

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THE MORAL LIFE

Session I

I. Law in the Old Covenant

1. Creation culminates in the Sabbath in Genesis 2:1-3 and the Sabbath expresses the inner meaning of creation. Order culminates in blessing, peace and rest. Hebrews 4:9 uses this rest as a way of speaking about salvation.

2. The original sin in Genesis 3:6-7 is not the mere violation of a rule but a deliberate act which involves the denial of God as God. Sin gives rise not merely to immoral behavior but to an assault on the order of creation. Note the contrast between Genesis 1:31 and Genesis 6:5-6.

3. Abraham appears as a pattern of redemption because of his obedience (Genesis 12:4). Note Paul's take on Abraham in Romans 4: In Abraham we see what God is aiming at (Romans 4:20-21).

4. The Exodus is explicitly seen as the consequence of God acting out of covenant loyalty (Exodus 2:23-25). The Law is seen as instrumental to God's purpose for Israel and for creation (Exodus 19:5-6). The first commandment provides a context for the whole law (Exodus 20:2-3); the whole law aims at restoring loyalty to God. The alternative to God is not the gods but lies.

5. While the Decalogue is given on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 20:1-21 and repeated in Deuteronomy 5, it is also present in an abbreviated form in Leviticus. In Leviticus, where the dominant theme is the holiness that befits Israel's God, the Law clearly appears as part of God's plan to restore human beings to their original dignity, a dignity which consists not in the possession of rights but in reflecting the character of God (Leviticus 19:2; 20:7, 26). Leviticus 19 repeats eight of the Decalogue's commandments:

19:3a: "revere father and mother" = Exodus 20:12

19:3b: "you shall keep my Sabbaths" = Exodus 20:8

19:4: "do not turn to idols" = Exodus 20:3-5

19:11a: "you shall not steal" = Exodus 20:15

19:12: "you shall not swear by my name falsely" = Exodus 20:7

19:16a: "you shall not go around as a slanderer" = Exodus 20:16

19:16b: "you shall not stand forth against the life of your neighbor" = Exodus 20:13

19:20: adultery = Exodus 20:14

This chapter also sets the Decalogue in its proper context: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:36b = Exodus 20:2).

6. There are strong indications that the Law is understood to presuppose creation as a norm and is not an arbitrary set of commandments. Among these indications are:

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- a. The seven day pattern of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3 explicitly invoked to justify the holiness of the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). The Sabbath is not simply a day of the week but part of the structure of creation.
- b. The Sabbath applies not simply to Israelites but also to animals and Gentiles living among Israel (Exodus 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:12-18).
- c. The Sabbath also applies to the land. Every seven years there is to be “a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord” (Leviticus 25:1-7).
- d. Priestly ordination takes seven days to complete: “it will take seven days to ordain you” (Leviticus 8:33). The priesthood is an instrument in God’s design to re-sanctify creation and is thus patterned after the act of creation.
- e. The code of holiness for human sexuality in Leviticus 18 clearly presupposes Genesis 1:27 and 2:4 as foundational. It is also clear that sexual impurity is not merely the violation of a set of rules but a violation of the order of creation. Thus, Israel is not to follow the sexual practices of the Canaanites “lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean” (Leviticus 18:28). Sexual impurity is understood to be not merely an immoral act but a *pollutant*.
- f. The provision for the poor from the harvest in Leviticus 19:9-18 is not understood to be a matter of “social justice” but presupposes the idea of creation being given to supply the needs of *all people*. In Matthew 26:11 when Jesus says “For you always have the poor with you...” he is referring to Deuteronomy 15:11 which is an explicit command to be generous “For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’”

7. There are various attempts to summarize the whole Law, to express its ultimate intentions: Leviticus 19:18; Leviticus 20:26; Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

8. The Law is not simply about specific actions but aims at a certain disposition: Deuteronomy 10:12-22; Psalm 51.

II. Law in the New Covenant

1. The Law is still seen as integral to God’s purposes
 - a. Matthew 5:17-20: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”
 - b. Matthew 5:48 as a paraphrase of Leviticus 19:2
 - c. Matthew 19:16-22 (= Mark 10:17-30 = Luke 18:18-30): Five commandments from the “second tablet” of the Law + Leviticus 19:18 added; fulfilling the first tablet is kept by following Jesus.
 - d. Criticism of the Pharisees: not for keeping the Law but for neglecting its “weightier matters” (Matthew 23:23 = Luke 11:42) which are “justice and mercy and faithfulness” (= Micah 6:8 = Zechariah 7:9).
 - e. The Sermon on the Mount and “messianic Torah”:
 1. Matthew 5:21 = Exodus 20:13 (murder/anger)

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2. Matthew 5:27 = Exodus 20:14 (adultery/ lust)
3. Matthew 5:31 = Deuteronomy 20:14 (divorce allowed/ divorce forbidden)
4. Matthew 5:33 = Deuteronomy 23:21; Leviticus 19:12 (do not swear falsely/ do not swear at all)
5. Matthew 5:38 = Exodus 21:24 (proportional retaliation/ no retaliation)
6. Matthew 5:43 = Leviticus 19:18 (love your neighbor/ love your enemy)
- f. The Law as a demand of obedience summarized and made possible in Christ
 1. Romans 8:1-8
 2. Philippians 2:1-11
2. Law and creation
 - a. Marriage: Matthew 19:3-6 = Mark 10:1-12
 - b. Sin as rebellion against the created order: Romans 1:18-32
3. Summaries of the Law
 - a. Matthew 22:34-40 (= Deuteronomy 6:4 + Leviticus 19:18)
 - b. Romans 13:8-11
 - c. Galatians 5:14
 - d. Ephesians 5:1
 - e. Acts 15:20 (= Leviticus 18:1-30 ["sexual immorality"] + Leviticus 19:26 [no consumption of animal blood])

III. The Christian Appropriation of the Law

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Qq 98-108
2. Human law and divine law: Human law aims at temporal tranquility and controls external actions. Divine law aims at bringing us to our ultimate end which is happiness in God. Divine law has in view both external actions and internal dispositions.
3. Divine law can be kept only through the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Old Covenant law did not confer grace; it was reserved to Christ and the New Covenant. The Old Covenant law was, thus, good but imperfect.
4. The law of the Old Covenant was not an end in itself but was given to ordain people to Christ in two ways: (1) by bearing witness to Christ and (2) by enclosing Israel within the worship of God and withdrawing her from idolatry.
5. While the precepts of the Old Covenant were diverse, they had a single end. The whole of the Law is summarized in one commandment, Leviticus 19:18 "as expressing the end of all the commandments: because love of one's neighbor includes love of God, when we love our neighbor for God's sake" (ST 1a2ae, Q99 a1).
6. The Old Covenant law was also necessary because human reason has been "habituated to sin" and thus requires correction and direction.
7. The law of the New Covenant is implicit in the law of the Old Covenant, the latter being related to the former as the imperfect to the perfect.

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8. "...the New Covenant consists chiefly in the grace of the Holy Ghost, which is shown forth by faith that worketh through love. Now men become receivers of this grace through God's Son made man, Whose humanity grace filled first, and then flowed forth to us" (ST 1a2ae, Q108 a1).

IV. Reflection

1. "On Sinai the people receive not only instructions about worship, but also an all-embracing rule of law and life. Only thus can it become a people. A people without a common rule of law cannot live. It destroys itself in anarchy, which is a parody of freedom, its exaltation to the point of abolition. When every man lives without law, every man lives without freedom...In the ordering of the covenant on Sinai, the three aspects of worship, law and ethics are inseparably interwoven...When morality and law do not originate in a God-ward perspective, they degrade man, because they rob him of his highest measure and his highest capacity, deprive him of any vision of the infinite and eternal. This seeming liberation subjects him to the dictatorship of the ruling majority, to shifting human standards, which inevitably end up doing him violence." (Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*)

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Session II

The First Commandment:

“You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3 = Deuteronomy 5:7)

I. Old Testament Meaning

1. This commandment disallowed the worship of other gods beside the God of Israel and established the precedence of Israel's God over other god. Its most radical meaning is expressed in Isaiah 44:9-22.

2. Exodus itself does not indicate that there are ten commandments; Deuteronomy 4:13 and 10:4 are the source of the notion of “ten words”.

3. The Ten Words do not themselves constitute the covenant but are, rather, a symbol for it.

II. St. Thomas Aquinas (*Catechetical Instructions*)

1. This commandment is related to the love of God and is violated in four ways:

a. by an implied or explicit pact with the devil through the use of magic or the failure to worship the one true God. After 1 Corinthians 10:20 Aquinas sees the choice as not being between God and the gods but between God and demons—to not worship the former is to already be in the service of the latter. Practices such as divination, fortune telling and astrology constitute at least implicit pacts with the devil.

b. by accepting the idea that heavenly bodies can control our destiny—the denial of human freedom and of providence constitute idolatry.

c. by worshiping the elements of creation—various determinisms (economic, genetic, psychological—or by using the things of the earth wrongly (after Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5).

d. by worshiping ancestors: children; civic, national and cultural heroes; family position; ourselves. “They worship themselves as gods, for by seeking the pleasures of the flesh, they worship their own bodies instead of God” (note Philippians 3:19).

2. Why should we love and adore God alone?

a. Because of the simple recognition of who God is (Isaiah 8:19).

b. Out of gratitude for God's generosity: God “is the maker and giver of all good things”.

c. Because of the promise made at our baptism to renounce the devil and to be faithful to God (Hebrews 10:28-29).

d. Because of the terrible burden of serving the devil (John 8:34). This burden is the opposite of the yoke of Christ (Matthew 11:30). One sin leads us into others.

e. The incomparable nature of the reward (Matthew 22:30).

III. John Calvin (*Institutes of the Christian Religion; Sermons on the Ten Commandments*)

1. The tendency to worship something other than God is the chief consequence of sin: “as soon as God’s name is mentioned, our mind is unable to refrain from lapsing into some absurd invention” (*Institutes*, II.viii.16).

2. “...we cannot ‘have’ God without at the same time embracing the things that are his. Therefore, in forbidding us to have strange gods, he means that we are not to transfer to another what belongs to him” (*Institutes*, II.viii.16).

3. We have four principle duties with respect to this commandment:

- a. Adoration
- b. Trust
- c. Invocation
- d. Thanksgiving

4. It is not enough merely to abstain from false gods; our minds must actually be devoted to the living God. We are “to contemplate, fear and worship his majesty; to participate in his blessings; to seek his help at all times; to recognize, and by praises to celebrate, the greatness of his works—as the only good of all the activities of this life” (*Institutes*, II.viii.16)

5. The source of much impiety is the thought that we can evade God’s notice. In fact, God’s eye “gazes upon the most secret recesses of our hearts.”

6. The only thing which allows this commandment to be kept is *piety*: “the pious mind does not devise for itself any kind of god, but looks alone to the one true God; nor does it feign for him any character it pleases, but is contented to have him in the character in which he manifests himself” (*Institutes*, I.ii.1).

7. This commandment presupposes the falling away from God; it is a commandment given to *sinners*. “...seeing that he has created the world because of us, that he has destined and consecrated everything to our usage, that he has implanted his image in us to the end that we might be immortal...when we see all this, would we not be more than stupid if we failed to be enraptured with an ardent desire to worship our God and to devote ourselves and everything to him? (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, Sermon 2).

IV. Martin Luther (*The Large Catechism*)

1. What is a “god”? “A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else that to trust and believe him with our whole heart.”

2. The purpose of this commandment is to require “true faith and confidence of the heart and thus to fly straight to the one true God and cling to him alone.”

3. “...if anyone boasts of great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family and honor, and trusts in this, he also has a god, but not the one, true God.”

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4. "To have God, you see, does not mean to lay hands upon him, or put him into a purse, or shut him up in a chest. We lay hold of him when our heart embraces him and clings to him."

5. "Even now there are proud, powerful, and rich pot-bellies who, not caring whether God frowns or smiles, boast defiantly of their mammon and believe that they can withstand his wrath. But they will not succeed. Before they know it they will be wrecked along with all they have trusted in..."

V. Reflections and Questions

1. Seen from the "backside" this commandment makes it clear that we have a positive duty to protect and nourish our faith. In what ways can this be done?

2. This commandment could also be seen as forbidding two extremes. On one hand, we must avoid despairing of salvation and on the other we must avoid presuming upon God's mercy. Which is the more likely tendency?

3. In traditional expositions of this commandment it is usually emphasized that what must be avoided is acedia or spiritual sloth and the qualities that tend to accompany it, ingratitude, indifference and lukewarmness. In what ways does acedia manifest itself in your life and in the life of the Church?

4. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) defines idolatry in this way: "It is, instead of the one true God who has revealed himself in his Word, or along with the same, to conceive or have something else which to place our trust" (Question 95). What are some of our idols?

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Session III

The Second Commandment

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image...” (Exodus 20:4-5=Deuteronomy 5:8-10)

I. The Old Testament Meaning

1. The key to interpreting this commandment is the phrase “make for yourself” (Exodus 20:4). Deuteronomy 4:15-19 forbids “making a carved image for yourselves” in the form of a human, an animal or a heavenly body (thought to be gods in the ancient near east). The reason for this prohibition is given in Deuteronomy 4:12 where it is recalled that when Moses went up on Mt. Sinai “you heard the sound of words, but saw no form” (cf. Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4).

2. Because of the close association between a god and the god's image in ancient near eastern thinking, in Israel such images were thought to constrict God's freedom. Carved images were always exercises in control. Carved images were static and lifeless and, thus, thought unfitting to represent God who was the *living God* (Psalm 42:2). The same is true of divine names (cf. Exodus 3).

3. Carved images also presented a problem for Israel because God had already created an image of himself by himself—human beings (Genesis 1:26).

II. Calvin

1. This commandment is a restraint on the imagination since “our stupid minds, crassly conceiving of God” are inclined to devise all sorts of erroneous representations (*Institutes*, II.viii.17). But erroneous representations are not limited to physical images since we can have improper mental images of God as well. This commandment safeguards God's incomprehensibility from being subjected to sense impressions, however low (animal images) or high (heavenly bodies).

2. The commandment is connected with the fact that God is the *living God* (Psalm 42:2): “...since the people of Israel know the living God, it almost seems unnecessary for him to prohibit them from making any images for themselves, but due to our wretched inclination, it was necessary for the prohibition to be added” (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, Sermon Three).

3. Idolatry “is rooted in the depths of our bones...there is no one among us who does not invent idols in infinite number” (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, Sermon Three).

4. This commandment means that God wishes to be known for who he truly is and not in terms of who we would like him to be or how we might be willing to think of him. To know God truly is to desire to accommodate ourselves to him. This principle is at the foundation of Calvin's conception of Christian theology: “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves” (*Institutes*, I.i.1).

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5. We are reminded that the capacity to worship God is a gift of grace; our natural inclination (guided by sin) is toward idolatrous worship which is finally a worship of ourselves.

III. St. Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther

1. Both Aquinas and Luther consider the prohibition of carved images to be part of the First Commandment and so treat Exodus 20:2-6 as the First Commandment and see Exodus 20:7, the prohibition of the misuse of God's name, as the Second Commandment.

IV. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Paragraphs 2129-2132)

1. The Catechism explains the prohibition of *manufactured images* of God with reference to Deuteronomy 4:15-16. However, it also notes that in Israel the prohibition of images was not absolute as can be seen in the case of the cherubim on the ark of the covenant (Exodus 37:1-9). The difference between the cherubim (who together probably served as an earthly representation of God heavenly throne) and the golden calf (Exodus 32) is that the former were made at God's command while the latter was made at the people's wish.

2. The Catechism cites the decisions of the Second Council of Nicea (787) which defended the *veneration* of holy images since "how much more frequently through the imaginal formation they are seen, so much more quickly are those who contemplate these, raised to the memory and desire of the originals of these, to kiss and to render honorable adoration to them, not however, to grant them true *latria* according to our faith, which is proper to the divine nature alone."

V. Reflection

1. For a good part of Israel's history, the First Commandment was taken to mean that while other gods did exist Israel was to worship YHWH alone (Hosea 9:10). This means that the prohibition of other gods and the prohibition of carved images are not the same thing. The Second Commandment means that the God of Israel is to be worshiped *aniconically*—without images.

2. The only actual explanation offered for this is given in Deuteronomy 4:15-16—God can not be represented because his form has not been seen by Israel.

3. In the latter part of Israel's history, the gods and idols are linked such that the gods of the nations *are idols* which is to say that they have no actual existence (Isaiah 40)

4. It is this development which leads to our notion of idolatry as the worship of human creations in the place of the living God (Isaiah 44:9-20; 41:6-7).

5. This commandment has to be seen in the light of the New Covenant which is centered on an *incarnate revelation* (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3). In Christ, God *provides an image of himself*. Christ is not an image of God which we have manufactured but he is God image of himself.

6. The Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea II, 787) dealt with the iconoclastic controversy. Iconoclasm was condemned on the grounds that an assertion of God's formlessness would be a denial of the incarnation—we do see the form of God in the humanity of Christ and in the sanctified humanity of the saints the glory of the Son shines through. The Council also made a distinction between the

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reverence given to images and the *worship* rendered to God alone. An epistemological point: the purpose of an image is to provide a window to its prototype. In this sense images, *ikons*, are not decorative art but a physical sign which points to its prototype.

7. We might want to begin with Calvin's insight that this commandment deals with the imagination and ask some important questions:

- (a) What images shape our understanding of God?
- (b) What images shape our understanding of the good life?

8. In what ways does our culture subvert or pervert our imagination with respect to God?

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Session IV

The Third Commandment

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain...”
(Exodus 20:7 = Deuteronomy 5:11)

I. The Old Testament Meaning

1. Literally translated, this verse means something like “You must not lift up the name of the Lord your God frivolously/falsely.” Since Deuteronomy 6:13 demands that Israel swear oaths by God alone (as opposed to other Gods), swearing by God’s name alone and doing so truly become ways in which Israel shows her fidelity to God.

2. What is ultimately involved in breaking this commandment is not simply the immoral act of telling a falsehood but the *blasphemous* act of abusing God’s name.

3. This seems the nature of the offense as presented in Leviticus 19:12: “You shall not swear by my name falsely, as so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.”. The false or frivolous use of God’s name falsifies or makes frivolous God’s very being.

II. St. Thomas Aquinas (*Catechetical Instructions*)

1. Because the name of God predominates this commandment, what is in view is not the *horizontal* dimension of speech but the *vertical*—we are speaking of a human action (lying) but of God.

2. Aquinas is aware of Matthew 5:33-34 but he understands it (probably correctly) to be hyperbole: Oaths are to be taken only when necessary. “Note well that an oath is like medicine, which is never taken continually but only in time of necessity.”

3. There are two improper uses of God’s name: to use God’s name in making a false oath and to use God’s name in a frivolous way.

4. We must keep in mind the proper uses of God’s name—the commandment is not merely negative: swearing a true oath bears witness to the fact that God is the first truth and shows reverence for God. To sanctify people and things is a proper use of God’s name as is the use of God’s name to expel the devil, to invoke God’s help and to confess God’s name (in words and actions).

III. John Calvin

1. “...it means in brief that we are not to profane his name by treating it contemptuously and irreverently...we ought to be so disposed in mind and speech that we neither think nor say anything concerning God and his mysteries, without reverence and much soberness...” (*Institutes*, II.viii.22).

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2. Three points need to be made:
 - a. Whatever we think or say of God should glorify his greatness.
 - b. We should not use his Word or worship for the sake of our own ambitions or amusement.
 - c. We should not detract from God's work but should speak in praise of his wisdom, righteousness and goodness.
3. "In the commandment we are enjoined concerning the worship of God and the reverence of his name, rather than the equity that we are to keep among men."
4. A true oath is a confession to God—in making a true oath we show that God is "eternal and immutable truth" (*Institutes*, II.viii.23). To swear to a falsehood is to make God the supporter of untruth.
5. To use God's name in idle way or a common way does the same thing. It is not enough to refrain from perjury. The use of God's name to cover perjury is all the worse for having become a custom: "God's name is commonly and promiscuously profaned in idle talk."
6. Matthew 5:34, 37; Deuteronomy 6:13; Exodus 22:10-11: Christ did not condemn oaths completely; what he condemned was the attempt to swear by other things in order to evade the truth (on the idea that if one swears by something other than God one has room to "fudge").
7. "Is it not an inestimable goodness then that our God so stoops toward us and permits us to use his name? And why does he do it? It is certain that the majesty of God is so precious that it ought not to be humbled to that extent, but he wants so much to accommodate himself toward us, that our shamefulness is even greater if we profane the name of God in our oaths" (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, Sermon Four).
8. The use of God's name to confirm a falsehood is *blasphemy*.
9. This also applies to not acknowledging God for his benefits: "All we have to do is contemplate heaven and earth and we shall see God everywhere. For what is the earth if it isn't a living image...in which God is revealed" (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, Sermon Four).

IV. Martin Luther (*The Large Catechism*)

1. "...what the commandment forbids is appealing to God's name falsely or taking his name upon our lips when our heart knows or should know that the facts are otherwise..."
2. "...misuse of the divine name occurs most obviously in worldly business and in matters involving money, property, and honor...where a person perjures himself, swearing by God's name..."
3. This also includes putting forth one's own idea as God's Word, to use God's name to embellish oneself or one's own position.
4. "Unfortunately it is now a common calamity all over the world that there are few who do not use the name of God for lies and all kinds of wickedness, just as there are few who trust in God with their whole heart."
5. "Since we are forbidden here to use the holy name in support of falsehood or wickedness, it follows, conversely, that we are commanded to use it in the service of truth and all that is good."
6. "We are not to swear in support of evil...or unnecessarily; but in support of the good and for the advantage of our neighbor we are to swear."

V. Ephraim Radner (“Taking the Lord’s Name in Vain”)

1. The commandment has to do not merely with swearing false oaths or using God’s name frivolously but with something more radical: “For who calls upon the ‘name of the Lord’ with the purity of heart and desire and act that could do anything *other* than profane the very thing it seeks to touch?...Most of those who use God’s name, do so vainly. Can we understand this?”

2. “...we should be asking ‘how do we live in a world in which, on some basic level, we are *all* atheists?’ when all of us in different ways set “at naught” God’s name, when all of us ‘empty’ it of power and reality, conjoining it to the maintenance of our constructions, when Church and Christians themselves execrate God’s name over and over again...”

3. “There is a sense, a real sense, then, in which blasphemy is the universal character of human life, nay of religious life itself...the prohibition against taking the Lord’s name ‘in vain’ easily takes aim at the very center of *every act* we do and at its motivation in the human heart, even and especially as these motivations clothe themselves with religious goals. Are our most spiritual desires at ll ever governed by ambition, or by pride, or by base fear and the like?”

VI. Reflection

1. How can we appropriate Radner’s insight that, at some level we are all blasphemers, without simply being overwhelmed into paralyzed guilt?

2. Note that Aquinas, Calvin and Luther understand this commandment to mean far more than that we should not swear falsely or tell lies. How can we put into practice the positive dimension of this commandment and, as Luther says, use the name of God for truth and goodness?

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Session V

The Fourth Commandment

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...” (Exodus 20:8-11 = Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

I. The Old Testament Meaning

1. The Sabbath is neither simply a day of the week (the second day of the “weekend”) nor simply a time of refraining from work. Abraham Joshua Heschel explains the deeper meaning of the Sabbath: “For the biblical mind, however, labor is the means toward an end, and the Sabbath as a day of rest, as a day of abstaining from toil, is not for the purpose of recovering one’s lost strength and becoming fit for the forthcoming labor. The Sabbath is a day for the sake of life. Man is not a best of burden and the Sabbath is not for the purpose of enhancing the efficiency of his work...The Sabbath is not for the sake of the weekdays; the weekdays are for the sake of the Sabbath.”

2. Heschel again: “To observe the seventh day does not mean merely to obey or to conform to the stricture of a divine command. To observe is to celebrate the creation of the world and to create the seventh day all over again, the mystery of holiness in time.”

3. Genesis 2:2: What is created on the seventh day is, according to Jewish thinking, was *menuha* (usually rendered as “rest”) which Heschel defines like this: “It is a state in which there is no strife and no fighting, no fear and no distrust. The essence of a good life is *menuha*”.

II. St. Thomas Aquinas (*Catechetical Instructions*)

1. The Sabbath is a sign first of the world’s creation and second of the world’s re-creation. Creation through Christ (Colossians 1:15-20) and recreation through Christ’s resurrection (Romans 8) are organically connected.

2. In keeping the Sabbath we renew our faith in the fulfillment of the rest it promises—rest from the labor of this life, rest from the struggle of temptation, rest from servitude to the devil (Matthew 11:28-30).

3. Our natural tendency is to love earthly things; keeping the Sabbath re-awakens our love for God (Isaiah 58:13-14).

4. What should be done on the Sabbath? Three things, including:

a. Sacrifice (Numbers 28:3-4, 9): Offering the soul to God, being sorry for sins and offering prayers. Presenting our very selves as a sacrifice: Romans 12:21. Presenting possessions as a sacrifice: alms (Hebrews 13:16).

b. Hearing God’s Word

c. Contemplating divine things (Hebrews 4:9-10). This requires rest from the turmoil of sin, rest from the passions of the flesh and rest from the occupations of the world.

III. John Calvin

1. "The general purpose of this commandment is that, being dead to our own inclinations and works, we should meditate on the Kingdom of God, and that we should practice that meditation in the way established by him" (*Institutes*, II.viii.28).

2. Exodus 31:13-14: The Sabbath is a sign that God is the one who sanctifies Israel: "...we must rest from all activities of our own contriving so that, having God working in us, we may repose in him..." (*Institutes*, II.viii.28).

3. The Sabbath is a promise of the perfection that shall come on the last day. Its purpose is to allow God's people to meditate on this perfection.

4. Isaiah 58:13-14: In Christ what the Sabbath points toward has become a reality (cf. Hebrews 4:1-13). The Sabbath regulations have been abrogated (since they come to their fulfillment in Christ) but the Church needs a day of regular worship (I Corinthians 14:40). The rest prefigured by the Sabbath is completely fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus.

5. "First, we are to meditate throughout life upon and everlasting Sabbath rest from all our works, that the Lord may work in us through his Spirit...Second, each one of us privately, whenever he has leisure, is to exercise himself diligently in pious meditation upon God's work" (*Institutes*, II.viii.34). For Calvin, we should keep to time set aside by the Church for the hearing of God's Word, the sacraments and public prayer.

6. For Calvin, the Sabbath no longer refers to a specific day—the gathering of the Church might take place on any day but the first day of the week (Sunday) is day chosen by the Church.

7. Colossians 2:17, 20: The purpose of the Sabbath was to put forth in figure what was to come in Christ: "...we cannot worship him in purity, unless we separate ourselves from opposing pollutions" (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, Sermon Five). This has happened in Christ (Romans 6:5). Because of this "we can renounce the world and even ourselves to the extent that our normal affections no longer dominate us. And although we are full of rebellion, nevertheless, the Spirit of God will rule over them and conquer them..." (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, Sermon Five).

7. "...now we are no longer subject to the ancient servitude of observing the Sabbath day..." (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, Sermon Five).

IV. Martin Luther (*The Large Catechism*)

1. Luther's view of the Sabbath is quite similar to Calvin's and is heavily influence by his negative view of the Law: "As far as outward observance is concerned, the commandment was given to the Jews alone...Therefore, according to its literal, outward sense, this commandment does not concern us Christians. It is an entirely an external matter."

2. For Luther, the keeping of the Sabbath and other holy days is largely a pragmatic matter: "we keep holy days so that people may have time and opportunity, which otherwise would not be

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available, to participate in public worship...This, then, is the plain meaning of this commandment : Since we observe holidays anyhow, we should devote their observance to learning God's Word."

3. The keeping of the Sabbath can not be simply a matter of not doing things: "Not when we sit behind the stove and refrain from external work, or deck ourselves with garlands and dress up in our best clothes, but, as has been said, when we occupy ourselves with God's Word and exercise ourselves in it."

4. The Sabbath is the day when the Church publically acknowledges the power of God in the presence of his Word and Sacraments.

5. "Therefore this commandment is violated not only by those who grossly misuse and desecrate the holy day, like those who in their greed or frivolity neglect to hear God's Word or lie around in taverns dead drunk like swine, but also by that multitude of others who listen to God's Word as they would to any other entertainment, who only from force of habit go to hear preaching and depart again with as little knowledge of the Word at the end of the year as at the beginning."

V. Reflection

1. For Christians, the Sabbath took on a new meaning in at least two ways. In terms of day, it shifted to the first day of the week, the day of Resurrection. The Resurrection took place "on the first day of the week" (Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19) and came to be known as "the Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10). Acts 2:46-47 suggests that the first Jewish Christians kept both the Jewish Sabbath and observed the Lord's Day. As the number of Gentile Christians grew this practice eventually disappeared.

2. One of the earliest accounts of Christian worship is found in St. Justin Martyr's (110-165 AD) *First Apology* which notes that "Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead."

3. For American Christians, the spiritual danger is that we have come to see the Lord's Day as an intrusion upon our schedules, yet another day in which we are trying to cram in as much as possible.

4. Thinking about the Sabbath must go beyond the view that we must simply cease to work and its opposite, the view that the keeping such a day is not longer a matter of Christian discipleship. For many Christians, the Sabbath is over after church. Our point of departure needs to be that of St. Ignatius of Antioch: "We have seen how former adherents of this ancient custom have since attained to a new hope; so that they have given up keeping the sabbath, and now order their lives by the Lord's Day instead (the day when life first dawned for us, thanks to Him and His death...)"

5. The question of how Sunday is to be kept is finally a question of what the Resurrection means for us.

6. "The Sabbath is the anticipation of the messianic hour, not only in thought and desire but in concrete action. Only by living according the form of the messianic age do we open the doors of the world for the time of the Messiah" (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord*). In this sense, the act of keeping Sunday is an act of testimony.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THE MORAL LIFE

Session VI

The Fifth Commandment

“Honor your father and your mother...” (Exodus 20:12 = Deuteronomy 5:16)

I. The Old Testament Meaning

1. It is rather unlikely that this commandment is addressed to children and is, thus, to be understood as a command for children to be obedient to their parents. One reason for this that in the Old Testament in general those addressed are the adult male members of the community. This does not mean that obedience to parents by children was simply overlooked. Deuteronomy 21:18-21 provides that a “rebellious son” (a son consistently disobedient to parents) is to be stoned to death by the men of his village.

2. The fifth commandment is best interpreted in the light of the fourth. Just as the fourth commandment provides for rest and refreshment for people and animals on the Sabbath, the fifth commandment has to do with the care of elderly parents when they have become too aged to work. Thus, Walter Harrelson argues that this commandment “focused on the treatment of aged parents by the more mature members of the community. Just as human beings and farm animals need rest from their labors, and just as grinding toil does not constitute the only reason for human life and activity, so also human beings do not cease to have worth and significance when the time for the productive working years has run its course. Parents are to be respected and cared for in their time of feebleness, diminished activity or senility.”

3. The fifth commandment also needs to be interpreted in the light of Exodus 21:15 (which mandates that the striking of a parent by a child is a capital crime) and Exodus 21:17 (which mandates that the cursing of a parent by a child is a capital crime). In both cases what is in view is the treating of a parent as if he or she were of no account. The situation addressed by the fifth commandment is another form of treating parents as if they were of no account—having grown frail and unable to support themselves, one simply discharges oneself of the responsibility to care for them.

4. Read in light of the fourth commandment, the fifth establishes an important principle: Human life, in this case the human life of elderly people, has an inherent value that goes beyond its commercial or economic value.

5. But the fifth commandment may have an even deeper intention. By mandating respect for elderly parents, it recognizes that one must respect the gift of life. The adult who has little respect for the source of life can easily fall into contempt for the life which is dependent upon him or her.

II. St. Thomas Aquinas (*Catechetical Instructions*)

(1) Aquinas understands this commandment to highlight the unique relationship between parent and child. Parents give three things to their children: the gift of life itself, nourishment and support for life and instruction.

(2) Because children have received these things from their parents they owe their parents honor. Because parents have supported children in life, children owe support to their parents. Aquinas cites Ecclesiasticus 3:12-13: "O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him."

(3) Aquinas does not understand the obedience owed to parents to be absolute or unqualified. Citing Luke 14: 26 ("If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother...he cannot be my disciple.") he notes that God is our truest father. Parental authority reaches its limit when it is contrary to God.

(4) Aquinas also notes that the fifth commandment is followed by "that your days may be long in the land..." (Exodus 20:12). For Aquinas this means that the honoring of parents is not simply a natural obligation but is part of obedience to God. He cites Ecclesiasticus 3:8: "Honor your father by word and deed, that a blessing from him may come upon you." Adopting the principle that the one who is faithful in little is faithful in much (Luke 16:10), Aquinas says "if you do not acknowledge the blessing of the natural life which you owe to your parents, then you are unworthy of the life of grace, which is greater, and all the more so for the life of glory, which is the greatest of all blessings."

III. John Calvin

(1) Calvin sees this commandment as part of the "economy of authority" and that it means that "we should look up to those whom God has placed over us, and should treat them with honor, obedience, and gratefulness. It follows from this that we are forbidden to detract from their dignity either by contempt, by stubbornness, or by ungratefulness" (*Institutes*, II.viii.35). But Calvin does not see subjection to parents as an end in itself. Rather, he notes that subjection per se conflicts with our sinful nature and that it is God's intention to use subjection to parents as a way of training us for all forms of proper subjection.

(2) Citing Deuteronomy 21:18-21, Calvin notes that God "has expressly bidden us to reverence our parents, who have brought us into life. Nature itself ought in a way to teach us this. Those who abusively or stubbornly violate parental authority are monsters not men! Hence the Lord commands that all those disobedient to their parents be put to death. For since they do not recognize those whose efforts brought them into the light of day, they are not worthy of its benefits" (*Institutes*, II.viii.36). Calvin does not think that this penalty should be carried out.

(3) Like Aquinas, Calvin does not think that parental authority is absolute, noting that Ephesians 6:1 instructs parents to "obey your parents in the Lord". Parental authority is not an end in itself since "the submission paid to them [parents] ought to be a step toward honoring that highest Father" (*Institutes*, II.viii.38). Because of this, "if they spur us to transgress the law, we have a

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perfect right to regard them not as parents, but as strangers, who are trying to lead us away from obedience...So we should act toward princes, lords, and every kind of superiors. It is unworthy and absurd for their eminence so to prevail as to pull down the loftiness of God" (*Institutes*, II.viii.38).

(4) Calvin is concerned to explicate what honor means here. It does not simply mean outward obedience or even affection: "Honor means much more. It means for children to follow the advice of their fathers and mothers, for them to let themselves be guided by them, to take the trouble to fulfill their duty to them; in brief, a child ought to understand that he is not at liberty with respect to his father and mother" (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, Sermon Seven).

(5) Calvin sees this obedience as a school of charity in that "we see that charity begins by this end: that we should be humble and modest, and that no one should elevate himself in arrogance and presumption, and overrate himself, rather we should be ready to humble ourselves in order to submit to whatever pleases God" (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, Sermon Seven).

IV. Martin Luther (*The Large Catechism*)

(1) Like Calvin, Luther attempts to define the meaning of honor: "Honor includes not only love but also deference, humility, and modesty, directed (so to speak) toward the majesty hidden within them. It requires us not only to address them affectionately and reverently, but above all to show by our actions, both of heart and of body, that we respect them very highly and that next to God we give them the very highest place." We are to revere parents as "God's representatives". We are to revere our parents through all kinds of circumstances, "to remember that, however lowly, poor, feeble, and eccentric they may be, they are their own father and mother, given them by God."

(2) Luther clearly thinks that this commandment has to do with supporting aging parents when they are unable to support themselves, though this is not its only meaning: "You are to esteem and prize them [parents] as the most precious treasure on earth. In your words you are to behave respectfully toward them, and not address them discourteously, critically, and censoriously, but submit to them and hold your tongue, even if they go too far. You are to honor them by your actions...serving them, helping them, and caring for them when they are old, sick, feeble, or poor."

(3) For Luther, honoring parents is a form of serving God. However, like Aquinas and Calvin, Luther does not think that parents have absolute authority over their children: "If God's Word and will are placed first and observed, nothing ought to be considered more important than the will and word of our parents, provided that these too, are subordinated to obedience toward God and are not set into opposition to the preceding commandments."

(4) Luther complains about the family situation of his day, saying that both young and old are negligent in their obligations (he does not imagine that all parents are ideal): "young and old are together wayward and unruly; they have no sense of modesty or honor; they do nothing until they are driven by blows; and they defame and depreciate one another behind their backs...Neither can parents, as a rule, do very much; one fool trains another, and as they have lived, so live their children after them."

(5) Like Aquinas and Calvin, Luther understands this commandment to be about gratitude: "...it is our duty before the world to show gratitude for the kindness and for all the good things we have received from our parents. But here again the devil rules the world; children forget their

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parents, as we all forget God, and no one takes thought how God feeds, guards, and protects us and how many blessings of body and soul he bestows upon us." This commandment reminds us of what our parents have done for us; it brings us to the point at which "everybody recognizes that he has received his body and life from them and that he has been nourished and nurtured by them when otherwise he would have perished a hundred times in his own filth."

(6) Like Calvin, Luther sees parental authority as playing a role in God's purposes; such authority tames our pride and disobedience: "Why, do you think, is the world now so full of unfaithfulness, shame, misery, and murder. It is because everyone wishes to be his own master, be free from all authority, care nothing for anyone, and do whatever he pleases." But parental authority is not absolute. God does not want "to have knaves or tyrants in this office and responsibility...Parents should consider that they owe obedience to God, and that, above all, they should earnestly and faithfully discharge the duties of their office, not only to provide for the material support for their children...but especially to bring them up to the praise and honor of God. Therefore do not imagine that the parental office is a matter of your pleasure or whim."

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THE MORAL LIFE

Session VII

The Sixth Commandment

“You Shall Not Murder.” (Exodus 20:13 = Deuteronomy 5:17)

I. The Old Testament Meaning

1. The prohibition of murder is found first in Genesis 9:6. Such a prohibition was not unique to Israel but the reason given for this prohibition is: Human life is to be protected because it reflects the image of the Creator.

2. The Hebrew verb in Exodus 20:13 specifically means “to murder” and should not be translated by the much broader phrase “to kill”.

3. Behind this commandment is the Old Testament’s idea that because life is a gift of God, the taking of life is not something which can be settled by mere human choice or desire. In the Old Testament, human life can only be taken as a consequence of certain specific crimes or when a specific divine command is given to do so.

II. St. Thomas Aquinas (*Catechetical Instructions*)

1. The divine law requires not only that we do good to neighbors (Leviticus 19:18) but also that we avoid harming them. To take a person’s life is the greatest of evils.

2. Aquinas specifically notes that this commandment does not apply to animals since they are subordinate to man. The use of animals as food is legitimate but this use does not include cruelty.

3. Nor does Aquinas understand this commandment to rule out capital punishment. However, capital punishment can only be for the breaking of certain laws and can not be administered as the result of a political whim. For Aquinas, only just laws can be enforced and require obedience; unjust laws can not make claims upon citizens. For Aquinas, the point is that “one shall not kill by one’s own authority”.

4. This prohibition also applies to suicide; because we do not have any “rights” over life (since it belongs to God) there is no “right” to take one’s own life.

5. There are various dimensions to murder, all of which Aquinas understands to be ruled out. Murder can be committed by direct action, by provoking someone else to act murderously, by assisting in a murder or by consenting to murder.

6. Aquinas notes that Jesus provides an interpretation of this commandment in Matthew 5:21-26 and expands it to mean that in addition to not murdering we must also avoid anger and practice charity. Anger is understood in a very specific sense (righteous anger, for example can be good): “that impulse of passion tending to do injury to the extent that reason is perverted”. Also, anger must be distinguished from hatred, the latter being the mature fruit of the former. (Wrath is one of the Seven Deadly Sins).

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7. The purpose of Jesus in Matthew 5:21-26 is not simply to restrain action (murder) but to root out the cause of the action (anger).

III. John Calvin

1. For Calvin, the purpose of this commandment goes far beyond the prohibition of murder: "The purpose of this commandment is: the Lord has bound mankind together by a certain unity; hence each man ought to concern himself with the safety of all...all violence, injury, and any harmful thing at all that may injure our neighbor's body are forbidden to us" (*Institutes*, II.viii.39)

2. For Christians, the Sixth Commandment is a counsel of charity: "Therefore this law also forbids murder of the heart, and enjoins the inner intent to save a brother's life. The hand, indeed, gives birth to murder, but the mind when infected with anger and hatred conceives it" (*Institutes*, II.viii.39). This commandment, thus, is a guide for the soul.

3. Calvin specifically notes that Genesis 9:6 forbids murder on the grounds that man is made in the image of God. This means that "we ought to hold our neighbor sacred. And if we do not wish to renounce all humanity, we ought to cherish his as our own flesh" (*Institutes*, II.viii.40). On this ground, Calvin concludes that the person who has simply refrained from murder has not kept this commandment: "If you perpetrate anything by deed, if you plot anything by attempt, if you wish or plan anything contrary to the safety of a neighbor, you are considered guilty of murder. Again, unless you endeavor to look out for his safety according to your ability and opportunity, you are violating the law with like heinousness" (*Institutes*, II.viii.40).

IV. Martin Luther (*The Large Catechism*)

1. Luther does not regard this commandment as applying to states, thus allowing capital punishment. However, he essentially agrees with Aquinas that the thrust of the commandment is that one should not take life on one's own authority.

2. Luther's basic principle is this: "Anger, reproof, and punishment are the prerogatives of God and his representatives, and they are to be exercised upon those who transgress this and the other commandments."

3, "Briefly, he wishes to have all people defended, delivered and protected from the wickedness and violence of others, and he has set up this commandment as a wall, fortress, and refuge about our neighbor so that no one may do him bodily harm or injury. What this commandment teaches, then, is that no one should harm another for any evil deed, no matter how much he deserves it. Not only is murder forbidden, but also everything that may lead to murder."

4. Luther also reads this commandment in light of Matthew 5 and draws the conclusion that God desires to "remove the root and source" of discord and violence from among us.

5. The first meaning of the commandment, Luther says, is that we should not harm anyone: "This means, first, by hand or by deed; next, we should not use our tongue to advocate or advise harming anyone; again, we should neither use nor sanction any means or methods whereby anyone

may be harmed; finally, our heart should harbor no hostility or malice toward anyone in a spirit of anger or hatred.”

6. But there is more: “...this commandment is violated not only when a person actually does evil, but also when he fails to do good to his neighbor, or, though he has the opportunity, fails to prevent, protect and save him from suffering bodily harm or injury.”

The Seventh Commandment **“You Shall Not Commit Adultery” (Exodus 20:14 = Deuteronomy 5:18)**

I. The Old Testament Meaning

1. The Old Testament assumes a context of polygamy, so adultery is defined as sexual intercourse between a man, married or not, and a married woman who is not his wife. Since tribal affiliation was reckoned through the father, the fidelity of wives was especially important.
2. But the Old Testament picture is more complex than this for marriage emerges (in Hosea and Isaiah, for example) as an important metaphor for explicating the relationship between God and his people. Two principles emerge which will have a determining impact on marriage: There is one God, Israel's unique spouse, and God relates to his spouse with absolute faithfulness and demands the same from her.
3. Increasingly in Israel (and then certainly in the Church), marriage was understood to involve one man and one woman living within a covenant bond which mirrored the relationship between God and his people (cf. Ephesians 5:22-33).

II. St. Thomas Aquinas (*Catechetical Instructions*)

1. For Aquinas, the seriousness of adultery derives from the fact that husband and wife are “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Citing I Corinthians 7:4 (which makes it clear that in marriage neither husband nor wife has autonomous authority over their body), Aquinas notes that in marriage neither husband nor wife has the authority to give him or herself to an adulterous relationship.
2. Adultery is to be classed as a mortal sin, that is, a sin which excludes one from the Kingdom of God. Aquinas cites I Corinthians 6:9 in this case. Going further, he cites I Corinthians 6:15 to make the case that the act of adultery does not simply involve the person's body but Christ's body as well since the person is joined to Christ.
3. But adultery, as Matthew 5:27-30 makes clear, is not simply a physical action; adultery is a spiritual action which destroys the soul. For Aquinas, sins of the flesh are more shameful than sins of the spirit though less serious. In committing sins of the flesh, human beings abandon their proper nature and act like beasts.

III. John Calvin

1. Calvin understands this commandment in a very broad way: “The general purpose of this commandment is: because God loves modesty and purity, all uncleanness must be far from us. To sum up, then: we should not become defiled with any filth or lustful intemperance of the flesh” (*Institutes*, II.viii.41).

2. Calvin holds that any treatment of adultery must be rooted in an understanding of marriage. Marriage has an important place in God's designs. Before the fall, it was to make sure that human beings did not live alone; after the fall it serves to prevent fall into uncontrolled lust. Marriage is the only sexual relationship between man and woman that God has allowed for; all other sexual relationships are “accursed in his sight” (*Institutes*, II.viii. 41).

3. Reflecting a long tradition of Christian thought, Calvin is also concerned about lust within marriage: “For even if the honorableness of matrimony covers the baseness of incontinence, it ought not for that reason to be provocation thereto. Therefore let not married persons think that all things are permitted to them, but let each man have his own wife soberly, and each wife her own husband...for it is fitting that thus wedlock contracted in the Lord be recalled to and modesty so as not to wallow in extreme lewdness” (*Institutes*, II.viii.44).

4. Adultery can only be understood in light of what God us to and this is “integrity of soul, spirit and body”. Lust overthrows this integrity: “Therefore he forbids us to commit fornication, at the same time he does not permit us to seduce the modesty of another with wanton dress and obscene gestures and foul speech” (*Institutes*, II.viii.44).

Martin Luther (*The Large Catechism*)

1. Like Aquinas, Luther sees marriage as a unique relationship, one in which two persons become “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). The Seventh Commandment is an extension of the Sixth Commandment.

2. And given our fallen state, such a commandment is necessary: “Inasmuch as there is a shameful mess and cesspool of all kinds of vice and lewdness among us, this commandment applies to every form of unchastity, however it is called. Not only is the external act forbidden, but also every kind of cause, motive, and means. Your heart, lips, and your whole body are to be chaste and to afford no occasion, aid, or encouragement to unchastity.”

3. Reflecting Christian tradition since St. Augustine, Luther understands that procreation is an essential part of marriage and the natural end of sexual intercourse: “Significantly he [God] established it as the first of all institutions, and he created man and woman differently...not for lewdness but to be true to each other, be fruitful, beget children, and support and bring them up to the glory of God.”

4. Within God's economy of order, the institution of marriage comes first and this explains why its violation is so serious: “it is a glorious institution and an object of God's serious concern. For it is of the highest importance to him that persons be brought up to serve the world, promote the

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knowledge of God, godly living, and all virtues...It is not to be placed on a level with the others; it precedes and surpasses them all, whether those of emperor, princes, bishops or anyone else.”

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THE MORAL LIFE

Session VIII

The Eighth Commandment “You Shall Not Steal” (Exodus 20:15 = Deuteronomy 5:19)

I. The Old Testament Meaning

1. It is important to remember that the commandments are not given to Israel simply as a moral code for individuals but as a social ethic, an ethic governing the common life of a people. Thus, the commandments form Israel's life as a people. At the heart of the Law there is a concern to guard the dignity of the person and to create a society whose principal characteristic is the maintaining of human dignity.

2. The Eighth Commandment needs to be seen in this light. By forbidding theft of property, the commandment promotes respect for the person of the owner.

3. Two examples from Deuteronomy make this point. In Deuteronomy 19:14 there is a law forbidding the moving of property markers marking off a neighbor's property. The reason given for this prohibition is to guard the neighbor's inheritance. In Deuteronomy 22:1-4 there is the admonition that if one sees a neighbor's farm animal wandering around, one is responsible for returning the animal to its owner. Not only must one not steal from a neighbor, one must also actively restore lost property to him.

II. St. Thomas Aquinas (*Catechetical Instructions*)

1. Aquinas understands theft to constitute injury of a neighbor and thus to be forbidden by God. He understands the commandments against murder, adultery and theft to be linked to respect for the person of the neighbor: we respect the neighbor's life (no murder), the neighbor's wife (no adultery) and the neighbor's property (no theft).

2. Aquinas sees different dimensions to theft: There is (1) theft by stealth (where goods are stolen from a person unawares) and (2) theft by violence (where goods are forcibly taken from a person in his presence). There is (3) theft committed by not paying someone due wages and (4) theft committed by fraud in buying and selling. Finally there is (5) theft in which a person is unjustly promoted to a position of temporal or spiritual honor.

3. Aquinas holds that for Scripture theft is akin to murder, especially where the poor are concerned and cites Ecclesiasticus 34:21-22: “The bread of the needy is the life of the poor; whoever deprives them of it is a man of blood. To take away a neighbor's living is to murder him; to deprive an employee of his wages is to shed blood.”

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4. Theft is also dangerous because it is difficult to repent of since true repentance requires restitution of the stolen property. Theft is thus spiritually harmful to the thief who is in danger of losing his own soul

III. John Calvin

1. Calvin understands this commandment in the broadest sense: “We are forbidden to pant after the possessions of others, and consequently are commanded to strive faithfully to help every man to keep his own possessions” (*Institutes*, II.viii.45).

2. Like Aquinas, Calvin sees different dimensions of theft. There is theft by violence, theft by fraud and theft by manipulation (advertising!). He offers a fairly stringent test of theft: “all those arts whereby we acquire the possessions and money of our neighbors—when such devices depart from sincere affection to a desire to cheat or in some manner to harm—are to be considered as thefts” (*Institutes*, II.viii.45). For Calvin, when we fail to meet our responsibilities to other people we are engaged in theft.

3. Theft presupposes a certain attitude to the neighbor, one which holds that we are free to “deprive our neighbor of his goods to increase our own” (*Institutes*, II.viii.46). What is needed is a very different attitude: “let this be our constant aim: faithfully to help all men by our counsel and aid to keep what is theirs, in so far as we can...let us share the necessity of those whom we see pressed by the difficulty of affairs, assisting them in their need with our abundance” (*Institutes*, II.viii.46).

IV. Martin Luther (*The Large Catechism*)

1. Luther also connects the commandments against murder, adultery and theft as having to do not merely with evil actions but being fundamentally against the neighbor. For Luther the meaning of theft is fairly plain: “For to steal is nothing else than to acquire another’s property by unjust means. In a few words, this includes taking advantage of our neighbor in any sort of dealing that results in loss to him.”

2. From the “good old days weren’t all that good” department: “If all who are thieves, though they are unwilling to admit it, were hanged on the gallows, the world would soon be empty, and there would be a shortage of both hangmen and gallows.”

3. Luther was particularly concerned about theft associated with the rise of urban commercialism: “Furthermore, at the market and in everyday business the same fraud prevails in full force. One person openly cheats another with defective merchandise, false measures, dishonest weights, and bad coins, and takes advantage of him by underhanded tricks and sharp practices and crafty dealing.”

4. This commandment, therefore, has both a positive and a negative dimension for Luther: “On one hand, we are forbidden to do our neighbor any injury or wrong in any way imaginable, whether by damaging, withholding, or interfering with his possessions and property. We are not even to consent to or permit such a thing, but are rather to avert and prevent it. On the other hand, we are

commanded to promote and further our neighbor's interests, and when he suffers want we are to help, share, and lend to both friends and foes."

Ninth Commandment
"You Shall Not Bear False Witness Against Your Neighbor"
(Exodus 20:16 = Deuteronomy 5:20)

I. The Old Testament Meaning

1. This commandment also presupposes a social context and is not simply a command for individuals to refrain from telling falsehoods.

2. The social context presupposed by this commandment can be seen in Deuteronomy 19:15-21. This law provides that the testimony of at least two witnesses is required to obtain a conviction in a court of law. Furthermore, the law makes it clear that no mercy is to be shown to those who give false testimony hoping to harm another person. This commandment, then, is also about not harming a neighbor.

II. St. Thomas Aquinas (*Catechetical Instructions*)

1. Aquinas holds that what is at stake here is harming a neighbor, not so much by deed as by word (telling falsehoods). Ruled out by this commandment is making a false accusation, giving false testimony and rendering an unjust judgment.

2. But Aquinas also applies this commandment to ordinary conversation. In this context one can violate the commandment by detracting from someone's reputation, listening to detractors willingly and repeating gossip.

3. Aquinas is especially concerned about the spiritual dangers of lying. In lying we become like the devil who is "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Lying induces a spiritual death since "a lying mouth destroys the soul" (Wisdom of Solomon 1:11).

III. John Calvin

1. For Calvin, the meaning of this commandment is simply put: "let us not malign anyone with slanders or false charges, nor harm his substance by falsehood, in short, injure him by unbridled evilspeaking in impudence" (*Institutes*, II.viii.47).

2. The commandment is interpreted by Exodus 23:1: "You shall not spread a false report. You shall no join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness."

3. Like Aquinas, Calvin understands this commandment to apply both in judicial settings and in the context of ordinary conversation. Thus, we are to refrain from perjury and we must be sure that what we say "serves both the good repute and the advantage of our neighbors" (*Institutes*, II.viii.47).

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4. Calvin recognizes that as fallen creatures we take a certain pleasure in harming the reputations of other people: "We delight in a certain poisoned sweetness experienced in ferreting out and in disclosing the evils of others. And let us not think it an adequate excuse if in many instances we are not lying. For he who does not allow a brother's name to be sullied by falsehood also wishes it to be kept unblemished as far as truth permits" (*Institutes*, II.viii.48).

5. To speak evil of a person does not include reproof with the intent to correct or making an accusation to correct an evil; to speak evil means to make accusations for the purpose of defaming. The love of God moves us "not to yield our tongue or our ears to evilspeaking and caustic wit, and not to give our minds without cause to sly suspicion" (*Institutes*, II.viii.48).

IV. Martin Luther (*The Large Catechism*)

1. Luther also sees an important connection between the prohibitions against murder, adultery, theft and false witness—they are all aimed at protecting the neighbor

2. Luther also sees the social context of the Ninth Commandment: "this commandment pertains to public courts of justice, where a poor, innocent man is accused and maligned by false witnesses and consequently punished in his body, property, or honor."

3. Like Aquinas and Calvin, Luther understands this commandment to have a broad application: "The first application of this commandment, then, is that everyone should help his neighbor maintain his rights. He must not allow these rights to be thwarted or distorted but should promote and resolutely guard them...Here we have set a goal for our jurists: perfect justice and equality in every case."

4. Luther applies this commandment to false teachers and preachers in addition to corrupt judges and witnesses: "This applies to false preachers and their corrupt teaching and blasphemy, to false judges and witnesses and their corrupt behavior in court...It is a common vice of human nature that everyone would rather hear evil than good about his neighbor. Evil though we are, we cannot tolerate having evil spoken of us; we want the golden compliments of the whole world."

5. There is a simple test for discerning if something is a matter of false witness: "Every report, then, that cannot be adequately proved is false witness. No one should publically assert as truth what is not publically substantiated." Recognizing that we are sinful creatures, more inclined to spread falsehood about our neighbor than to admit the truth about ourselves, Luther says: "Let this be your rule, then, that you should not be quick to spread slander and gossip about your neighbor but admonish him privately so he may amend. Likewise, if someone should whisper to you what this or that person has done, teach him, if he saw the wrongdoing, to go and reprove the an personally, otherwise to hold his tongue."

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THE MORAL LIFE

Session IX

The Tenth Commandment

“You shall not covet” (Exodus 20:17 = Deuteronomy 5:21)

I. The Old Testament Meaning

1. The last of the “Ten Words” makes it clear that we are not dealing with a mere list of dos and don'ts but, rather there is a concern for the emotional roots of actions.

2. It may be that the Old Testament regards coveting as the root of sin itself since it was at the root of the first sin (Genesis 3:6). The “Ten Words” begins a process which Jesus continues in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:17-48), the process of recognizing that immoral actions are symptoms of a spiritual condition which leads to the actions. Adam and Eve in the Garden did not merely break a commandment but broke a commandment because they had turned away from God.

II. St. Thomas Aquinas (*Catechetical Instructions*)

1. For Aquinas the key text is I John 2:16: “For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world” This commandment indicates that God does not simply judge actions but sees into the heart.: “For with God the intention is taken for the deed, and thus the words, ‘Thou shalt not covet,’ mean to include not only the taking by act, but also the intention to take.”

2. The reason for this restraint on desire is that human desire, under sin, is without limit. God is the true object of human desire but apart from God our desires are without object and, thus, can not be satisfied.

3. Covetousness also destroys the love of neighbor and, thus, undermines the keeping of all the commandments. The coveting of things can not be reconciled with the love of neighbor: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (I Timothy 6:10).

III. John Calvin

1. For Calvin this commandment has a simple purpose: “Since God wills that our whole soul be possessed with a disposition to love, we must banish from our hearts all desire contrary to love...no thought should steal upon us to move our hearts to a harmful covetousness that tends to our neighbor's loss” (*Institutes*, II.viii.49).

2. Love, as Calvin understands it, is not simply a feeling or emotion but has its root in the soul; the soul filled with covetousness is quite simply incapable of love in the real sense: “Now how

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does it happen that desires hurtful to your brother enter your heart, unless it is that you disregard him and strive for yourself alone? For if your whole heart were steeped in love, not one particle of it would lie open to such imaginings. The heart, then, in so far as it harbors covetousness, must be empty of love" (*Institutes*, II.viii.50).

3. Love (of God and neighbor) excludes covetousness. What God demands of us (and provides to us through grace) is a high thing: "He requires a marvelously tempered heart, and does not permit the tiniest pinprick to urge against the law of love" (*Institutes*, II.viii.50).

4. For Calvin, we must clear about the purpose of the commandments: "Here is the object of the teaching of the law: to join man by holiness of life to his God...to make him cleave to God (Deuteronomy 11:22, 30:20)" (*Institutes*, II.viii.50).

IV. Martin Luther (*The Large Catechism*)

1. Luther understands this command to be aimed not at a discrete action but at our whole corrupted nature: "Such is nature that we all begrudge another's having so much as we have. Everyone acquires all he can and lets others look out for themselves. Yet we all pretend to be upright. We know how to put up a fine front to conceal our rascality."

2. This commandment, Luther says, is not simply addressed to those who are obviously wicked but, also to "the people who wish to be commended as honest and virtuous because they have not offended against the preceding commandments."

3. Covetousness is a strong but subtle desire and if "you give the world an inch, it will take a yard, and at length open injustice and violence follow." This commandment reflects God's ultimate purpose for us which is "to destroy all the roots and causes of our injuries to our neighbors."

4. Like Calvin, Luther reminds us that the ultimate purpose of the Law is to "make our whole life pleasing to God" so that the commandments "are the true fountain from which all good works must spring, the true channel through which all good works must flow."