mtt. 19.8), is not an endorsement of divorce, but a recognition that in the patriarchal society of ancient Israel a wife who was put aside by her husband needed protection, and could have no protection except to the extent that she was deemed dismissed from the marriage by her husband.

Jesus recognizes that divorce might take place in the case of adultery (Mtt. 5.31-32; 19.9), but in recognizing this He is restricting the debate between two schools in rabbinic thought over whether a man could divorce his wife for something short of adultery. In other words, Jesus sets straight the record of what Moses taught, but this is not the same thing as saying that Jesus endorses divorce in the case of adultery. In all three synoptic Gospels, Jesus teaches that divorce is impermissible. It is only in Matthew that we have a record that the Pharisees who question Jesus would not let it go at that. They pressed the issue, to try to drive a wedge between Jesus and Moses, or between the rabbinic schools of interpretation, but Jesus would not play that game, and so simply noted that Moses had allowed for a certificate of divorce.

Paul allows for divorce in the case of permanent abandonment (1. Cor. 7.15), but this "Pauline privilege" appears to do no more than to recognize that a valid marriage did not exist in the first place, for permanent abandonment evinces that the intent necessary in the vows made in marriage was lacking, and that absent a valid vow there is no valid marriage.

The "hardness of heart" from which Moses sought to provide protection, and which Jesus recognized as a societal ill, is described explicitly at Malachi 2.10-16. In this passage the LORD speaks by the prophet to make it clear that the people have profaned their covenant with Him, and that it is because of the rupture in this bond that there are ruptures in the marriage bonds which it is *His* intent to uphold. The LORD enjoins at Mal. 2.16, "For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel ... So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless." When we break faith with one another, we break faith with God (Mal. 2.10). The people profaned the covenant

and were faithless to the LORD, when they turned to foreign gods (2.11-12), and this faithlessness is manifested in faithlessness in marriage (2.13-16). In other words, we are reminded that our vows to our spouses are vows made to God.

a) *What about remarriage?*

Scripture does not recognize remarriage as valid even in those cases where a certificate of divorce is allowed. This means that one who remarries is considered to be an adulterer. This is one of those “hard sayings” of Scripture, and the Church has sought to emphasize the love of God through pastoral office by making remarriage acceptable under the following conditions:

i) The Church recognizes that a divorce may represent the underlying fact that there was never a valid marriage in the first place. If there was a fundamental defect in intent in the vow made by one partner, then the marriage bond was never effected. For example, if one partner never understood or intended that marriage would be exclusive and lifelong, he or she may be deemed to have not given a valid consent to marriage, and to have given a valid vow. Therefore, the marriage never took place, and the divorce merely recognized the lack of a bond. Remarriage is therefore not an issue. This “exception” is recognized in canon law, and procedures exist for the annulment of a marriage.

Remember that the parties to a marriage make their vows “in the Name of God”. This means that if the necessary intent is lacking in the vow, the party who gives an invalid vow is taking the LORD’s Name in vain, in violation of the third commandment, but the damage of this violation flows as well to the partner who is offended against, and the justice requires that this offense not be compounded.

ii) The Church has long recognized that she is a “hospital for sinners” rather than a society of the elect, and that all are sinners. The excommunication of an otherwise faithful believer because of remarriage (*i.e.*, because of what is deemed adultery) has been considered to be unjust in the case where the remarried party has not caused the rupture in the marriage bond. Therefore, if a person seeks to have matrimony solemnized in the Church, he or she must establish to the satisfaction of the bishop that any prior marriage was not dissolved by reason of the applicant’s fault, in which case the bishop can grant permission for a Church wedding. The calculus here is one of intent. Did the person intend to offend (*e.g.*, was the person an adulterer or an abuser), or was he or she the party offended against?

Given the fact that the Church is a hospital for sinners, she recognizes that there will be remarried present who may not fall within the exception described above. Our Lord teaches that “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Mtt. 9.12), and so the Church desires that no person exclude himself or herself from worship because of any sin, but it is still up to each individual to examine his or her conscience to determine whether they should receive Communion, for Paul warns that receiving Communion while in a state of grave sin involves grave danger:

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself ... For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Cor. 11.27-29).

11. *The human person and abortion*

The construct of personhood, under which each individual has individual worth by reason of being a human being, is *not* a development of the “Enlightenment”. It is not an inheritance from ancient philosophy and anthropology. It is a belief which arose specifically in the context of Judaism and Christianity, which teach:

- Each human being is created in the *image and likeness of God* (Gen 1.26).
- Each individual is of *value to God* (Matt. 10.31; Luke 12.7).

Scripture makes clear that each person is created and recognized as such prior to his or her birth. Note the following language found at Ps. 139.12-15:

- 12 For you yourself created my inmost parts; *
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
- 13 I will thank you because I am marvelously made; *
your works are wonderful, and I know it well.
- 14 My body was not hidden from you, *
while I was being made in secret
and woven in the depths of the earth.
- 15 Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb;
all of them were written in your book; *
they were fashioned day by day,
when as yet there was none of them.

Couple this teaching with the account of Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1.39-56). Mary is described as visiting Elizabeth when Elizabeth is six months pregnant with John the Baptizer (Luke 1.36). This follows very soon after the conception of Jesus, and thus when John recognizes Jesus and leaps in his mother’s womb (Luke 1.41) he is responding to the presence of Jesus who is less than three months old. Admittedly, Jesus is an eternal Person of the Godhead, but as we are taught both by Scripture and the ecumenical councils of the Church, He is also fully human. Thus, a human being in the first trimester of gestation, is recognized to be a “person”. This is not the position of the law of this country and many others, under which a child may be aborted in the first trimester of pregnancy without question. In certain circumstances a more-developed child can also be aborted, but even if we restrict our examination to trimester 1, the definition remains clear: As taught by Scripture, a child in the womb is a person, and thus is one created in the image and likeness of God, knit together by God, who knows and values the person. Indeed, where the prayer book translation of Ps. 139.15 speaks of God beholding the “limbs” of the psalmist, the word used in Hebrew is *gōlem*.⁷ This word, which derives from the verb “to roll [something] up into a ball” and is often translated (*e.g.*, in the King James Version) as “substance,” but the meaning in Hebrew is much closer to “embryo,” *i.e.*, undifferentiated tissue. It is this tiny “ball” that Scripture tells of God looking upon as a person, “when as yet there [was no differentiation]”.

Scripture in fact refers to God knowing the individual as a person *prior* to intra-uterine development. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you ...” say the LORD to Jeremiah (Jer. 1.5; *cf.* Job 10.8-12). Regardless of whether

⁷ This word appears *only* in this passage of Ps. 139. The usage is unique in the Bible.

we consider a prophet to somehow represent a “special case,” what is clear is that the deliberate destruction of human life is an offense against God (Gen. 9.5-6) because God has made humankind in His own image.

a) *Is this definition in conflict with science?*

The legal definition of personhood turns essentially on the issue of viability, on whether or not a child can survive outside the mother’s womb. This standard is itself fluid, for modern medicine can support the life of very early pre-term infants in ways that were heretofore impossible. Note, however, that viability and the ability to exercise an independent will are not the same thing at all. Viability is a measure of the ability of a child to live if fed and cared for. A child born alive, capable of life, cannot be denied necessary sustenance absent the one who cares for the child being culpable of homicide, and so “viable” does not include the concept that the person entitled to legal protection is capable of self-actualization.

What about earlier? At what point would science recognize a developing fetus to be a person? Science defines all life with reference to biological differentiation and individuation. An individual is a unique aggregation of genetic material. Human cells have 23 pairs of large linear nuclear chromosomes, (22 pairs of autosomes and one pair of sex chromosomes) giving a total of 46 per cell. In addition to these, human cells have many hundreds of copies of the mitochondrial genome. Sequencing of the human genome has provided a great deal of information about each of the chromosomes, with 32,185 genes containing 3,079,843,747 bases (amino acid molecules) being identified. Any change in any gene on any chromosome, as reflected in changes in the base pairings of billions of molecules, result in a biological being which (who) is a different individual. Thus, even absent any recourse to the concept of a human soul,⁸ as soon as a human egg is fertilized by a human sperm cell, an “individual” exists, and this individual can only be differentiated from any other person with reference to factors which are *external to the person* (e.g., is the individual viable if cared for?) The fertilized zygote is differentiated and unique genetically. It is capable of reproducing itself and cellular growth and differentiation. It’s “design” is complete, and this design is being effected through growth and the differentiation of tissues and structures. In other words, science defines the fertilized zygote as alive and as unique, and no scientific argument can be made that this *gōlem* is not a person. To argue that the *gōlem* is not a person is not a scientific argument because the definition of “person” is not scientific; it is theological.

b) *Utilitarianism*

An adult human being in an irreversible coma consequent to injury, or who by reason of disease is demented to the degree that he or she cannot exercise any individual will, is still considered to be a person legally and scientifically. Care cannot be withdrawn from a comatose patient absent ethical issues, and such a person cannot be deliberately killed legally. The difference with intra-uterine human life thus turns on factors independent of that life. The issue is not scientific; it is moral.

⁸ Theology recognizes life as having two modes of definition. *Bíos* refers to the combination of genetic material and energy that gives rise to species and individuals. *Zoé* refers to life as participation in the life which is given by God independent of biological existence.

We cannot refer to God as our “Maker” and simultaneously argue that there is a point in our creation when we are unknown to the Creator, that we exist as individuals but that we are not persons created by God in His image and likeness. Given the intersection between how an individual is defined by science and what Scripture reveals, it becomes manifestly evident that ethical issues obtain in all considerations of the manipulation of life: abortion (including certain contraceptive practices), stem cell research, genetic engineering of human life, euthanasia and assisted suicide, and suicide. Any destruction or manipulation of a person, regardless of stage of development, logically therefore involves a calculation of *utility*.

Utility involves what we might consider “good” (that is, useful) *to us*, not good (that is, effecting His will) to God.

i) To use the example of abortion: There are very many children conceived the coming of whom is not “good” to the mother. An unwanted child is simply that, unwanted, for any variety of reasons including the socioeconomic, educational, vocational, and psychological status of the mother, and her status within or without a family unit. A child becomes a mouth to feed, options to forgo, evidence of conduct that the mother may wish to conceal. An unwanted child may grow up so subject to social pathologies that he or she becomes a burden on society. (This latter argument is set forth in detail in the 2008 best-seller of Steven D. Levitt and Steven J. Dubner, *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* [see ch. 4, “Where have all the criminals gone?”])

ii) To use the example of euthanasia: There are individuals who are so debilitated by disease, malformation, or morbidity secondary to trauma, that their quality of life is nil as assessed by others. A “vegetable” thus becomes a burden, financially and emotionally, on his or her caregivers and/or society.

Now, let’s go back to those example and pay attention to the operative verbs. The child is not *wanted* by the mother, because of the effects on the *mother’s* life. Her individual will is deemed to be of higher utility, a higher good, than the will of God who is the Maker of the child. The “vegetable” has his her or quality of life determined by *others*, and the lack of utility to his or her life (the burden) is a lack of utility not to the person but to others.

Salvation and the fullness of life in Christ are not determined by any utilitarian calculus. “[T]he word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1.18) Utilitarianism is a calculus made wholly within a human frame-of-reference, but we are called to an eternal frame-of-reference; we are called to participate in the kingdom of heaven. *God invests mortal beings with immortal value.*

b) *Pastoral considerations*

Utilitarian arguments about life, whether these are in the context of abortion, euthanasia, or any other issue which affects the choices made about a person, are arguments made because life is not simple. For example, a pregnant woman considering all of the utilitarian burdens associated with unplanned motherhood is most often in genuine turmoil emotionally. She has limited options and few resources, and few who are willing to help. If she chooses to “terminate her pregnancy” (often as advised by people who want to make sure that “choice” is considered paramount) this may not be a choice made following any real prayerful discernment, and it is a choice which she will always revisit later in life. Decisions which are revisited inflict emotional and spiritual scars that are real, and all Christian believers are called to recognize that even absent formal repentance a person carrying a scar is in need of love as expressed by those around

her/him. Once God forgives a sin it is *gone*, like it never existed (Ps. 103.12), and it is the call of every Christian believer to express God's love to people who face agonizing decisions. This love must be expressed in action, so that if, for example, the decision is taken in light of what it will cost to continue to provide care for a "vegetable," then the Church will support the caregiver in giving care. We are each members of one Body in Christ, and if any member is troubled over what to do, we are each called to do what we can to make sure that options for action are real.

12. *Other bioethical issues*

Having considered at some length the intersection of personhood with the will of God, and how this juncture intersects with a human, utilitarian calculus, we'll pass quickly through remaining bioethical issues. (Our discussion of abortion was necessarily included in the discussion of personhood.)

a) *Human stem cells*: Stem cells are cells capable of differentiating into different types of tissue. The two broad types of mammalian stem cells are: embryonic stem cells that are isolated from the inner cell mass of blastocysts, and adult stem cells that are found in adult tissues. In a developing embryo, stem cells can differentiate into all of the specialized embryonic tissues. In adult organisms, stem cells and progenitor cells act as a repair system for the body, replenishing specialized cells, but also maintain the normal turnover of regenerative organs, such as blood, skin, or intestinal tissues.

In 1998 scientists at the University of Wisconsin succeeded in isolating and culturing human embryonic stem cells. It is thought that embryonic stem cells may be used to allow for new treatments of various degenerative disorders, but to date results have not been good. The ethical issues presented relate to the fact that embryonic stem cells are derived from aborted fetuses, *i.e.*, the use may entail participating in the destruction of a person. Transplanting tissue from a living person who is a knowing and willing donor is a life-giving procedure, and the transplantation of tissue from a dead person who, when alive, has given consent to this, is likewise an act of giving. But a fetus cannot consent to any "transplantation," and we do not destroy living humans in order to "harvest" their organs. Such "harvesting" would constitute a sophisticated form of cannibalism in the case of a living adult. A living fetus is no less a person.

b) *Suicide, assisted suicide, and euthanasia*

In speaking of transplantation we spoke of consent, of an act of the will. Under this calculus, why would suicide, as an expression of the will of the person, present a moral issue? In most cases of suicide the person is suffering from such emotional distress as to render the decision less than informed and willing (and thus the requisite intent necessary for a decision to be sinful is absent), but what about those cases where a decision is truly made knowingly? These are rare, and usually are informed by a higher principle of sacrifice (as in saving others in combat, or in martyrdom). Willingly facing certain death in order to serve God is no sin at all, but a form of blessedness, and this service may include dying to serve others (Rom. 5.7).

Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering or torture can diminish the gravity of the sin of suicide, but suicide itself remains a grave sin, for it ignores the fact that our person has been created in God's image and likeness and is dear to Him. Our lives

are not our own; they are God's, and to deny our lives is to deny God. Assisted suicide most often does involve grave fear of suffering, but not on the part of the assistant!

Properly speaking euthanasia must be distinguished from assisted suicide. The latter involves the expression of will of the person who is to die; the former is a much more utilitarian decision taken with reference to the "usefulness" of a person's life and his or her "quality of life". Scripture teaches that God alone sets the number of our days (Job 14.6), and for any one of us to decide the number of days for another violates not only God's prohibition against killing (Exod. 20.13; Deut. 5.17), but involves the human pride which says that we, not God, control life (and control it to suit our own utilitarian purposes, not God's will).

c) *Genetic engineering and human cloning*

The technologies of genetic engineering are morally neutral. The question is to what ends these technologies are applied? If gene insertion and/or splicing is used to correct a defect (*e.g.*, the deletion of a sequence of a chromosome, that would lead to serious disease), a moral issue is not presented. God has given us science, medicines, and the knowledge to use them (Sir. 38.1-8) in a fallen creation. But, once we start trying to "improve" life through active genetic eugenics, we are substituting our will for God's. This is manifestly the case in human cloning. We must always remember that life, that a child, is a gift of God, not any kind of right or thing "owed" to anyone. If we inject ourselves into the equation of creation by acting to artificially produce a cloned person, this is a grave offense against the dignity of God; it is manifestly proud, for it does not recognize that a person is created in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1.26) but seeks to create a person as an act of will of a human creator (*i.e.*, in that human's "image," even if the clone is of another person).

13. *Crime and Capital Punishment*

The scriptural proscriptions against crime include the Decalogue's commandments not to kill, not to steal, and not to bear false witness (Exod. 20.13, 15-16). At the most basic level, these commandments cover the criminal intent and actions which inhere in the *mens rea* (or "guilty mind") of criminality: harm against the *person* directly; harm against the person indirectly by misappropriation of his or her *property*; and harm against the *spirit* of truth by which justice may be given and reputation and honor maintained between persons. These three harms can be seen to be the opposite from the norm established in the Great Commandment:

The first [commandment] is, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12.29-31; *cf.* Mtt. 22.34-40; Luke 10.25-28).

In other words, Jesus makes clear that we are to refrain from harming each other; we have a positive duty of care for each other. Notice also that an element of idolatry is present in *mens rea*, for if I value something (*i.e.*, my own "good" as defined by me to include advantage over others, and possession of things) above God's will, then I have made an idol out of whatever I value (*e.g.*, the money which I obtained without warrant, or the way in which I have used another

human person). The scriptural norms about crime do list proscriptions (“Thou shalt not ...”), but it is important to remember that these describe what fall outside of God’s will. When we look at God’s will, this involves positive duties, and we recite this duty in our baptismal covenant, in which we promise to “respect the dignity of every human being” (BCP 305).

a) *Killing*

Not all killing violates the Fifth Commandment. As we discussed in our last session, God invests the life of each individual with immortal value, having created each person in His image and likeness (Gen. 1.26). The value of this creation is made clear at Gen. 9.5-6, in which a “reckoning” is required for the shedding of the lifeblood of a human. (Blood is considered a sacred sign of life, Lev. 17.14.) Jesus teaches against personal vengeance in the Sermon on the Mount (at Mtt. 5. 21-22 and 43-48), but the power of the state to maintain order and to avenge crime is also a scriptural norm (Rom. 13.1-6). In other words, we need to be careful about what we mean in speaking of killing. The word used in Hebrew at Exod. 20.13 (*cf.* Deut. 5.17) is *ratsah*, better translated as “murder”. Of the many examples of offenses for which the Law prescribed capital punishment only one, *ratsah*, could not be commuted by the payment of a life ransom (Num. 35.31). All other offenses could be atoned for by payment, but not deliberate, premeditated murder, in the case of which God demanded an accounting (Gen. 9.5-6).

Where does this leave us? In the case of self-defense of the person and of a society, the *intent* for *mens rea* is lacking, for the intent is for preservation of the self, not for the killing of another. Indeed, the defense of others who are otherwise defenseless may itself constitute a grave duty. Absent such intent the intentional killing of another human constitutes a grave sin which cannot be justified even to promote an otherwise good end.

b) *Capital punishment*

Exodus 21.12-14 prescribes capital punishment for deliberate, premeditated murder. This punishment is that of the government, it is not the personal vengeance that Jesus addresses at Mtt. 5.21-22 and 43-48. The fact that this is a government duty is also made clear by Paul’s reference to the “sword” of the sovereign at Rom. 13.14. Capital punishment is considered a form of self-defense, but also an accounting to God for lifeblood, as demanded at Gen. 9.5-6. Jesus does teach mercy, but His teaching at Mtt. 5 does not abrogate the fact that God does not consider any human life to be worthless, and He will require a reckoning.

c) *Stealing*

The prohibition of stealing is straightforward, and stealing always includes an element of idolatry. However, the issue of intent must always be examined. For example, a person who is starving, who steals necessary food, has no intent to wrongfully deprive another of what is his, except to the extent that he steals from one who will by reason of the theft himself starve. Stealing in other cases, of anything that is not absolutely a necessity for life, cannot be justified under any scriptural calculus. This includes withholding something from its rightful owner who otherwise does not know of its existence (and this includes the payment of just taxes, Rom. 13.7). The necessary intent involves harm to another through harm to his interests, and Jesus blesses the positive duty to make reparation (Luke 19.8).

14. *Substance Abuse*

Substance abuse may include the abuse of alcohol and legally prescribed medicines, and the use of illegal drugs. In all cases of substance abuse moral responsibility is diminished but not eliminated. Responsibility is diminished because substance abuse always involves a psychological component and most often involves a physical component. A person may be dependent on a drug in the sense of not being able to function without the drug. This dependence may be psychological and may be physical. Physical dependence may arise to a level in which withdrawal of the substance (*e.g.*, benzodiazapines, barbiturates, and alcohol) may lead to severe debility and death. In cases of physical dependence, therefore, the moral responsibility for continued use is very much diminished.

The distinction between dependence and addiction is behavioral. Dependence describes the inability of the person to function absent the substance. Addiction describes drug-seeking behavior (*e.g.*, stealing or lying to obtain a drug). This behavior almost always involves moral fault, but with diminished responsibility. But what about the moral responsibility for being dependent in the first place? Is this an issue?

The abuse of alcohol or a legitimately prescribed medicine is a form of gluttony, which itself is an exaltation of the self. We are called to always remember that we are not our own, but God's, and our bodies are God's temple in which His Spirit dwells (1 Cor. 3.16-17), each a member of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12.12), joined together into one holy temple (Eph. 2.21).

Prov. 23.29-35 warns against the excessive consumption of alcohol. Scripture does not condemn the consumption of alcohol (indeed, Jesus provides wine in his first sign at the wedding in Cana described at John 2.1-11), but warns that we are to avoid excess consumption, because we know the consequences of excess consumption. The question is one of intent. If I drink a glass or two of wine with a meal, and from experience I know that this amount of alcohol will not disable me, the act is morally neutral. If I know, however, that I will afterward drive an automobile, I might limit my consumption further, because I know that even an amount of alcohol that is not disabling will have some effect on my reaction times, and if my driving is impaired through my own action then any harm resulting from my driving is something for which I will be culpable.

If my intention in drinking is to become drunk, then my intention is itself morally corrupt, for intoxication is a form of gluttony. This is the issue with illegal drugs, and with the abuse of prescribed medicines (such as tranquilizers) for the purpose of altering mood and inducing euphoria. If I smoke a marijuana cigarette, my only purpose is to change my mental status. The change in status is intentional, and the intent is contrary to our call to seek those things that are above, and to put off what is earthly within us (Col. 3.1-5). A mind which is set on physical pleasure is one which is not set on God (Rom. 8.5-8). We are to walk by the Spirit and not by bodily appetites (Gal. 5.16-25).

15. *Civil Disobedience*

At our last session we considered issues of crime and capital punishment, and this discussion by its very nature recalled our session on 14 November, in which we considered the conflicts between utilitarian arguments made in favor of taking life (*e.g.*, in abortion, assisted suicide, and euthanasia) and the definition of the human person; of each individual being created in the image

and likeness of God; of each mortal life being invested by God with immortal value. This conflict will be something we need to examine again when we look at issues of war and peace (*infra*), but before we get there we need to first address another apparent conflict, *i.e.*, between our duty to “... be subject to the governing authorities ... [who have been] instituted by God ...” (Rom 13.1), and the *moral* boundaries of such obedience. If we are to “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mtt. 22.21; Mark 12.17; Luke 20.25), how do we define the limits of what are Caesar’s, and when we do define these limits, what are we called to do?

a) *Justice*

The biblical concept of justice is different from our contemporary concept. In our society, justice is enforced by the people in a particular polity. It is enforced by institutions applying laws which have been consented to by the people. In the Bible, justice is dispensed, and it is dispensed by the king (*see, e.g.*, Ps. 72.1-4). The king as dispenser of justice ensures that God’s will is effected; that like cases will be treated alike, reflecting the command to love neighbor as self (Lev. 19.18). The corollary to this understanding (and to Paul’s understanding that rulers have been “instituted by God”) is that when the ruler does not dispense justice, but acts in a wicked, self-serving way, he is to be seen as not acting for God.

Where does this leave us in a modern context, in which we are governed by laws consented to by ourselves, and by authorities elected by ourselves? The question still obtains: regardless that a sovereign government has acquired power by legitimate means, does this sovereign (do these laws) effect or contravene God’s will, and to the extent that the sovereign’s actions are opposed to God, is a Christian: (a) morally bound to obey the authorities (or to passively acquiesce to the actions complained of)?, or (b) morally bound to actively oppose the authorities?

At Romans 13.3 Paul reasons that one is to obey the sovereign because “... rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad,” and goes on to argue that obeying the government includes a positive duty to pay taxes. Paul argues this knowing the Roman world of the Augustan Principate (the reign of a single emperor under the fiction that he reigns with the consent of the senate). Paul does not develop his argument on this point in detail. For example, is the payment of taxes required when one knows that taxes support gladiatorial contests in which human beings will be killed? (Paul writes prior to the active persecution of Christians by the Roman government.) We need to be careful about taking Paul at face value, because his argument is directed elsewhere. Rulers will in fact *become* “a terror to good conduct” quickly after the writing of Romans, when the emperor begins his persecution of Christian believers who are blameless in conduct.

Despite the reservations just expressed about what Paul intended in his argument, his language is broad and unqualified, and he wrote during the reign of Nero! Couple this with the fact that Peter, writing during the reign of Caligula, instructs, “Be subject *for the Lord’s sake* to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right” (1 Pet. 2.13-14). If ever a case could be made that rulers were insane despots, Nero and Caligula would be at the top of the list with such monsters as Hitler and Stalin, and after Paul and Peter wrote other emperors would punish as “those who do wrong” Christians for failure to sacrifice to the emperor as divine (*i.e.*, for failing to fall into the sin of apostasy).

Perhaps the phrase italicized above gives us a hint of a principle of response. When one is subject to the ruler, even if or perhaps especially if the ruler is unjust, this obedience is to be offered for the Lord's sake, *i.e.*, as sharing in the suffering of Jesus who was condemned not only by religious but also by civil authorities. At Jer. 29.7 the prophet (speaking for God) advises those who have been taken captive to Babylon, "... seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." In other words, bearing the burden of ill rule can be bearing the burden for the sake of God's plan, for the sake of trusting in His providence.

This all sounds quite fatalistic. What guidance do we have about when disobeying the ruler may be what God requires?

b) *The imperative to act*

Our duty to God comes first (Deut. 6.4; Mark 12.29-30), and to place the ruler above God is to violate the first commandment (Exod. 20.2-3). Our duty to God is expressed in our duty to our neighbor (Lev. 19.18; Mark 12.31). If, therefore, the requirements of the sovereign contravene our duties to God and neighbor, we must question the morality of obeying the sovereign and may be compelled not only not to act, but to actively resist acting.

Classically, two broad philosophies of justice exist: natural law and positivism. Greatly over-simplified, the natural law theory posits that a moral code exists by virtue of the creative action of God, and that due to our faculty of reason we recognize this moral order. This position is biblical, Paul noting that even Gentiles who do not know the law have the law "written on their hearts" (Rom. 2.14-15). The positivist position argues that law exists *only* by reason of the sovereign (*e.g.*, the king, the state, the people gathered) and that there is no natural order. Speaking more practically, most political systems function using an underlying assumption that laws as applied are based in the authority of the sovereign, but that they must reflect the natural law, *i.e.*, that the moral order is the ultimate "sovereign".

c) *Biblical examples of civil disobedience*

At Exod. 1.15-21 the Hebrew midwives are described as having a greater regard for God and for the lives of the Hebrew male babies than for Pharaoh's command that the infants are to be killed. At Josh. 2.1-14 the harlot Rahab of Jericho fears the LORD more than she fears the king of Jericho, and so hides the Israelite spies. Finally, in Daniel 3 the Jewish exiles Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow down as Nebuchadnezzar has commanded. In each of these examples, God blesses the actions taken because they are taken to fulfill His purpose and display a greater regard for Him. This blessing reflects the natural law principles that a moral action must have a good object, a good intention (the end in view), and must be made with secondary regard to the circumstances of the decision to act. A salient example of this kind of disobedience is found at Acts 4.1-22, where in order to proclaim the Gospel (the object) the disciples disobey the authorities (they have the intention that the Gospel will be proclaimed) despite the circumstances. The disciples are prompted specifically by the Holy Spirit (Acts 4.8), but when we are compelled by conscience to act we do well to consider that the Holy Spirit is working in us, and that "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (James 4.17).

In order that a law may be resisted, it must be clearly unjust and unbiblical. Resistance just because we might disagree with a law is not justified, and even where resistance is allowable every ordinary means must be employed to attempt to change the law. Resistance of the sovereign is a last resort, and where resistance is called for believers must be prepared to pay the penalty for resisting (*i.e.*, to be “subject for the Lord’s sake,” 1 Pet. 2.13). Resistance must be motivated by love and carried out in humility. Anger is not a sufficient reason or action, and even when resistance is justified this does not grant license to disrupt peaceable society, *i.e.*, resistance is justified only when there is a reasonable prospect for success.

17. War and Peace

The principles we just discussed, of the existence of a clear injustice, of the exhaustion of normal means of resistance (intervention), and of actions undertaken as a last resort and without anger, all apply to the definition of a “just war”. A just war calculus is one of three positions that can be taken citing biblical authority. The just war position is known as “Selectivism,” under which a Christian may fight in a war when the war itself can be seen to be undertaken under the necessary principles. The other two positions are Activism, which holds that believers are to support military actions because these are undertaken at the direction of the sovereign (Rom. 13.1-7), and Pacifism, which holds that the way of Jesus is by definition non-violent (Matt. 5.39 and 5.44).

In the Old Testament it is made clear that whoever sheds the blood of another human being shall have his own blood shed in restitution to God (Gen. 9.6), but we are also taught that we shall not kill (murder) (Exod. 20.13). In other words, not every killing is murder, the *ratsah* prohibited. This begs the question: when may deadly force be used? Chs. 19-21 of Deuteronomy describe the law regarding killing and the conduct of war. The people may (indeed must) conduct war as commanded by God for His own ends. This begs the question of how to identify these ends.

Formally, the just war doctrine was formulated by St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), following St. Augustine of Hippo’s (354-430) arguments from Romans 13.1-7. Seven principles are identified, five on the question of whether it is justified to begin a war (*jus ad bellum*) and two on the principles of the conduct of war (*jus in bello*). These principles are:

- a) *A just cause*: Aggression is to be totally rejected. Participation in warfare is justified only if there is a just cause (a morally good object).
- b) *A just intention*: Revenge and conquest are impermissible. The intention of warfare must be to secure peace.
- c) *A last resort*: Offers of peace and efforts of diplomacy must be employed. Non-violent methods of persuasion (*e.g.*, economic measures) must be exhausted.
- d) *Formal declaration*: A sneak attack is rejected.
- e) *Limited objectives*: Destruction of another nation or power is not a moral end. War must be waged only to secure peace.
- f) *Proportionate means*: The types of weapons and the amount of force used must be limited to those necessary to quell the aggression and secure the peace.
- g) *Noncombatant immunity*: Only legitimate military targets (the forces of the opposing government) may be attacked. Noncombatants are to be immune from attack.

17. *Stewardship of possessions*

The love of neighbor as self necessarily reflects love for God and reflects the self-giving love of the Lord, who "... though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8.9). God is the creator and proprietor of everything in heaven and on earth (Ps. 24.1). Materials good are not, therefore, bad. Everything made by Him in the created order God pronounced "good" (Gen. 1).

Recognizing that material possessions present no moral issue of themselves, the question becomes, to what end are these possessions acquired and maintained? How are they used? As reflected in the denunciations of the prophet Amos against those trading human needs for material possessions (Amos 2.6) and extorting tribute from the poor while living in luxury (Amos 5.11), how wealth is acquired and used matters, and the fact that a person may have great possessions can place him or her in danger of pride, in danger of trusting in themselves rather than in God (Prov. 28.11).

Whenever we trust in wealth more than in God we both dishonor God and deceive ourselves (Job 31.24-28; Prov. 11.28; 1 Tim. 6.17-18). Trusting in wealth gives a false sense of security (Mtt. 13.22; Mark 4.19), in which our lives are built on an unstable foundation (Prov. 23.4-5). Placing wealth first is to steal from God (Mal. 3.8) and from our fellow men (1 John 3.17), and each form of stealing denies the order of creation.

At Deuteronomy 8.1-20 Moses, speaking for the LORD, gives a lengthy warning against forgetting God by reason of focusing on prosperity. "Take heed, lest you forget the LORD your God [when you enjoy material blessings]" (vv. 11-14). This begs the question: What does it mean to forget God by virtue of trusting in our wealth? It means that we forget that in the order of creation God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind, to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits (Gen. 1.26-29). The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race. This is not to say that all property must be held in common. Property acquired or received in a just manner is intended to provide each person with his basic needs and the needs of those in his care, and this provision for needs is intended to promote a natural solidarity between persons. The recognition of private property does not negate that the whole of the earth is a gift to all mankind, and the commandment ("You shall not steal," Exod. 20.15; Deut. 5.19; Mtt. 19.18) prohibits the usurpation of the property of another, *i.e.*, it recognizes a legitimate ownership interest.

Human work proceeds from persons created in the image and likeness of God and called to participate in the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another (Gen. 1.28). Work is, therefore, a duty. "If any one will not work, let him not eat" (2 Thess. 3.10; *cf.* 1 Thess. 4.11). Work honors the gifts of God and the talents and blessings received from Him. Work that is performed for another person requires a legitimate wage, and to refuse or withhold just earnings constitutes a grave injustice (Lev. 19.13; Deut. 24.14-15; Jas. 5.4) as a form of stealing.

a) *Tithes*

Recognizing that we are stewards of creation, what offerings are we to make to God? Firstly, we are to acknowledge that possessions—even private possessions—are held for the common good and the promotion of common solidarity between all persons. Treating material goods as held in stewardship is itself an offering to God, an offering of praise and thanksgiving. But there is a

material offering to be made as well. The biblical standard of an offering made to God in support of His Church is the tithe, the tenth part of the fruits of the land and the fruits of labor. This offering is first mentioned at Gen. 14.20, but the offering is not there explained, from which we may conclude that even as long ago as Abram's offering to the royal priest Melchizedek the institution of the tithe offering was understood, and, indeed, when Jacob is vouchsafed a vision at Bethel he offers a tenth of his income to God (Gen. 28.22). The offering of a tenth of the fruits of the earth and labor is commanded at Lev. 27.30 and Deut. 14.22, and these offerings to God are made over by God to the support of His sacred ministers. "To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel [says the LORD]" (Num. 18.21).

The New Testament has very little to say about offerings. At 1 Cor. 9.13 Paul makes clear that those who serve the altar are to live by the offerings made to God, from which we learn that the institution of the tithe as commanded in the Old Testament was recognized and carried over into the Church. What about taxes? Is the tenth portion before or after the payment of taxes? The Bible does not make this clear, except that tithes preceded the institution of the monarchy (and thus of taxes) and Jesus makes clear that we are to "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mtt. 22.21; Mark 12.17; Luke 20.25). The tithe is specified as God's, and so it is reasonable to conclude that this offering is made without regard to taxes.

18. *Stewardship of the environment*

As we have seen in examining economic activity, productive work involves the legitimate and intended use of the gifts of God's creation. As we often say at the offering of tithes in public worship, "All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee." Scripture makes clear that we are to subdue and govern the earth, but this does not involve the destruction of nature through wanton consumption. We need to be careful here. Much of the "Green" movement is redolent of an alternate faith, of pantheism (the belief that the divine is comprised of all things) and panentheism (the belief that the divine is in all things). Creation, "nature" becomes an idol. Thus, arguments which have been made to the effect that people (who are created in God's image and likeness) may be permitted to suffer for the sake of the preservation of a given environment from proper stewardship value "nature" above the value God has invested in humanity. Arguments made that crops cannot be enhanced through the use of recombinant DNA technology to develop better-yielding or drought resistant plant varieties ignore that plant varieties have been "genetically modified" from the beginning of cultivation by humans. Current technology involves the manipulation of recombinant DNA sequences. Historical technology involved and involves cross-breeding and hybridization (*e.g.*, by grafting), and all these techniques embody the grant of stewardship over the earth given by God to humans. Humans have been placed by God in creation "to till it and to keep it" (Gen. 2.15).

"Tilling and keeping" does not, however, include abusing. It does not include plunder. The Hebrew word used for taking care of creation, *shamar*, means "to guard, to keep, to preserve". Creation is God's, and following the flood He made a covenant not just with mankind but with *all* creation (Gen. 9.6). Thus, God's care extends to all. He not only created, He *creates*. He sustains the world by His "word of power" (Heb. 1.3). "[I]n [God] all things hold together" (Col. 1.17). Stewardship of the environment was described in how the Israelites were to live under the law. A direct connection was made between the people's obedience to God's commands about exercising proper stewardship of the land and the blessing that would come to

the people and the land (Lev. 25.1-12). For example, the Israelites were to conserve the trees of the land (Deut. 20.19-20), bury their human waste (Deut. 23.13), treat their domesticated animals generously (Deut. 25.4), and respect wild animals (Deut. 22.6). Mankind is given mastery over the “works of [God’s] hands” (Ps. 8.7), but this involves recognition that this mastery is to reflect the exaltation of God’s Name (Ps. 8.1, 10). Whenever we abuse the environment we: a) Do not live as one’s called to love our neighbors as ourselves; and b) We treat the environment as our *possession*, not as God’s bounty over which we are to serve as stewards. God will demand an accounting of stewards (Luke 12.42-48).

a) *Animal “rights”*

Animals are God’s creatures, and He surrounds them with His providential care (Mtt. 10.29; Lk. 12.6). By their existence animals bless and give glory to God (*Pr. Azah. 57-59*;⁹ Mtt. 6.26). God has given humans stewardship and mastery over plants and animals (Gen. 2.19-20; 9.1-4). Therefore, it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to provide humans with help in work and companionship in leisure. Medical and scientific experiments may involve the use of animals, provided such experiments are intended and designed to avoid any unnecessary pain and suffering, and are intended to benefit the care and preservation of life (animal and human). One can love animals, but they are not to be valued above human necessities. (This would include spending money on animals that should provide relief to human suffering.) They are to be loved as God’s creation but not afforded the love which is to be given to humans, for humans have been created in God’s image and likeness. Animals are not intended by God for eternal life; humans are, and God has invested our mortality with immortal value (John 3.16).

God’s law accords a status to animals as a part of creation. Thus, they are even afforded a sabbath rest (Exod. 20.10), and God’s mercy is extended to the cattle as well as the people of Nineveh (Jon. 4.11). An animal which has fallen under its load is to be raised to its feet, even if the animal belongs to an enemy (Exod. 23.12; Deut. 22.4). Even the sabbath law may be broken to rescue a trapped animal (Luke 14.5). These actions flow from God’s love of creation, but this is not the same thing as to argue that animals have “rights”. In the intended order of creation, as shall be seen at the coming of the kingdom of heaven, all suffering shall cease, including that of animals (Isa. 11.6-9). The “peaceable kingdom” described by Isaiah flows from the righteous conduct of the Messiah (Isa. 11.1-5). This kingdom reflects God’s intention, His plan. We are to honor and may love animals as reflecting God’s providence, but to invest them with rights is to invest mortal creatures with the immortal value that God has invested in humans, *i.e.*, it is not a part of God’s will.

19. Review

1. An ethical choice involves how we treat our fellow human beings.
 - a. How we treat our neighbor is dependent upon our relationship with God, and our relationship with God is expressed in how we treat our neighbor.

⁹ *The Prayer of Azariah and The Song of the Three Young Men* is part of the apocrypha. In the Septuagint canon of the Old Testament, this book is an addition to ch. 3 of Daniel, and the verses cited may also be cited as Dan. 3.79-81. *The Song of the Three Young Men* is included as canticle 1 (BCP 47) and 12 (BCP 88) in Morning Prayer.

2. Primary guidance in ethical decision-making is found in Scripture. Reason and Tradition allow us to better interpret Scripture, but do not provide ethical guidance.
3. Ethical conduct reflects and is reflected in divine judgment. Sinful conduct is a provocation of God, but also reflects that God's judgment involves the sinner being abandoned to his/her own wrong choices.
 - a. We must make decisions with an expectation of judgment. We can never know when judgment will come.
 - i. We are called to transformation in faith.
 - b. We make a strong distinction between the present and the future. As reflected in biblical Hebrew, God does not.
4. The Great Commandment (*e.g.*, Mark 12.29-31) makes clear that our relationships with God and each other cannot be separated.
 - a. We are to live as people covenanted with God and each other.
 - b. As covenanted people, we are to choose the kingdom offered to us by God.
 - i. This involves recognizing a positive duty of regard and care for others.
 - ii. Each person is valued by God, and we are to value each individual as well.

a) *The Human Person*

The concept of "person," of an individual having individual self-worth, and not being defined solely by gender, race, class, nationality, language, etc. is a belief which arose specifically in the context of Judaism and Christianity. The Bible makes clear that each human being is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1.26) and that each individual is of value to God (Matt. 10.31; Luke 12.7). This is not the way of the world, either in the ancient world or today. To the extent that modern and postmodern thinkers claim that faith leads to intolerance, their thinking is contrary to the evidence that the most repressive regimes in history (National Socialism and Soviet Communism) have been militantly secular, valuing the "people" or the "revolution" over the "person". The Bible makes clear even in the context of the community defined as Israel and/or the Church, God values the person, and we are to do the same.

b) *A new mindset*

At Phil. 4.4-9, Paul writes:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.

1. Jesus enjoins that we are to rejoice, for our “names are written in heaven” (Luke 10.21).
2. Restraint of self connotes self-giving. Our respect for others reflects our respect for God.
3. Do not allow the worries of the world to strangle you. Trust in God.
4. God will provide.
5. Applications flow from a spiritual state in which God is first, others second, and ourselves last, a state in which we do, indeed, take up our cross to follow our Lord.
6. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14.6). When we are Christ-centered we fill ourselves with truth.
7. By seeking what is higher we are raised above what is base.
8. Clear ethical guidance is given to us in Scripture.
9. We are to focus on what is clear in nature and transparent in purpose, that our character may not be stained.
10. God has given us beauty, and we are to “Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Ps. 96.9).
11. When we focus on the six ethical injunctions just given, we find excellence and what worthy of praise. Filling our minds and hearts with these things honors God and armors us against what is base (Eph.6.10-20).

20. *The “alternative”:* *Self-referential ethical thinking and Materialism*

Ideas have consequences. The evils seen in Nazism and Soviet Communism were committed in the name of ideas, of “truths” that people believed in. So we need to pay attention to the ideas that underpin an ethical sensibility in which a human frame-of-reference is the only frame-of-reference. The ideas which underpin this form of self-reference can be described in a global sense as “Materialism”.

Materialist thinking is not about greedy consumerism. Such consumption is just a symptom of Materialism, a philosophy which arose principally in the so-called Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.¹⁰ Materialism refers to the view that all entities and processes are composed of (or are reducible to) matter, material forces or physical processes. Materialism entails the denial of the reality of spiritual beings, consciousness and mental or psychic states or processes, as ontologically distinct¹¹ from, or independent of, material changes or processes. The universe of the materialist is one in which everything, including persons, is completely reducible to physics and chemistry. Human beings are nothing more than a complicated collection of molecules thrown together by a universe that is itself nothing more than a great impersonal machine. Not surprisingly, materialism is often associated with atheism (the belief that there is no God) or agnosticism (the belief that we cannot know if God exists).

¹⁰ The Enlightenment is often referred to as the “Age of Reason”. As will become clear, Enlightenment thinking involves a very real rejection of Reason as participatory knowledge of the natural order of creation.

¹¹ That is, distinct in terms of being and substance.

a) *Materialistic Determinism*

Materialistic determinism is the view that everything, including human actions, is pre-determined by physical forces. Persons are nothing more than complicated machines, programmed by the laws of nature, and all personal desires, thoughts and aspirations (and anything which gives us a sense of significance), are really just the result of an impersonal chain of cause and effect which could never be otherwise.

Having convinced themselves that there was nothing to deify in the metaphysical dimension, the eighteenth-century humanists¹² began implicitly to deify the physical realm. (Remember that danger of pantheism?) “Nature” became a point of moral reference. Nature effectively became the resident god. In parody of the rejected Bible, it became customary for 18th century intellectuals to refer to “the book of Nature.” Rather than turning to the words of the apostles and prophets, one turned to what was empirically verifiable in “Nature’s book.” There thus began to be a lot of talk about “natural religion” as opposed to revealed religion.

The net result of the confluence of the ideas of Materialism, Materialistic Determinism, and Nature was a sexual revolution. It was a natural progression of ideas to move from a mechanistic view of man to formulating an entirely mechanistic theory of moral values. In a determinist’s world, everything we do must be natural because everything we do is the inevitable result of mechanical forces beyond our control (*i.e.*, there is no such thing as free will, and therefore there is no such thing as moral responsibility). “Morality” becomes a set of social conventions lacking any transcendent significance. (Note how the sexual revolutionists of our own day argue that biblical proscriptions against immoral sexual conduct are part of a “holiness code” of a society that no longer exists.)

In the Materialist worldview human beings, along with everything else, are assumed to be all material. We “think with our bodies,” and behavior results purely from external contingencies, not from any supposed sense of moral value. The person simply acts as the prior contingencies have programmed him or her to act. Moral categories, therefore, are superfluous in understanding human behavior. Those who hold to a materialistic/deterministic worldview must eventually conclude that a morality is a delusion.

b) *Postmodernism*

The necessary moral corollary to a Materialist worldview is strict utilitarianism. Any distinction between “right” and “wrong” must be utilitarian only (*Does this benefit me?*); *i.e.*, what is “right” is defined as what the exercise of the will requires,¹³ or that what is “right” is what is “natural”. The current development of this worldview is what is called Postmodernism, in which there is no such thing as objective truth, objective reality, or revelation. “Truth” and “reality” are constructs that are experienced.¹⁴ “Truth” and “reality” are always in quotation marks, because they are just subjective experience. There’s my “truth” and yours, but there is no objective standard against which to judge them.

¹² *E.g.*, Thomas Hobbes, Julien Offroy de La Mettrie, Denis Diderot during the Enlightenment age. A contemporary parallel can be found in the thinking of the co-discoverer of DNA, Sir Francis Crick.

¹³ This isn’t really a corollary, because a strict Materialist would deny the existence and exercise of will.

¹⁴ Think of the *Matrix* series of films from the Wachowski brothers.

We may well ask, “How is this ‘liberating’? How is faith a ‘straightjacket’?” Recall that our Lord Himself taught that when we continue in His word we will know the truth, and “... the truth will make you free” (John 8.32). He also, of course, revealed that He *is* the Truth (no quotation marks) (John 14.6). The Materialist/Postmodern worldview, far from being liberating, is imprisoning. It imprisons its adherents in a determinism of matter and material forces, denying human will. This worldview is also not one of Reason. To make reality subjective, to make truth subjective, to define reason in functional terms only (as in how cognition works), is to define existence itself as a function of the random conditions of a wholly material universe. This is not “reason” in the sense of any participatory knowledge; it is “acquisatory” or acquiring knowledge, in which what is not useful to the individual is rejected. In other words, philosophy and psychiatry here meet in diagnosis.¹⁵ Just as the loss of intact reality testing is the hallmark of a psychotic break, the exercise of pure “reason” without reference to external testing is a form of philosophical madness. An epistemology which recognizes no truth outside of self-reference is not a philosophy of truth, and absent a philosophy of truth there can be no real moral reasoning; hence, the literally crazy lack of clear moral thought and conduct in much of our society. As recognized as long ago by the apostle Paul:

They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God’s decree that those who deserve such things deserve to die, *they not only do them but approve those who practice them* (Rom. 1.29–32, *emphasis supplied*).

Clear moral reasoning and conduct, as determined by the will to obey God’s commandments, represent not only what we are called to do, but the alternative to the insanity of a society in which the magnet of self causes the compass needle of ethical “reasoning” to spin and never to rest.

21. *Community, Cross, New Creation*

The Postmodern worldview involves an atomistic frame-of-reference, and a frame-of-reference which is by definition individual is by definition relativistic. “Moral” actions are calculated actions, and morality itself is defined to be a societal construct. But, note an important distinction: There is a difference between *social* interaction and *societal* interaction. A social interaction is no more and no less than how I relate to other people. A societal interaction is defined with reference to how a society is defined, and thus with reference to the norms of behavior accepted within the society. A society will therefore consider its norms (when they are considered) to be the result of human collective will, but in the experience of faith we each know that the acceptable norms of behavior are experienced independently of collective human will. For example, Heinrich Himmler, the monster who headed the S.S. in Nazi Germany, complained to his most ardent Nazi followers:

¹⁵ In psychiatry a key finding in support of a diagnosis of psychosis is that “reality testing” is not intact. A man may believe himself to be Napoleon Bonaparte in his own mind, but this does not make him Napoleon!

“The Jewish people is to be exterminated,” says every part member. “That’s clear, it’s part of our program, elimination of the Jews, extermination, right, we’ll do it?” And then they all come along, the eighty million good Germans, and each one has his decent Jew. Of course the others are swine, but this one is a first-class Jew.¹⁶

In other words, Himmler complained that in a society in which extermination of other human beings was accepted as a societal norm, as something “good” (useful), there were competing norms of human behavior that were based on *social* interaction, on the human knowledge of one for another. This norm of concern for the other (even when the concern is not reciprocal), of an unconditioned basic knowledge of some things being right and some things being wrong, is the fundamental norm of how humans are humans; it is the foundation of community. Just as God made humans in His own image, “male and female he created them” (Gen 1.26), so He instructed that He is present when we are gathered “two or three ... in my name” (Matt. 18.20).

In his 1996 book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*,¹⁷ Richard B. Hays identifies three focal images in the revelation of God’s will for human behavior and human society: *Community*, *Cross*, and *New Creation*. Community emphasizes that what we do in Christ we do together. The Cross makes clear that we are called to a life of self-giving; that to follow Jesus we must place His will before ours. When we do this He makes all things new, a New Creation is born in each of us and among us. The “vertical” dimension of human life, of man before God, meets the “horizontal” dimension of how we relate to each other. We are reconciled to God in how we are reconciled with each other, in one offering of holiness, as people called to follow our Lord, and called to seek and serve God in all people.

¹⁶ Quoted in Joachim C. Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 177.

¹⁷ San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996.