

The Christian and Social Ethics

Studies in Ethical Decision-making

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Preface

Everyone who believes in the categories of right and wrong, good and evil, better or worse is compelled also to be involved in ethical decision-making. If history addresses “what was” and “what is,” ethics address “what ought to be.” The field of social ethics is the study of the questions of “what ought to be” as they arise in a social context, that is, in public policy, politics, economics, war, poverty, education, racism, ecology and crime.¹

Of course, social ethics are impossible to separate completely from personal ethics, since no individual behavior is without social implications and no social situation is without individual repercussions. Nevertheless, some aspects of ethics are especially applicable to social groups, institutions and corporate problems, and it is this branch of ethics that we wish to treat here. It is only fair to point out that this work is not complete in the sense that it does not treat every category of social ethics that could be treated, or for that matter, that other ethicists treat. Still, the issues that are addressed are major ones that face Christians in contemporary culture.

Special thanks must be given to my congregation who patiently bore with a lengthy series of studies on the following subjects, and not only did so, but made many helpful suggestions and raised many challenging questions which helped to sharpen my focus. In addition, I wish to extend special appreciation to two members of our congregation who reviewed the sections of this work that fell under their particular area of expertise. These two persons are Stan Reuter, M.D., and Dan Lynch, J.D. Both offered very helpful suggestions, though it should be understood that while they saved me from both logical and technical errors, any errors still remaining must fall upon my own shoulders.

¹ D. Gill, “Social Ethics,” *EDT* (1984) 1023-1024.

THE CHRISTIAN AND SOCIAL ETHICS

Some of the most perplexing and disturbing issues confronting Christians today are social, moral issues. The explosion of knowledge in general and technology in particular has raised problems and issues never before encountered. Furthermore, in the western world at least, we live in a post-Christian society. At one time the western world was predominantly Christian, or at least considered itself to be so. Now it is pluralistic, maintaining a variety of religious and non-religious ethical systems that have no grounding in the Christian faith.

The church is exceedingly unwise if it hides its head in the proverbial sand and pretends that the consequences of these issues are minimal or indifferent. This is true for two primary reasons. First is the fact that Christians themselves have no assurance that they will not personally confront such issues. In all probability, they will indeed confront them. Second, the church as a community of faith is to exert a godly influence in the world. They are to be “salt” and “light.” Within this context and in response to this mandate, it is worthwhile to address the questions raised in the arena of social ethics.

The Basis for the Church’s Confrontation with Social Ethics

The church must define its relationship to society if it is to function well and with a clear sense of direction. This is not only true of the universal church, but specifically, of individual congregations. Equally important, the church as well as individual congregations must define ethics. How are Christians to make ethical decisions? What is Christian liberty, and what is its role in ethical decision-making?

Christ and Culture

The relationship of the church to society has been long debated by sincere and well-meaning Christians. At one extreme is the view that the church should be “other-worldly,” that is, that the church performs an exclusively spiritual work which is completely apart from culture. Biblical mandates for this view are thought to appear in passages such as 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, John 15:18-19 and 1 John 2:15-17.

At the other extreme is the view that the church is “this-worldly,” that is, that it

performs a task primarily in relation to the present world and its circumstances. Biblical mandates for this view are thought to appear in passages such as Matthew 5:13, 43-48, John 17:15 and Mark 2:15-17.

It seems that in some sense the church is to be both, but of course “there’s the rub.” How can the church find a balance between the two? H. Richard Niebuhr’s discussion of Christ and culture is instructive to assist in surveying the possible approaches.²

Christ Against Culture

This position views the church as being in a full scale war with culture. It sees culture as satanic and evil. The Christian is encouraged to utterly separate himself or herself from all culture. Such withdrawal usually tends toward the development of sub-cultures, and in the history of Christianity, such sub-cultures may be seen in monasticism, in the extreme separatists groups, such as, the Hutterites and the Amish, and in the radical holiness movements.

Christ in Culture

This position minimizes the tension between Christ and culture. Here, the essence of Christianity is the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humans. Reason, scientific method and human discovery stand virtually on equal ground with revelation and faith. As such, culture and Christianity become united. This viewpoint is epitomized in the religious liberalism that arose out of the Enlightenment.

Christ Above Culture

This position recognizes that culture as well as Christianity was instituted by God, culture at the creation of humankind and Christianity through the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, the church cannot simply be against culture, nor can it confuse culture with Christianity. In other words, the Christian participates in both culture and Christianity. He/she is a member of two worlds. Both worlds are of God. However, they are not viewed as standing on equal ground, but as hierarchical. Christ and culture are both affirmed, but Christ is the more important of the two. This view is standard within mainline Protestantism.

Christ, the Discriminator of Culture

This position is somewhat similar to the preceding one in that both culture and

² The following analyses are summaries from H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

Christianity are seen as institutions of God. Here, however, it is emphasized that while culture was divinely ordained, culture has gone astray due to the fallen nature of humans and their bondage under sin. The powers that be are indeed ordained by God, but fallen humanity has abused these powers and used them for human glory rather than for God's glory. Therefore, the Christian must discriminate in his/her participation in culture. The believer is free to participate in culture only as he/she allows Christ to control that participation. This view has generally characterized evangelical passivism.

Christ Transforming Culture

This final position assumes that culture is astray due to the fall, as in the previous position. However, while the former view advocates shunning those areas of culture that conflict with Christ, this view advocates transforming those areas which conflict with Christ. In other words, the task of the church is not simply to avoid anti-Christian elements within culture, but it is to convert them into being Christian. This view is characterized by evangelical activism.

The Role of Christian Freedom

Foundational to the Christian life is the concept of freedom, most fully expounded by Paul in the New Testament. Paul's explanation of freedom is especially relevant to the question of ethics. According to Paul, the Christian is free to make moral choices, even though there are principles that govern those choices. For instance, he charges that a Christian widow is free to marry anyone she wishes, though her new spouse must be a fellow-believer (1 Co. 7:39). Paul declared himself to be free to marry if he so desired, free to receive offerings from the churches, and free to eat and drink what he chose (1 Co. 9:4-6). At the same time, he refused to eat or drink anything that might destroy the Christian faith of a weaker brother or sister in Christ (Ro. 14:19-21; 1 Co. 8:1-13), even though on a private level he showed no compunctions about recommending wine to Timothy (1 Ti. 5:23). Similarly, a Christian was free to enjoy the society of non-Christian friends without an overly fussy conscience (1 Co. 10:27). Still, he or she was responsible to maintain the integrity of the Christian confession (1 Co. 10:28-30). The upshot of this ethic of freedom is that believers are at liberty to come to conscientious ethical decisions on their own but also out of respect for God and his ways (Ro. 14:5-6, 22-23).

The Christian approach to moral decision-making, then, is a combination of freedom and responsibility. Freedom from legalism must be maintained, else the very gospel itself becomes distorted (Ga. 5:1, 13; Cf. 1 Pe. 2:16). At the same time, the believer is responsible to use wisdom, godly principles and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to assist in decision-making (Phil. 2:12; 1 Co. 6:12; 10:23-24; Ga. 5:16-17).

Christian freedom is not autonomous, but it operates within the guidelines of the moral nature of God as revealed in Holy Scripture (Ro.6:18-23; 8:5-9, 12-14; 1 Co. 9:21).

Ethical Tensions

Ethics have to do with moral decision-making. The study of ethics addresses not so much “what *can* I do” as “what *ought* I to do.” All ethical systems are based on some definition of what “good” means with the assumption that some choices are better than others. The ethical person “ought” to choose what is morally good, and if possible, what is morally best. In the discussion of ethics, the following tensions are to be observed:

Difference Between Intrinsic and Instrumental Goods

The idea that there are two kinds of goods is very old, going back at least to the time of Plato and Socrates. Intrinsic goods are those things which are thought to be good in themselves, such as beauty. Instrumental goods are those things which are a means to other goods, such as physical exercise. The highest form of good is often thought of as that which is both intrinsic as well as instrumental.

Means and Ends

We have all heard or participated in ethical discussions in which someone uses the phrase, “the end justifies the means,” or alternatively, “the end doesn’t justify the means.” Any discussion of ethics is bound to come to grips with the problem of means and ends. Means are the methods used to reach some goal or the principles which guide someone in reaching a goal. Ends are the goals themselves when they are reached. An end, for instance, would be the goal of maintaining the safety of law-abiding citizens in society. A means would be the imprisonment of law-breakers.

Ethical systems often tend to emphasize either means or ends, either principles or results.

Ethics Which Emphasize Means³

Here the ethical system places the emphasis on methods and/or principles. The important thing is to make decisions which are based on moral laws or rules, not on practical consequences. It is better to act on a right principle, even if the result is unwelcome, than to use wrong principles to achieve a desirable result.

³ Philosophically, this sort of emphasis is called deontological ethics. It is an ethical view which stresses duty rather than consequences.

*Ethics Which Emphasize Ends*⁴

Here, the ethical system places the emphasis on the practical result of actions, not the theoretical rightness or wrongness of actions. The important thing is to make decisions that achieve a good consequence, even if certain methods and principles must be set aside.

Ironically, Christians have appealed to the Bible to support both of the above emphases. For instance, when King Saul is rebuked with the maxim, “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sa. 15:22), the rebuke is grounded in an ethic of means. It was more important for Saul to do what he was told than for him to disobey in order to offer sacrifices to God. On the other hand, when Jesus defended his disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath and himself for healing the lame man on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:1-14), his argument proceeds along the lines of an ethic of ends. It was more important for the disciples to be fed and the lame man to be restored than it was to observe the restrictions regarding the Sabbath. Most ethical systems have a high regard for both means and ends, but there may be some ethical dilemmas in which means and ends come into conflict.

Absolute and Relative Ethics

A popular accusation is that “so-and-so has no absolutes”, just as a popular defense is that “everything is relative.” Systems which emphasize the absoluteness of ethics argue that moral principles are universally applicable. The moral rule never changes; it is to be followed in all cases. Systems that emphasize the relativity of ethics argue that there are no moral standards that are always to be followed. Ethics are relative to the individual and the situation. What might be right for one person may be wrong for another. What might be right in one situation may be wrong in another. The question of relative ethics is, “What determines the rightness or wrongness in a given situation?”

There are two primary answers for relative ethicists. One is existential, that is, the belief that there are no permanent values, but values arise out of each situation through personal decision. The other is emotive, that is, that ethical statements and decisions are merely the expression of strong feeling without any objective reality.

Meeting Issues Head-On

Most decisions in life are not morally complicated, even for Christians. There is no hesitation over whether or not one should give artificial respiration to a nearly-drowned child. Persons are not filled with ethical doubts about whether or not they

⁴ Philosophically, this sort of emphasis comes under the headings of utilitarianism, pragmatism or teleology. It is the ethical view which stresses the end, consequence or result of one’s actions.

should shoplift. Even though some ethical decisions may be made for reasons of convenience, such as breaking the highway speed limit or talking in the public library, still the moral character of the acts are not in question so much as their level of seriousness. (For better or worse, we tend to see minor infractions as largely indifferent if they are made for “reasonable” causes.)

In a minority of circumstances, however, decisions must be made in the midst of serious ethical tension. Furthermore, some of these decisions, while they may not affect the everyday routine of life, are of a highly significant character in that our responses to them may have implications which reach far beyond our own personal lives. If most moral decisions are clear, here we wish to examine the minority which are not.

Putting Yourself in the Picture

To better illustrate a circumstance of ethical tension, consider the following dilemmas:

Hypothetical Situation

“You are the mother of two children. Your husband is away from home, and after hearing on the evening news that there is an armed psychopathic murderer of small children at large in your neighborhood, you are suddenly confronted by a stranger brandishing a knife who has broken through your back door. You are convinced beyond reasonable doubt that the man is the one of whom the news spoke because of the matching description. Earlier, you hid your children in the bedroom closet because you heard suspicious noises at the back of the house. As you confront the man, he asks you, ‘Are there any children in the house?’”

Your choices are to tell the truth, possibly endangering the lives of your children, or to tell a lie in order to save them. Refusal to cooperate may endanger your own life. The ethical tension is between truth-telling and life-saving. (Do not forget that “lying” can be non-verbal, that is, to lie is to misrepresent reality, whether spoken or not, cf. 1 Sa. 19:11-17.)

An absolute ethic might hold that if it is ever wrong to lie then it is always wrong to lie. Therefore, if forced one must always tell the truth, however reluctantly. If a murder is committed, you are exempt because you did not physically participate in the taking of a life. A relative ethic, on the other hand, might hold that in extreme cases it is right to lie, and this is one of those cases. It would hold that even though you were not physically involved, you would still be partly responsible for the deaths of the children if you told the truth.

*Real Situation*⁵

Moving from the hypothetical to the real, an ethical dilemma confronted U. S. Commander Lloyd Bucher of the spy ship *Pueblo* during the Vietnam War. Bucher and his crew of 23 men were captured by the North Vietnamese and threatened with execution. To spare their lives, Bucher signed confessions, untruthfully admitting that he and his crew had been spying in the territorial waters of North Korea. Because of these false confessions, Bucher's crew was spared execution, and ultimately they were released.

His situation produced an acute ethical tension. Should he lie in order to save the lives of his crew? Should he tell the truth and "let the chips fall where they may?"

An ethic of means might demand that the truth be told, since, under this approach, principles and methods are more important than results. On the other hand, an ethic of ends might demand that he tell a lie, since, in an ethic of ends, the result of saving lives would be more important than the method of saving them.

Biblical Situations

Not only modern men and women meet such ethical dilemmas, but biblical men and women also confronted them. Consider the following similar ethical tensions:

Abraham on Moriah: How was Abraham to perceive the seemingly monstrous command of God to slay his only son Isaac (Genesis 22)? Child sacrifice might have been something to be expected in the religions of Israel's neighbors, but hardly to be expected from the God of Israel's faith.⁶

Hebrew Mid-Wives in Egypt: How were the Hebrew mid-wives to respond to Pharaoh's command to kill every male infant (Exodus 1)? In this case, they not only disobeyed a governmental command (1:15-17), they lied about it with divine approval (1:18-21).

Daniel in Babylon: How was Daniel to respond to the edict forbidding prayer (Daniel 6)? In this case, he disobeyed his government and was saved from the state's penalty by divine intervention.

David at Nob: When King Saul was threatening David's life, David fled by way of Nob, where the Tent of Meeting was pitched. Desperately hungry, he asked for five loaves of bread and was given the Bread of the Presence, which had

⁵ This example, which may well be remembered from the media coverage of the times, can also be found with an accompanying discussion in N. Geisler, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 13-20.

⁶ For more on child sacrifice in the Ancient Near East, see C. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, trans. J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 357-358; B. Margalit, "When King Mesha of Moab Sacrificed His Oldest Son," *BAR* 12 (Nov-Dec 1986) 62-63.

recently been removed from before the curtain that closed off the Most Holy Place (1 Samuel 21). This bread was supposed to be reserved for priests (Lv. 24:9), but in the New Testament even Jesus inferred that David's actions were justifiable under the circumstances (Mk. 2:23-28).

Jeremiah's Lie: In a conversation with King Zedekiah during the final days of the nation of Judah, Jeremiah was instructed by the king to misrepresent the truth in order to save his own life. Just as the king had indicated, Jeremiah deceived the court officials, and they did not bother him further (Je. 38:24-27).

In addition to the above choices that are treated as justifiable in the biblical narratives, it should also be pointed out that some choices that were made in the midst of ethical tensions are not treated as justifiable. These might include Jephthah's rash vow (Jg. 11:30-40), Saul's decision in favor of saving-life over obeying the laws of holy war (1 Sa. 15) and Uzzah's spontaneous attempt to save the ark of the covenant from falling from a cart (2 Sa. 6:6-7).

Ethical Systems

In each of the above cited examples, whether hypothetical or actual, whether modern ancient, there exists a tension between ethical principles. Even though these kinds of decisions do not daily confront Christians, every Christian needs to think through the implications of making such a decision, for he/she will likely be confronted with a circumstance of ethical tension at some time. Christians, of course, believe in divinely revealed moral values. At the same time, the Christian must avoid being idealistic to the point of ignoring the real world, and he/she must not be so naive as to think that all moral choices are obvious. Following are several different ethical approaches that can be found in modern American society.

Nothing is Right or Wrong⁷

This kind of ethical indifference is usually accompanied by an atheistic world view (though to be fair, the inverse is not necessarily true). Rightness or wrongness is strictly personal, and it is not so much a matter of morals as of advantage, perspective and emotions. To say, "One should not lie," means only, "I do not like anyone to lie to me." Christians, of course, reject this system categorically.

What is Generally Wrong is Sometimes Right and Vice-Versa⁸

In this view, there are no universal rules. Nothing is always right or always

⁷ Also called antinomianism

⁸ Also called generalism

wrong. Such a position is a milder sort of relativism than the first one, and it posits that moral norms can only be said to be usually applicable, and then only within a given time frame. Often, the morality of an action is dependent upon the majority of public opinion at a particular period in human history. Morality is commonly considered to be evolutionary, and moral values may change in time. As with the first system mentioned above, Christians are compelled to reject this one if they take seriously the existence of God and his revelation of moral values.

One Moral Principle Covers Every Situation⁹

It should be noted at the outset that supporters of this ethical system are not identical. Different people may define their idea of the one moral rule in different ways. One might say, for instance, that “right” is what causes the greatest good for the greatest number. Another might say that “right” is whatever promotes happiness in an individual or in a community. Joseph Fletcher has popularized a “love ethic,” that is, that the “right” thing to do is whatever love demands. As such, individual actions are not right or wrong in themselves, but they are to be chosen only as they express the single universal moral principle, whatever that might be.

In general, this ethical system is unsuitable for Christians because of the imprecise definitions of the one moral principle. How is “love” to be defined, for instance? How does one measure the “greatest good” without lapsing into a morality merely established by popular vote?

Wrong is Wrong Right is Right, and They Never Come Into Conflict¹⁰

This ethical system has been chosen by some Christians, at least in theory. It views all moral principles as absolute, but at the same time, it assumes that these principles will never conflict. Such a position has the problem of short-sightedness and the failure to come to grips with reality in a fallen world. While it may be held that in most cases ethical principles do not conflict, it is extremely difficult to maintain that they *never* conflict. We have already seen that sometimes moral values such as life-saving and truth-telling come into conflict, and they even did so in the stories of the Bible. Because of the difficulty of holding to such absolutism, many Christians opt for one of the following two systems.

It is “Right” to Choose Between the Lesser of Two Evils¹¹

This position views moral values as relating to each other in an ascending

⁹ Also called situationism; may be seen in such philosophical perspectives as utilitarianism or pragmatism, hedonism and Joseph Fletcher’s “love ethic”.

¹⁰ Also called non-conflicting absolutism

¹¹ Also called positive hierarchicalism

scale. In other words, some values are more important than others, and some wrongs are more evil than others. As such, murder is worse than lying, or inversely, truth-telling is good but not at the expense of sacrificing a human life. Persons are more valuable than things. Actual persons are more valuable than potential persons; potential persons are more valuable than things; many persons are more valuable than few persons; acts which promote human worth are more valuable than acts that promote things, or alternatively, acts that do not promote human worth, and so forth.

It is Best (Though Not Necessarily Right) to Choose the Lesser of Two Evils¹²

This system, probably the most biblically accurate of the options, is quite similar to the preceding one in that it also views moral values on an ascending scale. However, this position hesitates to say that the lesser of two evils can be called “right.” The lesser of two evils can only be “best.” Situations arise in which there is not any “right” thing to do--only a best thing to do. Such an ethical dilemmas are due to the fallenness of the human race and the pervasiveness of evil in the world. Sin is unavoidable in some circumstances, even though it might be excusable and pardonable. Even when one chooses the lesser of two evils, he/she cannot escape an uneasy conscience that calls for God’s grace and forgiveness. If values come into conflict, the more important value is to be upheld, i.e., it is better to “obey God rather than men” (cf. Ac. 4:19).

Christian Ethics as a Part of Christian Theology

Christian ethics arise from the moral teachings of the Bible as the sufficient Word of God. They are not simply emotive (based on strong feeling) or existential (based on arbitrary personal decision). The perfect character of God is the highest moral standard. In treating ethics as a part of Christian theology, it is important to answer the following three questions:

- 1) Am I righteous?
- 2) If so, how did I become that way?
- 3) How may I remain righteous?

Four Primary Christian Realities That Relate to Ethics

The following concepts are fundamental to the Christian way of answering the three questions posed above.

¹² Also called negative hierarchicalism

God is Righteous and Makes Righteous Demands of Men and Women

God uses his own nature as an objective standard by which to evaluate humans. He requires moral response and judges men and women according to his own level of perfect holiness (Mt. 5:48; 1 Pe. 1:15-16). This standard is broader and higher than any list of laws could ever be, including the law of Moses. While the Christian is not bound to Mosaic law in the sense in which the Israelites were bound to it as a covenant people, still the Christian is bound to God's higher standard which is the Divine Nature itself (1 Co. 9:20-21). If a person is to be in right relationship with God, it must be on this basis.

Humans Are Limited and Do Not/Cannot Live Up to God's Righteous Demand

Probably the clearest statements of this truth are to be found in Isaiah (53:6; 64:6) and Paul (Ro. 3:9-19, 23). Other explanations in the Bible are given of human moral failure, but each one concludes firmly with Paul that "*all* have sinned."¹³

God's Righteousness is More Than Just a Demand--It is Also a Saving Power

The state of being in a right relationship with God can never be achieved by obeying laws, for humans invariably fail to perfectly obey laws, and even a single offense makes one a lawbreaker (Ja. 2:10). Law, in and of itself, cannot produce righteousness. Instead, the law of God makes men and women conscious of their sinfulness (Ro. 3:20; 7:7). Due to a limited and fallen nature, humans can never fulfill perfection (Phil. 3:12). Rather, moral perfection must be received as the free gift of God when a woman or a man believes the gospel (Ro. 1:16-17; 1 Co. 1:30; Phil. 3:8-9). The Christian does not rest in his/her ability to live morally perfect; the Christian rests in the saving righteousness of God that has been transferred to him/her as God's free gift, and this free gift is received by faith (Ro. 4:3-8, 22-24).

Holiness is Both a Fact and a Challenge

The Christian is called upon to affirm both the fact of holiness (i.e., that he or she has been declared holy by faith in Jesus Christ) and the challenge of holiness (i.e., that he or she is expected to live a life of holiness before God). The believer does not live a holy life in order to become holy; rather, the believer lives a holy life because

¹³ It is worth mentioning that there is some difference between the way Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies treat the universal sinfulness of men and women. Roman Catholic teaching regarding human failure, going back to Augustine and before, is rooted in what is called "original sin," that is, the belief that the sin and guilt of Adam is passed on to every person biologically, cf. V. A. Harvey, *A Theological Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 221-223. Protestants are more hesitant about accepting the idea of the biological transmission of sin and guilt, and they tend to teach that what humans inherit is not Adam's sin and guilt but his weakness and propensity to sin.

God has declared him/her to be holy and desires that he/she live up to that privileged position (Ep. 4:1; Col. 1:10-12).

Two Contrasting Models for Attaining Righteousness in Ethical Decisions

Since there is a demand for Christians to live righteously, it is important that they employ a proper approach in attempting to satisfy this demand. There are essentially two ways in which they might go about this. First, they might follow what could be called the “idealist” model. This is the model which non-Christians generally expect of Christians. In the idealist model, righteousness comes by making right decisions, obeying the laws, and following the principles of Christianity. Here righteous is a matter of doing right things. Unfortunately, this position does not adequately come to grips with the reality of human finitude. Due to human weakness, a man or a woman will never be truly righteous by this method, because he/she can never perfectly obey the law.¹⁴

In the second model, which might be called the “realist” model, righteousness comes by repentance and faith. The Christian’s goal is to make right decisions, because this is God’s demand. At the same time, the believer is fully aware that his/her best efforts fall short of perfection (cf., Phil. 3:12-16). Righteousness lies not in the human ability to make perfect choices but in the power of Christ to justify apart from obedience to law (Ro. 3:21-28). The motivation toward making right decisions stems from a new nature in Christ, not from any expectation of achieving perfection.

The Love Ethic of Jesus

The highest ethical principle in God’s moral purpose is love--love expressed to the one and only God and love expressed to other people (Mk. 12:28-34; Mt. 22:34-40; Ro. 13:8-10). Love for God is expressed by love to his human creatures. This raises two important questions:

What is Christian Love?

Christian love is concrete action (Mt. 5:43-47; Jn. 13:34-35; Ro. 13:8-10; 1 Jn. 3:16-18). The love ethic of Jesus was more than a recapitulation of Moses’ law. It was indeed a “new” commandment. It emphasized not only love to those who love in return but love to those who do not love in return. It reached beyond both culture and

¹⁴ It must be conceded, of course, that some Christians hold to a perfectionist theology of sanctification. As such, they believe that after salvation there is a second work of grace that perfects them so that they neither sin nor desire to sin. In this way of thinking, sanctification is not progressive, but instantaneous. This study will not follow that particular theology.

reason, as in the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37). Thus, Christian love is not merely feeling or words. It is expressed in the capacity to give, a readiness to serve, the performance of altruistic actions, and the willingness to forgive wrongs.

How Do People Confront God in the Present that They Might Love Him?

Love for God is not merely expressed in religiosity. It is expressed by a selfless love for others. God is to be found in the needs of one's neighbor. Who is one's neighbor? Whoever stands in need! To demonstrate love in concrete actions to others is to demonstrate love to God (Mt. 25:34-45).

Thus, the love ethic of Jesus is the motive behind all Christian ethical action. The love ethic of Jesus is not so much a rule *per se* as an attitude that is expressed in concrete situations.

Implications of Christian Theology and Ethics

The implications of the New Testament discussion of ethics and righteousness can be summarized as follows:

1. There are universal moral principles based upon the self-revealed character of God. These principles issue forth in both propositional demands (commandments) as well as implicit demands (what love requires).
2. While humans are universally bound to live according to God's moral standards, they consistently fall short due to their limited nature. This failure is to be seen in the rebellion of the unregenerated person, but it is also to be seen in the human finitude of even Christians.
3. When faced with ethical dilemmas, the believer must: not be filled with over-confidence in his/her ability to discern and choose the right way, and at the same time not be filled with despair over the difficulty of making a moral decision.
4. Finally, Christians must rest in the grace of God as they attempt to fulfil the ethic of love.

Christian Ethical Decision-Making

When examining Christian ethical decision-making, one may consider it in at least four ways. It may be addressed:

- Observationally: What do I do?
- Ideally: What ought I to do?
- Hypothetically: What would I do if....?
- Concretely: What shall I do now?

The first three are preparatory stages for the last one. Concrete decisions can only be made in real life as a person confronts the various factors in a given situation and then decides how to respond. While one cannot make concrete decisions in an abstract study of ethics, one can explore the first three areas as preparation for making godly concrete decisions when they arise.

Observations About Human Moral Decisions

Sociologists have long observed the way in which humans make moral choices. A helpful guide to moral behavior has been developed that describes different levels of moral decision-making. These levels seem to be related to different periods of growth in children, adolescents and adults. There seems to be such a thing as moral growth as well as physical growth, and this moral progression seems to hold true regardless of race, culture or national environment. A given person may progress through all the stages of moral development, or he/she may stop at any given stage.¹⁵ One may wish to assess his/her own “progress”, and measure it against these stages.

STAGE 1: OBEDIENCE/PUNISHMENT

Motivation for moral decisions is the fear of punishment.

STAGE 2: OBEDIENCE/REWARD

Motivation for moral decisions is the desire for a reward.

STAGE 3: GOOD BOY/BAD BOY

Motivation for moral decisions is the anticipated approval or disapproval of others, whether real or imagined.

STAGE 4: LAW AND ORDER

Motivation for moral decisions is based on a sense of duty, respect for authority and the maintenance of the social order.

STAGE 5: SOCIAL EQUALITY AND JUSTICE

Motivation for moral decisions is one’s concern for balancing individual rights with the rights of society.

STAGE 6: INDIVIDUALIZED ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Motivation for moral decisions is the internalized sense of truth and values which may go far beyond social equality and justice. The individual is concerned that he/she does not condemn himself/herself by violating his or her own principles which are believed to be

¹⁵ This model of moral development was formulated by Lawrence Kohlberg (1969). While some of his conclusions are debatable, the general reliability of his categories is usually accepted, cf. J. Braun, D. Linder and I. Asimov, *Psychology Today*, 4th ed. (New York: Random House, 1979) 233-236.

universal.

Ideal Considerations

When the Christian studies ethics, he/she does so in order to be able to interrelate the absolute moral principles of the Bible with given situations, however simple or complex. In most moral situations in life, the Christian has a simple, absolutist choice. He/she may do either one thing or the other, and the one way is clearly right, the other clearly wrong. It is to steal or not to steal--to help or not to help.

However, in some situations, even though these may be the minority of cases, the Christian is faced with ethical conflict. He/she may have strong ethical motivations for deciding in both directions, but of course, he/she can only decide on one course of action. For instance, a man's wife and daughter may both have fallen into the lake, yet they are some distance apart. Neither can swim. To attempt to save the daughter means leaving the wife to drown; to attempt to save the wife means leaving the daughter to drown. Furthermore, the man is forced to choose. He cannot wait to think about options, and so he makes an extremely difficult choice.

Because Christians do meet such ethical dilemmas on occasion, it is important to clearly set forth what might be called the "standard spiritual equipment" that is a part of the Christian's background when he/she faces an ethical dilemma. In light of the various things studied thus far, the Christian should be aware that:

1. The believer is both "in" the world yet not "of" the world. He/she must strive to discriminate between godly and ungodly elements in culture while at the same time work toward converting culture to Christ.
2. The believer is both free and responsible. He/she is free to make moral decisions and responsible to make godly ones.
3. The believer is to be guided by the absolute universal moral principles of the Word of God.
4. Although the believer has been redeemed from fallenness, he/she still contends with human finitude.
5. God alone can rectify moral distortion. He is not only righteous, he has the capacity to make people righteous by his gracious gift of righteousness.
6. The believer's central motivation for ethical behavior must be self-giving love as demonstrated by Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Hypothetical Areas of Ethical Conflict

Following is a list of common ethical problems with which the modern Christian must struggle.

<u>ABORTION</u> :	It's my body, isn't it?
<u>AFFLUENCE</u> :	Why can't I spend what's mine?
<u>BIO-ETHICS</u> :	Is it right for scientists to explore and create alternative life forms?
<u>BUSINESS ETHICS</u> :	What's wrong with being successful?
<u>CENSORSHIP</u> :	I thought we believed in freedom of speech!
<u>CHEMICAL ABUSE</u> :	It's my body--I can do what I want with it!
<u>CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE</u> :	What if the law seems wrong?
<u>CONSUMERISM</u> :	How can I get my money's worth?
<u>CRIMINAL PUNISHMENT</u> :	Isn't killing always wrong?
<u>ECOLOGY</u> :	How careful should I be of the environment?
<u>EUTHANASIA</u> :	Isn't death with dignity preferable?
<u>HOMOSEXUALITY</u> :	Why can't I love the way I want to?
<u>INFANTICIDE</u> :	Isn't quality of life the most important thing?
<u>LEISURE</u> :	Shouldn't I be able to do what I want with my time?
<u>OBSCENITY</u> :	Surely words never hurt anyone!
<u>PORNOGRAPHY</u> :	Isn't pornography just another kind of art?
<u>RACISM</u> :	Aren't some kinds of races just naturally superior to others?
<u>NEW MUSIC FORMS</u> :	What's wrong with a different kind of sound?
<u>SELF-LOVE</u> :	What's wrong with just loving myself?
<u>SEXUAL PROMISCUITY</u> :	How can anything that feels so good be so wrong?
<u>SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY</u> :	Am I my brother's keeper?
<u>SUICIDE</u> :	Who does it hurt?
<u>WAR</u> :	Must I not protect my country at any cost?
<u>WOMEN'S RIGHTS</u> :	Why can't I be treated as a person?
<u>WORLDLINESS</u> :	Why is everything that is fun supposed to be wrong?

HUMAN SEXUALITY

Nowhere is the pattern of establishing acceptable behavior by popular opinion more evident than in the area of human sexuality. The sexual revolution of the 1960s and afterward created a “values free” sexual society. In the later part of the 20th century, largely due to the AIDS epidemic, a movement back toward monogamy resurfaced, but its influence has been marginal. The number of couples cohabiting without marriage increases yearly. Whether gay or straight, more and more human sexual behavior is adopted outside the framework of the Bible.

One thing is clear: the morality that has the most clout is a morality of utility, not a morality of the intrinsic rightness or wrongness of an act. The public school system has responded to this moral impassivity by offering courses in sexuality that are “value free,” that is, courses that study human sexuality in terms of biology, technique and sociology rather than morality. Birth control and in some cases abortions without parental consent or even parental knowledge are permissible by law. In Great Britain, the legal age for consenting homosexual behavior was lowered from eighteen to sixteen, and currently there is a concerted movement to lower it yet again to age fourteen. Attempts to control pornography, both in print and on the internet, repeatedly face outraged cries of censorship.

Human sexuality is as old as humans themselves, and consequently, sexual issues are unlike many of the other social ethical issues that are modern enough so that the Bible does not address them directly. The Bible gives rather straightforward instructions on sexual behavior.

Sexual Norms

For Christians, sexual norms begin with the creation account (Ge. 1-2). Sexuality is part of the created order, and the categories of male and female reflect the very image of God (Ge. 1:27-28). Humans were created for fellowship, the deepest expression of which is marriage. Wedlock is the biblical setting for sexual intimacy, where spouses may express and celebrate the deepest sense of their relationship (Ge. 2:24-25; Mt. 19:4-6; Ep. 5:31). Intimacy without shame is the divine ideal for wives and husbands (Ge. 2:25; cf. Tit. 1:15). Eve, the first mother, acknowledged God’s approval of the procreative process (Ge. 4:1). The author of Hebrews likewise speaks of the purity of the marriage bed (He. 13:4).

Like all God’s gifts, sexuality was created with a divinely ordered purpose. Biologically, sex is for procreation. God ordered our first parents to propagate the human race (Ge. 1:27-28), though of course, fertility is not guaranteed. Human sexuality is not biological only, however. Sex also is deeply emotional and relational. Though some Christians have adopted the stoic notion that “if it’s enjoyable it must

be bad,” the Bible quite plainly speaks otherwise. Sex is emotionally fulfilling, and the clearest expression must surely be the Song of Songs, where human love, particularly erotic love, is celebrated with utter frankness. The emotional side of sexuality is not selfish, however, for it finds fulfillment in the giving of oneself to the other. Hence, as C. S. Lewis says, “Our sexual appetites are humanized and personalized only when taken into a personal bond of love.”¹⁶ Finally, sex is an expression of covenantal commitment. Sexual intercourse brings two human beings into the closest possible unity as it expresses lifelong love (Song 8:6). It is within marriage that partners may express themselves in uninhibited union with a love that is freely given and freely received (Song 8:12; 2:16; 4:16; 6:3; 7:10; 8:6-7). The references to “wedding” and “bride” in the Song of Songs are not merely incidental (3:11; 4:8-12); they set the stage for this deepest level of intimacy.

Because of wedlock’s basic character as a covenant of commitment, God ordained that the sexual relationship is fundamental to married life. The sexual act in marriage is appropriately described by the Old Testament euphemism of “knowing” one’s spouse (Ge. 4:1).¹⁷ Marriage itself is sealed before God by sexual intercourse (Ge. 24:67; 29:22-30; Dt. 22:28-29), though the inverse should not be assumed.¹⁸ This sealing is the primary meaning of the expression “one flesh”, and sexual union continues to express the commitment of spouses to each other (He. 13:4). As such, Paul forbids spouses to deprive each other of this loving relationship except for brief interludes of spiritual preoccupation (1 Co. 7:3-5). In keeping with God’s basic purpose, sexual intercourse between spouses should be free from guilt and fear, and it should serve to strengthen the unity of marriage. Any use of sex by one spouse as a manipulative force against the other would be a sin against God’s basic purpose.

Heterosexual Sin

Because it is so powerful, sex must be controlled (1 Co. 7:7-9). The more powerful something is, the more potential for abuse. Even though sexuality is part of God’s good creation, it is especially susceptible to exploitation by fallen men and women. Thus, when Adam and Eve succumbed to disobedience, they both immediately realized their vulnerability to each other (Ge. 3:6-7, 10-12). It is important to understand that the fall did not cause sex to become evil. It only opened

¹⁶ *The Four Loves* (Waco, TX: The Episcopal Radio-TV Foundation, Inc., 1970, 1983).

¹⁷ The Hebrew word **יָדָע** (*yada'* = to know), though it may refer to social knowledge of a more general kind, also has the more restricted sense of sexual intercourse.

¹⁸ It may be questioned whether a marriage is valid in those rare cases where sexual intercourse is not possible, but the consent of each partner to all that marriage involves, including intercourse (even though in their case it may not be possible), seems sufficient, cf. G. Meilaender, Jr., “Sexuality,” *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, eds. D. Atkinson and D. Field (Leicester, England: IVP, 1995), p. 74.

the door for human sexuality to become distorted by evil. Hence, the Bible gives clear lines of demarcation for sexual experience. Since sexuality is an expression of commitment by one person to another for life (Mk. 10:6-9), marital unfaithfulness is strictly forbidden in the ten commandments (Ex. 20:14; Dt. 5:18). It is precisely for this reason that God used the unfaithfulness of Hosea's wife to illustrate the covenant unfaithfulness of Israel to himself (Ho. 1:2; 2:2; 4:10). Similarly, Jesus interpreted the seventh commandment along the same lines (Mt. 5:27-28). To lustfully desire someone to whom one is not committed in marriage, even though no sexual act is performed, is a form of breaking God's ideal for the marriage bond. Alternatively, faithfulness in marriage is an appropriate metaphor for the relationship between Christ and the church (Ep. 5:25-33).

It is in this context that the Bible gives the strongest prohibitions regarding extramarital sexual relationships. Under Old Testament law, adulterers were guilty of a capital crime (Lv. 20:10). In the New Testament, sexual sin without repentance meant expulsion from the church (1 Co. 5:1-5, 13). The various lists of sins that appear in the New Testament invariably include adultery and fornication (cf. Ac. 15:29; Ro. 1:29; 2:22; 2 Cor. 12:21; Ga. 5:19; Ep. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Th. 4:3; Ja. 2:11).¹⁹ The church should bear in mind, of course, that sexual sin can be forgiven (Jn. 8:3, 10, 11; 1 Co. 6:9-11), but it is serious nonetheless.

In contemporary society, premarital sex usually is considered acceptable upon the grounds of the freedom of consenting adults. In the Christian community, it can never be acceptable because of the covenantal nature of sexual intercourse. Sex without marriage is privilege without responsibility, covenant intimacy without covenant commitment. As such, premarital sex is not merely a sin against God and the other party (though it is certainly this), but it also is a sin against one's own body and God's purposes for the human body (1 Co. 6:13b-20). Under the Torah, premarital sex between unengaged persons called for marriage, though the marriage was contingent upon the father's consent (Ex. 22:16-17). If an engaged woman was discovered having sex in town with a stranger, both were to be executed, because it would be assumed that the woman had not screamed for help (Dt. 22:23-24). If an engaged woman was discovered having sex with a stranger in the country, she would be given the benefit of the doubt, because her screams would not have been heard. Only the man was to be executed (Dt. 22:25-27). If a woman had married, and later it was proved that she had engaged in premarital sex with someone other than her

¹⁹ In Greek, the terms *πορνεία* (*porneia* = fornication) and *μοιχεία* (*moicheia* = adultery) are very close in meaning, the former referring to illicit sexual intercourse, such as, prostitution, unchastity or any other kind of unlawful sexual encounter, and the latter referring generally to illicit intercourse with the spouse of another. Both terms to some degree overlap.

husband, she was to be executed (Dt. 22:13-21).²⁰ Hence, sexual deviation was a serious crime with serious consequences.

In the New Testament, it is assumed that unmarried persons will defer sexual union until marriage. Couples who are engaged must either control their sexual drive or else marry (1 Co. 7:8-9, 36-37).²¹ Still, the question is sometimes posed, “Why not just live together? Why marry at all? Doesn’t God recognized marriage on the basis of sex anyway?”²² This attempt at easing the biblical restrictions is shaky. First, God requires Christians to conform to the laws of citizenship (Ro. 13:1; 1 Pe. 2:13-14). Though these customs may change and though they vary from culture to culture, they cannot be discarded. God once executed a man for violating the then current ancient Near Eastern cultural expectations regarding sex and marriage, even when there was no divine prescriptive law in effect (Ge. 38:8-10). Second, public marriage says that a couple faces responsibility to a larger society—friends, family, fellow Christians—as conscientiously as possible. Christians do not live to themselves; they live as members of a community whose approval is important, whose love is desired, and whose reputation is esteemed. Finally, if cohabiting without formal marriage was acceptable, the passages in the Bible that address marriage would be irrelevant, since they obviously assume formal marriage either under Jewish or Roman laws.

A related question concerns western dating practices, which were altogether unknown in the biblical world. What are the limits of acceptable gestures of romance and courtship? As a general principle, any gesture that arises purely out of self-gratification cannot qualify as a true expression of love. Pressure to “let me show you how much I love you” is usually not love at all, at least in the biblical sense, but selfish fulfillment and a long step toward the lust that Christ prohibited. Any act that sexually excites so that clearly forbidden sexual gratification becomes a real temptation must be shunned. It suggests intimacy without commitment, it weakens self-control, and it “plays with”—treats casually or flippantly—the sacred institution of sex.

With the rise in pornography and exhibitionism, and especially due to their unrestricted accessibility on the internet, the moral code of Jesus must be reiterated: to look lustfully on another is tantamount to adultery (Mt. 6:27-30). Pornography,

²⁰ Precisely what is the “proof of virginity” is unclear. It could refer to blood-stains resulting from the first sexual union, it could refer to some sort of chastity belt, or it could refer to evidence of regular menstruation, which in turn would indicate that the woman was not pregnant prior to her marriage, cf. A. Mayes, *Deuteronomy [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 310.

²¹ Unfortunately, Paul’s language in 7:36 about “his virgin” is somewhat ambiguous so that the male in the passage could refer to either the young woman’s father (so NASB, TCNT, Weymouth) or her fiancée (so NIV, RSV, NEB, TEV, Goodspeed, Phillips). In either case, it is clear that marriage is preferable to risking unchastity.

²² Both in Britain and America, cohabitation before marriage (or cohabitation with no intention of marriage) had become the majority practice by the early 1990s.

especially, can become addictive, and the warning against promiscuity in the ancient wisdom literature still holds true (Pro. 2:12-19; 5:1-23; 6:23-29; 7:6-27). Furthermore, pornography encourages, supports and enables the exploitation of women and children, since the larger share of pornography is marketed for men and pederasts.²³

Finally, Christians have rightly condemned bigamy, polygamy and polyandry. Though the Bible neither condemns nor advocates multiple spouses, it nevertheless offers broad indications that such practice deviates from the divine intent. In the first place, God created one man for one woman (Ge. 1-2). The bigamy by Lamech was a sign of the fallenness of humans resulting in exploitation and terrorism (Ge. 4:19-24). Jesus' words, based on the Genesis account of creation, that "the two will become one flesh" (Mk. 10:8), presupposes monogamy as the divine ideal. By the time of the apostolic church, Christians leaders were restricted to monogamy (1 Ti. 3:2, 12; Tit. 1:6).

HOMOSEXUALITY: THE BIBLICAL QUESTION

Everyone who follows the media with any regularity is aware of the issue of Gay Rights. It forms an important plank in the platform of every political entity, and it is an issue that is difficult to face with neutrality. Furthermore, most people are aware that the mainline Protestant denominations in Christendom have addressed and are continuing to address this subject from a theological perspective, notably the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, the American Lutheran Church and the Presbyterian Church USA.²⁴ Within each of these denominations, there is a growing advocacy group which hopes to reverse the traditional opinion that homosexual behavior is sinful. In the past decade, a critical rereading of the biblical texts that address the question of homosexuality has resulted in a position that the Bible, far from condemning homosexuality, is largely silent on the issue. It is this question which we intend to entertain here.

Does the Bible Condemn Homosexuality?²⁵

"YES"

Here are some of the common arguments made by people who believe the

²³ This is the burden of the large investigative report, *Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill, 1986).

²⁴ C. Grossman, "Protestants Gather with Sex on Their Minds," *USA Today* (June 6, 2001), p. 9B, 11B.

²⁵The following article appeared in the *Detroit Free Press* on April 11, 1992. It is a very good summary of the issue from both sides.

Bible teaches that homosexuality is sinful.

THE BIBLE is God's infallible guide for living. It's the most important authority for determining church teachings. It contains many different kinds of writing--laws, histories, letters and poetry--but the meaning of most Bible verses is clear. They should be obeyed as written.

EVERY REFERENCE to homosexual acts in the Bible describes them in a negative or sinful way.

HOMOSEXUALITY MUST be a deviation from God's ideal plan for the world, because many stories throughout the Bible show that normal families should be formed by men and women who marry and have children. From the beginning of the world, the Bible says, God created men and women as the perfect partners. Genesis 1:27-28 says: "He created them male and female, blessed them, and said, 'Have many children, so that your descendents will live all over the earth and bring it under control.'" Genesis 2:24 explains that God had planned the world so that "a man leaves his father and mother, is united with his wife, and they are one." There are no examples of families headed by gay couples in the Bible.

TWO VERSES in the Book of Leviticus (18:22 and 20:13) say that sexual relations between men are evil. The second verse says it's so evil that it deserves the death penalty: "If a man has sexual relations with another man, they have done a disgusting thing, and both shall be put to death." Leviticus ranks this sin with adultery and incest.

THE STORY of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 describes God's destruction of cities that were sinful centers of homosexuality. It's the story of two angels who took the form of men and came to visit Lot's house in Sodom. Men from the town surrounded Lot's house and called for him to send these two visitors outside. Genesis 19:4: "The men of Sodom wanted to have sex with them." The next day, the two angels told Lot: "The Lord has heard the terrible accusations against these people and has sent us to destroy Sodom." Lot escaped, and God destroyed both towns.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, St. Paul says at least three times that sex between men is sinful. In Paul's letter, 1 Corinthians 6:9, he says bluntly: "Do not fool yourselves. People who are immoral or who worship idols or are adulterers or homosexuals or who steal or are greedy or are drunkards or who slander others or are thieves--none of these will possess God's Kingdom." In Romans 1:27, Paul says: "Men do shameful things with each other, and as a result they bring upon themselves the punishment they deserve for their wrongdoing."

BOTH THE GOSPELS of Mark and Matthew say that even Jesus referred back to God's plan in Genesis for men and women to be partners. In Mark 9:6, Jesus says: "In the beginning, at the time of creation, 'God made them male and female,' as the scripture says."

*Bible quotations are from "Today's English Version" and "New International Version."

“NO”

Here are some of the common arguments made by people who say the Bible is neutral on homosexuality.

THE BIBLE is a divinely inspired guide to God's plan for the world. But its many laws, histories, letters and poetry are complex and need to be interpreted in light of modern religious experience, human history and God's continuing revelations to church leaders.

THERE ARE less than a dozen verses that mention sexual acts between men among the 31,173 verses in the Bible. It's not a big concern of the Bible's authors.

THE BIBLE'S authors had no sense of homosexuality as a basic sexual orientation, and the Bible never clearly refers to lesbians. A proper understanding of God's gift of human sexuality is something the church is learning about in modern times. As Christians learn more, they interpret the Bible in different ways. There are hundreds of Bible passages about human relationships that have been widely reinterpreted. For instance, many Bible verses accept slavery as normal, a relationship now considered evil. Regarding marriage, Jesus said that divorced people must not remarry--although most churches now recognize divorce.

THE CODE of law in Leviticus was intended for the ancient Hebrews and doesn't apply today. Leviticus forbids the sin of sex between men but it also condemns as evil many things that are commonly accepted today, including: crossbreeding farm animals, planting two kinds of seeds in the same field, wearing clothing made of two kinds of material and trimming a man's beard.

THE DESTRUCTION of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 is a story of God's punishment, but the crime was not homosexuality. God was angry because the men of Sodom had tried to rape two angelic messengers he had sent to Lot's house. This was partly a violation of the code of hospitality, a very important set of social customs in ancient society that ensured the protection of visitors. It also was evil because men were trying to abuse angels sent by God. Almost nothing is

said about Gomorrah in this story, except that it was situated in the same valley as Sodom. There is no record of God destroying anyone because of homosexuality.

ST. PAUL'S brief references in the New Testament to sex between men are confusing and have been twisted by Bible scholars who assume that all gay sex is sinful. It's incorrect to translate the Greek words of 1 Corinthians 6:9 or 1 Timothy 1:10 to condemn all "homosexuals." Paul probably was referring to the Greco-Roman practices of sex between men and boys or of male prostitution, both of which concerned Paul because they were casual or abusive. In Romans 1:24-27, Paul also is complaining about people who satisfy their sexual desires with casual sex.

JESUS NEVER TALKED about homosexuality. His main concerns were preaching about compassion, caring for neighbors, and God's love for all people. In Luke 6:37, Jesus says: "Do not judge others and God will not judge you; do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you."

The Traditional, Christian Interpretation

Homosexuality is known from ancient times. The name for female homosexuality, lesbianism, is taken from Lesbos, where Sappho, the Greek poetess who reputedly was homosexual, lived in about 600 BC. The inscribed Greek vases from the classical period have many graphic depictions of sodomy. It was known in ancient Assyria and Rome, and later, in Islam.²⁶

In assessing this behavior theologically, the account of the creation of humans as male and female is of first importance (Ge. 1:27). God created intimate companionship for the first humans through the male/female polarity. Adam surveyed all the animals, and his survey is bracketed by the double affirmation, "It is not good for the man to be alone" and "for the man no suitable helper was found" (Ge. 2:18, 20b). Of all the creatures, only the man was alone. Thus, God created a companion for him—very much like him, but very different as well (Ge. 2:21-23). The essential family unit, according to divine command, was to be one man and one woman, committed and united to each other sexually, which in turn expressed their union in all other aspects of life (Ge. 2:24-25). That the creation account is to be taken as paradigmatic for all successive human relationships is clear in Jesus' teachings about marriage and divorce, drawn from the same passage (cf. Mk. 10:6-9;

²⁶ E. Burns, et al., *World Civilizations: Their History and Culture*, 6th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), pp. 61, 379; J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), pp. 61-87.

Mt. 19:3-6). If Jesus' norm of one man for one woman for life is the clear conclusion of the creation account, so also is the behavioral norm of heterosexuality.

While there are various kinds of laws in the Mosaic code, some applying to sedentary life in Palestine, others to cultic situations, and others to universal moral concepts, it has generally been understood that the sexual laws of Torah fall into this latter category of universal norms, given that they seem to follow the created order. The fundamental apodictic law is against adultery (Ex. 20:14; Dt. 5:18; cf. Lv. 18:20). Accompanying this basic apodictic are various other apodictic and case laws relating to adultery (Lv. 19:20-22; 20:10; Dt. 22:22), seduction (Ex. 22:16-17; Dt. 22:23-24), incest (Lv. 18:6-16; 20:12, 17, 19-21), multiple marriages within the same family (Lv. 18:17-18; 20:14; Dt. 22:30), intercourse during a wife's menstrual cycle (Lv. 18:19; 20:18), homosexuality (Lv. 18:22; 20:13), bestiality (Lv. 18:23; 20:15), rape (Dt. 22:25-29), and prostitution (Lv. 19:29; Dt. 23:17-18; cf. 1 Kg. 14:24). In general, Christians have traditionally believed that all these behaviors were morally reprehensible.

Regarding homosexuality, there are two narratives in the Old Testament that reinforce the direction of these laws. One is the story of the judgment of Sodom, a city of which God said the moral outcry against them was so grievous that not even ten righteous persons could be found among the citizenry (Ge. 18:20-33). When angels appeared in the form of men as though they were traveling strangers to the city, Lot was so afraid of the potential consequences of leaving them unguarded that he prevented them from staying in the square at night (Ge. 19:1-3). Nevertheless, the men of Sodom, both old and young, surrounded Lot's house, demanding to have sex with the strangers (Ge. 19:4-9). It was only through their supernatural powers that the angels escaped (Ge. 19:10-11).²⁷ In the end, God obliterated this city with fire and burning sulfur (Ge. 19:24-25). Sodom, then, became a symbol of those who paraded their depravity (Is. 3:9; Eze. 16:49-50). The term "sodomy" derives from this story.

The other story occurs during the period of the Tribal League. Once again, strangers passing through Gibeah of Benjamin were prevented from staying the night in the town square because of the inherent danger (Jg. 19:14-21). As in the earlier incident, a group of homosexuals surrounded the house, demanding to have sex with the male traveler (Jg. 19:22). Though unable to convince the man's host to deliver up his guest, the men raped the travelers' slave-wife, eventually killing her (Jg. 19:23-30). The other clans of Israel were so deeply disturbed by this incident that they

²⁷The Hebrew verb *la'ah* used in this passage means to become tired of doing something, hence the KJV rendering, "...they wearied themselves to find the door" (also NASB, RSV, ASV). This clause may indicate that even in their blindness, their obsession with the strangers was not immediately sated.

nearly exterminated the clan of Benjamin (Jg. 20).

Paul cites homosexual behavior as a practice which reflects human depravity, particularly the human tendency to deliberately suppress the truth by wickedness, a behavior that merits the wrath of God (Ro. 1:18-20). It is akin to idolatry (Ro. 1:21-23, 25). Because humans refused to recognize God, he abandoned them to sexual perversion (Ro. 1:24), including lesbian behavior (Ro. 1:26) and male homosexual actions (Ro. 1:27). Of course, homosexual behavior is not the only demonstration of human depravity (cf. Ro. 1:29-32). It, along with the other sins in Paul's list, indicate the kinds of things that are typical human rebellions against God (Ro. 1:28).

Later, Paul asserts that those who live the homosexual lifestyle will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Co. 6:9-10; cf. 1 Ti. 1:10). Cult prostitution, adultery, male prostitution and homosexual behavior are categorized with other kinds of sins characteristic of those who are separated from God. Of course, all of these sins are forgivable, and in fact, some of the Corinthian Christians apparently had indulged in just these very sort of sins before they had come to know Christ (1 Co. 6:11). Now, however, they had been cleansed.

When Jude looks for ancient sins that parallel the sins of his own day, Sodom looms large due to its sexual perversions (Jude 7-8). Similarly, the Book of 2 Peter describes the behavior of the Sodomites as ungodly, filthy and lawless (2 Pe. 2:6-8).

The Case Against the Traditional Christian Interpretation

In the latter part of the 20th century, a concerted effort has been made on the part of the homosexual community to legitimize its behavior. Politically, this has been approached in two basic ways, first in the efforts to remove this behavior from the American Psychiatric Association's registry of emotional disturbances, and second, under the rubric of civil rights.²⁸ Scientifically, it has been suggested that sexual orientation is innate to individuals and controlled by genetics rather than adopted as a behavior.²⁹ Theologically, an apologetic has been built which attempts to take the sting out of the biblical passages described earlier.³⁰ In general, the creation

²⁸ The political machinations preceding the 1973 APA's successful vote to strike homosexuality from the officially approved list of psychiatric illnesses is a story in and of itself, cf. J. Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), pp. 31-40. It culminated in the 1994 attempt to alter the APA's code of ethics, making it a violation of professional conduct for a psychiatrist to help a homosexual patient become heterosexual even if the patient requested it, though the action, recommended by the Board of Trustees, was eventually defeated.

²⁹ In the "nature/nurture" controversy, National Public Radio announced on July 15, 1993, followed by similar reports in *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, that scientists had discovered a "gay gene." This report was extremely tendentious, and the relationship of homosexuality to genetics, in the end, is no stronger than the relationship between tall individuals and basketball, cf. Satinover, pp. 109-117. Certainly it is seriously misleading to suggest that homosexuality is a product of genetic determinism.

³⁰ Two of the most influential books to date on this subject are D. Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (Longmans, 1955) and J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (University

account is ignored, because it is deemed too ambiguous. The other passages, however, are carefully scrutinized.

In Leviticus 18 and 20, homosexual behavior, along with the other various descriptions of forbidden sexual activity, is described as **תועבה** (*to'ebah* = abominable, detestable). The apologetic from the homosexual community asserts that this word does not signify something intrinsically evil, but rather, something ritually unclean, more or less on the order of the kosher food laws. It is asserted that these laws were narrowly designed to maintain a rigid distinction between Israel and the Canaanites, and since they were symbols of Jewish distinctiveness, they were not morally absolute. Homosexual behavior might be forbidden to Jews as Jews, but in the Christian era the statute is irrelevant.

With respect to the events at Sodom and Gibeah, it is the idiomatic use of the verb **יָדָעַ** (*yada'* = to know, to engage in sexual intercourse) which comes under reexamination. In ancient Hebrew, the verbal expressions used to describe sexual intercourse are invariably idiomatic.³¹ Since in the cases of Sodom and Gibeah the effort of the townspeople was "to know" the strangers, it is argued that there is no overtone of sexuality in their demand. Their demand may have been socially inappropriate, but it was not necessarily sexual. If the men of Sodom and Gibeah sinned, it was due to a breach of ancient Near Eastern hospitality customs, not homosexual desire.

When one comes to the New Testament, the homophile apologetic argues that the Greek words **μαλακος** (*malakos* = effeminate, homosexual) and **αρσενοκοιτης** (*arsenokoites* = male homosexual, sodomite, pederast) do not, in fact, refer to homosexuals generally. Rather, they are restricted to definitions free from a general condemnation of homosexual behavior. It is asserted that the first word simply refers to an indulgent lack of self-control, and would be better translated as "unrestrained" or "wanton." In the case of the second word, while it is admitted that it refers to homosexual behavior, it is argued that the word only refers to homosexual prostitutes, not to homosexuals living in a committed, loving relationship. The passage in Romans, it is asserted, refers to heterosexuals who have left their heterosexual orientation in order to engage in homosexual behavior. Thus, homosexual behavior in itself is not wrong providing such behavior is the natural orientation of the person. It is only wrong if one goes against a natural heterosexual orientation. The inverse would be true as well. If one's natural inclination is

of Chicago, 1980).

³¹The two most common are the verbs *yada'* (= to know) and *shakav* (= to lay). Obviously, both of these verbs are also used in contexts other than sexual, but equally obvious, some contexts are specifically sexual (e.g., Ge. 4:1; 19:32-36).

homosexual, it would be wrong to go against this orientation by engaging in a heterosexual relationship. Thus, Boswell can say, "The New Testament takes no demonstrable position on homosexuality," and by implication, homosexual behavior is legitimate so long as it is carried out as an expression of caring and love.

Responsible Biblical Interpretation

What about these new interpretations? Is the traditional Christian opinion invalid? Has new scholarly research thrown over the moral values of the past and rendered them obsolete? Several factors combine to show that the homophile apologetic is tendentious and dangerous. While it makes a show of scholarship which might be impressive to the lay person unfamiliar with ancient history or biblical languages, it is, in fact, a serious breach of scholarship.

In the first place, it always is suspect when a person or group first adopts a certain behavior and only later tries to prove from the Bible that it is legitimate. If the "discovery" had been made first that the Bible permitted homosexual behavior, one might at least be inclined to pass over the issue of motives. However, when the behavior comes first and the biblical support for it is advanced only later, then one suspects that what is being offered is an interpretation of convenience. Furthermore, it is also quite correct to say that those who advance the reconstructed interpretation are hardly in the camp of those who ardently support the integrity and binding authority of the Bible.

While the creation account is often dismissed or ignored by the homophile reconstructionists, such a lapse is negligent at best. If Jesus considered the creation account to hold the norms for marriage and divorce, it is surely appropriate for the norms of sexual behavior to be there as well, particularly since the role of sexual behavior is specifically addressed in the Genesis narrative. When Adam needed a companion corresponding to him for a life-long, committed relationship which was reflected in sexual union, God created a woman, not another man.

The explanation that the prohibitions in the Mosaic Code were ritual issues only, not moral ones, cannot be sustained. The homophile correctly perceives that a key point in the case for or against homosexual behavior is the word *to'ebah*, but to dismiss this word as exclusively relegated to the cultic is a serious overstatement. The word also clearly refers to things morally offensive to God, as any survey of the 117 times it is used in the Hebrew Bible will indicate (e.g., Dt. 25:13-16; Pro. 6:16-19). To be sure, this word is used to refer to cultic uncleanness, but often enough, the cultic violation and the ethical violation coalesce.³² In most cases, it is clear that behavior which is *to'ebah* is repugnant to God himself, and what is repugnant to God

³² *TWOT* (1980) II.976-977.

can hardly be a matter indifferent with respect to human behavior, regardless of the period of time under consideration.

The suggestion that the sin of the Sodomites and the Benjamites was only a case of bad manners has won little support among biblical scholars. Even apart from linguistics, it seems a bit farfetched to have God annihilating a city for breach of etiquette. The contexts of the situations at Sodom and at Gibeah are both clearly sexual in nature, since in both cases women were offered for sexual intercourse as a way of protecting the male guests from violation. Other passages in the Old Testament which use the verb *yada'* with a sexual nuance seem to be directly parallel to these two instances as well (cf. Ge. 4:1, 17, 25; 24:16; 38:26; Nu. 31:17-18, 35; Jg. 11:39; 19:25; 1 Sa. 1:19). In both the stories of Sodom and Gibeah, it is especially relevant that the idiom *yada'* is used with a clear sexual nuance regarding the women (Ge. 19:8; Jg. 19:25). It seems extremely unlikely that the same idiom used in the same context regarding men means something altogether different (Ge. 19:5; Jg. 19:22).

The treatment of the words *malakos* and *arsenokoites* is equally specious in the homophile reconstruction. Many biblical scholars understand the two words to refer directly to the passive and dominant partners respectively in male homosexual relationships.³³ Quite literally, the word *arsenokoites* refers to a male bed-partner for a male in homosexual intercourse. To reduce this word to meaning no more than a male homosexual prostitute is blatant deception.

With respect to Romans 1, the argument that Paul is only condemning heterosexuals who leave their natural inclinations for a homosexual relationship is against any plain reading of the passage. Homosexual behavior is unnatural, to be sure, but not simply in the case of violating one's sexual orientation. It is unnatural because it violates the truth of God which has been changed into a lie, the truth which is implicit in the creation itself (Ro. 1:20, 25).³⁴

The Current Moral Drift

The current moral drift in the mainline Christian denominations over the

³³ C. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (A. & C. Black, 1971) 140.

³⁴ To date, the most thorough theological and exegetical treatment of homosexuality is R. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001). His conclusion, after carefully treating all the relevant passages, is terse: *Same sex intercourse is strongly and unequivocally rejected by the revelation of Scripture. Arguments put forward by advocates of homosexuality to undermine the contemporary relevance of Scripture are weak. Scripture does not reject same-sex intercourse because of some alleged ignorance of non-exploitative forms of homosexual behavior or genetic causation factors. It does not reject homosexual intercourse because of some misperception that only idolaters in the strict sense could engage in such behavior or because of some superstition about defilement and purity. It does not reject homosexual practice, at least no primarily, out of some need to assert the rule of men over women. Rather, Scripture rejects homosexual behavior because it is a violation of the gendered existence of male and female ordained by God at creation.*

question of homosexuality runs concurrently with their general drift away from the authority of the Bible. At one time, we thought of only two primary options regarding how the Bible was to be viewed. One was the Christian view of the Bible as the Word of God -- authoritative, unique and inspired or supervised in such a way that its truth was ultimately guaranteed by God. The other was the non-Christian view of the Bible, that is, that the Bible was a human composition by ancient Israel and the early Christian movement, not a unique revelation from God, and only one among a number of religious documents produced by the various religions of the world. Today in many of the mainline denominations, there has arisen a third option which accepts the name Christian but also believes in the human rather than divine composition of the Bible.³⁵ As such, then, the ethical and moral seriousness with which the Bible is approached has been considerably weakened. If the Bible is a human document only, then prohibitions and ethical commands are cultural expressions only. While a Christian may feel bound in loyalty to God, he/she is not necessarily bound in loyalty to the stipulations of the Bible. Furthermore, what once were considered to be serious moral issues are increasingly being viewed as cultural expressions that have outlived their usefulness and are to be superseded by our more advanced modern ethical sensitivity.

Related to the issue of Scripture is the issue of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. To say that Jesus Christ is Lord but that there is no way of knowing exactly what he said, or to say that God is to be obeyed but there is no way of knowing exactly what he intends, in the end, becomes a way of living with no moral imperative. The modern person wants grace, but he wants it without any clear recognition of the seriousness of sin. The law has been relegated to an ancient time, and it is considered to be irrelevant for the modern era. St. Paul, to the contrary, said that the law served a critical moral function. It was given so that "sin...might become exceeding sinful" (Ro. 7:13, KJV). It is in this sense that Paul says the law is "holy, righteous and good" (Ro. 7:12). As the church has lost contact with this holy function of the law, it has also lost the meaning of grace. Grace, in the modern definition, means little more than permissiveness. It is no longer the unmerited favor by which God forgives sin, but it has become the latitudinarianism by which the church tolerates moral laxity. This moral drift is seen nowhere more clearly than in the discussion of sexual ethics. Judgment must begin with the house of God (1 Pe. 4:17)!

³⁵A short but insightful discussion of this merging of the two older views is to be found in the editorial by Marcus Borg in *BR* (August 1992) 7, 13.

HUMAN LIFE

The increasing trend in our culture toward self-love, personal empowerment and the denial of accountability to God has frightening repercussions with respect to the value of human life. A maze of ethical issues confront us, ranging from euthanasia to assisted suicide to fetal tissue research to abortion on demand. So long as humans perceive themselves to be accidents of time and space, it will be hard to place any supreme value on human life. Instead, the supreme value will be upon personal happiness, personal power and personal freedom. Traditionally, the laws of the land held in check the threat to the supreme value of human life, but even the law is rapidly capitulating to the spirit of the age.

What life is worthy to be lived? Christians have always answered this question theologically. The Bible teaches that humans are the crown of God's creation, made in his image (Ge. 1:26-27; Ps. 8). Even the unborn are under God's providential care and concern (Ps. 139:13-16; Ge. 25:22-23). All human life is worthy to be lived. To willfully take life from another human being means the forfeit of one's own life, for only in this way can human life be given its full value (Ge. 9:5-6).

These biblical principles are currently under deliberate and formidable attack. Human life is increasingly being valued from a utilitarian perspective rather than a theological one. Humans are valuable because of what they can produce, not because they are made in God's image. The self is valuable, not because one has been given life from God, but because of self-love alone. When one faces the difficult ethical questions of life and death, the perspectives of narcissism, personal convenience, survival of the fittest, Darwinian biology and ethical relativism intrude upon biblical values, eventually canceling them.

The Life of the Unborn

The first issue of human life must surely be the life of the unborn. In the 20th century, this debate between pro-life and pro-choice advocates became the watershed for all subsequent issues. It will be helpful in this discussion to note some of the primary stages in human gestation:

HUMAN GESTATION: a period of about 38 weeks, preceded by two weeks of egg development to the stage ready for fertilization, and divided into three trimesters, each about three months long

First Trimester (first three lunar months): *Zygote Stage:* On the first day, the sperm and female ovum (egg) unite; all genetic information is now present for the development of a fully actualized human being. During the first

twelve hours, the fertilized ovum divides into two cells. Cell division continues. *Blastocyst Stage*: The cluster of dividing cells travels down the mother's fallopian tubes into the womb where, by the end of the first week, it implants in the soft uterine wall and begins to tap into tiny blood vessels and draw nourishment. *Embryonic Stage (from three to eight weeks after ovulation)*: By the second week, according to their genetic codes, the rapidly dividing cells begin to form the amnion (water-filled sac that protects the embryo), the placenta (which brings the embryo's blood into contact with the mother's bloodstream), and the umbilical cord (the lifeline that transports nutrients and wastes between the embryo and the placenta).

At about three weeks, the heart has been formed and begins to beat, and the brain, spinal column and nervous systems are being formed. The kidneys, liver and digestive tract are also taking shape. By the end of four weeks, appendages for arms and legs have appeared as well as indentations in the head for jaws, eyes and ears.

In the second month, the embryo becomes capable of swimming in the amniotic fluid, and the nervous system is sensitive to touch. The nose, ears, lips and tongue begin to appear, the inner ear develops, and the embryo begins to hear the watery sounds of his/her small world. Pigment is produced in the eyes, and eyelids form to cover the eyes and then remain sealed until after the seventh month. Brain waves can be detected. Impulses begin to control circulation, digestion, and waste elimination. The skeleton begins to change from cartilage to bone. The jaws, complete with buds for teeth, are formed. At the end of the second month, the developing little one has arrived at the fetal stage. From this time on, the primary changes will be in dimension and the refinement of working parts.

During the third month the arms take on length, the fingers and toes, complete with fingerprints, mark the fetus as unique in the world. Muscle activity increases; the fetus can turn its head, curl its toes, open and close its mouth, pucker its lips, and make a fist. Nails appear, the genitals are sexually distinct, and the vocal chords are complete.

Second Trimester (middle three lunar months): During the fourth month, facial expressions, hair, brows and lashes begin to appear. The thumb can be sucked, and the mother may begin to feel the first signs of movement within her. The fetus seeks comfortable positions when preparing for sleep. Bone marrow is forming and beginning to produce blood cells on its own (previously performed by liver and spleen). The tiny heart is pumping vigorously, and the umbilical cord is transferring fluids daily.

During the fifth and sixth month, the fetus begins to recognize its mother's voice. He/she curls and moves as the mother moves, grasps the umbilical cord, develops the hiccups and shows frustration by punching and kicking when he/she cannot find a favorite position. Oil and sweat glands now function, and the lungs are developing to perform their tasks when called upon. The lungs are at 50% maturity at 33 weeks and 98% maturity at 37 weeks.

Third Trimester (final three lunar months): During the final three months the fetus continues to grow and wait. He/she can use the senses of seeing, hearing, tasting and touching. The fetus is affected by the moods of the mother. Fat is produced and stored beneath the skin, and antibodies are built up. About a week or two before birth, the fetus "drops" into the pelvic cavity, usually head downward, and awaits the day of birth. At 36 weeks, it weighs about 2900 grams. At 38 weeks, it weighs about 3400 grams. Growth continues to occur until delivery.

Since the United States Supreme Court Decision in 1973 (Roe vs. Wade), abortion on demand has ended the lives of millions of the unborn.³⁶ The standard lines of justification for abortion in our society include the following:

- 1) It is a woman's right to do what she wishes with her own body. (The assumption, of course, is that nascent life is a non-human appendage of the woman's body to do with as she chooses.)
- 2) To legislate against abortion is to legislate morality. (The assumption is that morality either cannot or ought not be legislated.)
- 3) Abortion is one among several acceptable methods of birth control and family planning. (The assumption is that as a method it is on the same moral level as any other method of birth control.)
- 4) Abortion must not be restricted, so that the rights of women can be protected in cases of rape and/or in cases where birth defects are possible or probable. (The assumption is that the mother's lifestyle should not be interrupted by events beyond her control.)
- 5) A woman's right to abortion is the only way to preserve equality between the sexes, since men are exempt from carrying a fetus to term. (The assumption is that equality means sameness.)

³⁶The Alan Guttmacher Institute report of 1990 plus Unofficial Statistics from 1992 put the toll in excess of 28 million abortions. By 2001, this number, already gargantuan, has multiplied exponentially.

- 6) Every child has the right to be wanted. Abortion is necessary to prevent children being born into homes where they are not wanted, and where, therefore, they are likely to be abused. (The assumption is that the only reasonable alternative to having an unwanted child is death to the fetus.)

The Christian viewpoint is very different than the above secular viewpoint. For Christians, the unborn child is not merely an appendage of the woman's body, like hair and nails. Human life begins either at or very near conception,³⁷ and therefore, it should be protected throughout the pregnancy. This position dates from the earliest period of Christianity, when Christians emphatically rejected abortion along with murder, adultery, fornication, sodomy and infanticide.³⁸ The Bible assumes that the whole complex of conception, pregnancy and birth are involved in the divine gift of life (1 Sa. 1:19-20; Ps. 139:13-16; Je. 1:5; Lk. 1:35-37). For Christians, the power of choice for the woman, providing she is not sexually forced, comes at the time of intercourse, not afterward.

Critical to all ethical judgments about abortion, Christian or otherwise, is the definition of the human person. Pro-choice advocates use the personhood argument that excludes rather than includes. Ironically, those labeled “liberal” in the public debate are in fact the most restrictive when it comes to the definition of personhood, while those labeled “conservative” are the most inclusive. A typical definition of personhood from the pro-choice side comes from H. Tristram Engelhardt, who asserts that persons should be defined as those *...concerned about moral arguments and...convinced by them. They must be self-conscious, rational, free to choose, and must possess moral concern.* Of course, such a definition leaves out children as well as the unborn, not to mention the senile! Philip Abbott has well stated:

*There are very few general laws of social science but we can offer one that has a deserved claim: the restriction of the concept of humanity in any sphere never enhances a respect for human life. It did not enhance the rights of slaves, prisoners of wars, criminals, traitors, women, children, Jews, blacks, heretics, workers, capitalists, Slavs, Gypsies. The restriction of the concept of personhood in regard to the fetus will not do so either.*³⁹

It is true that the law cannot make people moral. However, to say that morality should not be legislated is to empty the law of its intrinsic definition, for law

³⁷Anomalies can occur, such as, the occurrence of twinning after the first few cell divisions following fertilization. Alternatively, twinning can be reversed by a recombination of twins into a single individual as well.

³⁸*Didache* 2.2, which states, “You shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill them when born,” parallels exactly the same prohibition in the *Epistle of Barnabas* 19.5. For a more extensive discussion of the early Christian rejection of abortion, see M. Gorman, *Abortion & the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1982), pp. 47-73.

³⁹Quoted in Gilbert Meilaender, “Abortion: The Right to an Argument,” *Life Choices*, 2nd. ed., eds. J. Howell and W. Sale (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 2000), p. 181.

exists in the first place because certain actions are believed to be morally wrong, not merely inconvenient (1 Ti. 1:9-11). The real issue is the moral base undergirding the law. For Christians, morality is based upon the holy nature of God and the moral guidance in the Scriptures he has given. For secular society, morality is based upon tradition and public consensus, each of which are constantly shifting.

To place all forms of birth control on the same level is morally naive. Some methods are contraceptive, that is, they aim at preventing the union of a sperm and an egg. Abortion, on the other hand, is the killing of a fetus. The RU486 pill (recently approved in the USA by the FDA) is a method that usually is used to affect the fertilized ovum after conception,⁴⁰ either preventing its implantation in the uterine wall or depriving it of chemicals necessary to its survival. (It is usually effective some forty-two days after conception.) To say that preventing conception and killing a fetus are morally equivalent is about as accurate as saying it makes no difference whether one negotiates a treaty for peace or simply bombs the opposition into oblivion.

In cases where a woman has been sexually forced, it must be conceded that her powers of choice have been severely violated. Christians are then left with the ethical tension between the right of a woman to choose child-bearing and the right of the child to live. Christians do not all decide in the same way over this tension.⁴¹ Nevertheless, it still remains that the vast majority of abortions are not performed in circumstances of rape, but rather, in circumstances of sexual consent. Furthermore, to say that abortion on demand must remain legal in order to protect raped women from child-bearing is absurd.

Where there are potential or probable birth defects, the issue again is an ethical tension over the quality of human life. Upon what basis does one conclude that another human being has a life unworthy to be lived? Is God the God of the handicapped, also? Does he care for them less, because they are helpless? Sometimes Christians differ in their answer, but the fact remains, such abortions occur in a minority of cases and do not warrant abortion on demand. Furthermore, Christians must not forget that God always has demonstrated a special concern for the powerless and disadvantaged.

It is true that all humans want and deserve to be loved. However, if one permits the killing of a fetus because he/she is unwanted, the same logic can also be used to kill any other unwanted person who makes life inconvenient. Hitler's Third

⁴⁰ RU486 also can be used, in lower dosages, as a contraceptive.

⁴¹ It may be noted that the early Christians, on the basis that the fetus was a "neighbor", not simply a part of the mother (e.g., *Epistle of Barnabas* 19.5), may have rejected therapeutic abortions also, so J. Noonan, Jr., ed., "An Almost Absolute Value in History," *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives* ((Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1965), p. 10.

Reich used the same argumentation for the killing of the insane, the physically handicapped, and those who were racially different.

In the end, then, the value of nascent human life becomes a watershed for all human values. Related issues, such as fetal tissue research, open the door to the utilitarian assessment of human life. In utilitarianism, human life is valuable because of how it can be used for selfish benefit. The devaluation of human life brought about by abortion on demand desensitizes the public to the value of human life in general. This desensitization, in turn, affects a whole variety of other life issues, including the “enlightened” killing of the mentally infirm, the elderly, the terminally ill and the handicapped. Utilitarian ethics opens the door for the conception of children precisely so they may be used as donors. Fetal tissue research is only one example. Another is the intentional creation of human life so as to provide compatible transplant material.⁴² Infants can be conceived for the purpose of donating organs, and if a wrong tissue type is conceived, the fetus simply can be aborted. All of these procedures flow out of a utilitarian view of ethics, which is morality by consensus, and ultimately, morality defined by selfish need.

The abortion issue has become the threshold on a wide front for societal ethical dilemmas concerning life and death. France’s highest court, the Cour de Cassation, has ruled that disabled children are entitled to compensation if their mothers were not given a chance to abort the “defective” fetuses. Already it has awarded damages to several children, one with a malformed spine, two born with only one arm and a mentally retarded boy because, as the attorneys argued, if the physicians had detected the fetuses’ disabilities, the pregnancies would have been terminated. Hence, increasingly abortion will be the medical advice of choice for even the barest suggestion of anything unusual in prenatal testing.

The Life of the Aged, Sick and Infirm

Besides such frightening legal horizons, the influence of abortion on demand and the explosion of biotechnology has affected the way we think of patient care, especially for critically or terminally ill patients. There are many more factors to consider now than at any other time in human history, especially since it is possible to keep the human body functioning for sustained periods of time beyond what was

⁴²An example is the birth of Marissa Ayala, who was conceived precisely so that she could provide bone marrow transplants to her leukemia-stricken older sister, cf. *The Detroit Free Press* June 5, 1991, 7A. Doctors and ethicists say that this is the first time a family has publicly admitted to conceiving a child to serve as a donor. However, a recent survey has shown that many other families are conceiving babies to serve as donors without publicly acknowledging that they are doing so.

once considered death. Medical resources need relief from indefinitely prolonged comas, and relatives need emotional relief for persons in irreversible coma.

A fundamental question is how to define death? Is it the cessation of pulmonary action (a definition quite acceptable for most of human history) or the cessation of brain waves? The essence of human life is more than just existence and should at least include such things as the intellect, volition, sensibilities and capacity for fellowship. Human death is the permanent loss of such capacities, keeping in mind that there may be temporary losses that do not end in death. Hence, a flat electroencephalogram (brain death) is presently the most acceptable definition for human death, but it should be kept in mind that even this definition may need adjustment as biotechnology increases.

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

Euthanasia, or "good death," is usually divided into active and passive categories. Active euthanasia is a life-taking act. Passive euthanasia is allowing someone to die by withholding extraordinary medical means so as to avoid prolonging the process of death. Christians usually are open to passive euthanasia in cases of the terminally ill, or with respect to themselves, through the vehicle of a living will.⁴³ In those cases where death is imminent, they wish to avoid prolonging the death process by artificial or extraordinary means.⁴⁴ Before the modern advance of medical technology, death for many people would have been relatively short and peaceful, but by modern techniques it can be drawn out to great lengths of time, not to mention the incurring of great expenses. Those who refuse even passive euthanasia must be prepared to live with difficulty, including sharing the cost of prolonged care and offering loving actions in service to the sufferer. For those who choose passive

⁴³ A living will has become common, especially since the Supreme Court decision on June 25, 1990 that Americans have a constitutional right to die. The decisive case involved Nancy Cruzan, who lay in an irreversible coma for seven years. Her parents were not allowed to discontinue her medical treatment, since there was no clear and convincing evidence that she would have elected to discontinue such life support had she been competent to do so. Hence, Americans have the right to die, but *only if there is compelling evidence that they truly wish to do so under special circumstances*. The so-called "living will" has become the vehicle of choice to make one's wishes known in advance.

⁴⁴ Of course, defining "extraordinary means" is no easy task in many cases. What may have been quite extraordinary only a few years ago may be quite ordinary today. Furthermore, one must decide whether the discontinuance of aid, such as turning off a respirator or a pace-maker, is merely an omission or an overt life-taking act. Pope Pius XII said that ordinary means is to be defined according to circumstances of persons, places, times and culture, that is to say, means that do not involve any grave burden for oneself or another, but the ambiguities of such a definition are obvious.

Similarly, the attempt to resuscitate has become increasingly ambiguous. Should a patient risk "dying twice" by the aid of a surgical procedure that often has no certain outcome? What responsibility do physicians have in making the decision for resuscitation in emergency moments when there is little or no time for adequate reflection? Once again, a "living will" is the instrument of choice.

euthanasia, they still must maintain their responsibility to the terminally ill, making them as comfortable as possible so long as their own life support systems will sustain them. Any decisions about removing artificial life support must be made solely in terms of the patient's welfare, not the convenience of those who are close.⁴⁵ As much objective evidence as possible should be gained about the degree of brain damage and impossibility of recovery.

Though most Christians are open to at least some form of passive euthanasia, they have resolutely stood against active euthanasia. Active euthanasia usually is directed toward the deformed, the insane, the retarded, the terminally ill, the aged, the infirm and the senile. One may do everything possible to alleviate pain and suffering and to promote healing, but one may not preempt God's sovereignty over human life by a life-taking act. Humans must not play God. The Third Reich of Hitler's Germany engineered a sophisticated scheme of propaganda to enlighten and convince the German public that such acts of life-taking were scientific, progressive, responsible, and virtually demanded by the evolutionary progress of the human race. At the end of World War II, these acts were tried as war crimes. Half a century later, the same acts are being advocated by the same countries who conducted the war crimes trials.

While no one can predict the future, it is not hard to visualize a scenario in which active euthanasia might play a significant role. The first step in active euthanasia is the reclassification of unwanted persons into the status of non-persons or defective persons. Once it is established that such persons are not truly human or not fully human, the protection of law is taken from them. Then, without the protection of law, they can be disposed of at will. With burgeoning populations, the elderly and the disabled likely will be the first to be reclassified. As the proportion of the old and the weak to the young and the strong becomes unusually large, the demand will be made for economic relief. Those who do not wish to "shuffle off" quickly will be made to feel that they are not contributing to society.

The implementation of active euthanasia in our society would come through a combination of elements. First is the enacting of arbitrary sociological laws by the courts and legislators. Old laws, including the foundational documents of our country, will be reinterpreted in light of contemporary values. Modern forms of literary criticism, which abandon the effort to interpret a document in terms of authorial intent and replace this traditional method with an emphasis on the mind of

⁴⁵ The welfare of the patient, however, is often confused with the medical meaning of the term "beneficial," which has a wide range of nuance, including *medical management* for the benefit of health care providers, *immediate and short-term relief* without long term benefit, *corrective therapy* to improve a disabling condition without being curative, *maintaining the status quo* of the patient, and *benefiting someone other than the patient* through experimentation, cf. R. Truog, "Triage in the ICU," *Life Choices*, p. 256.

the reader alone, will accelerate such reconstructionism. New laws will be made in accord with the consensus of the population, which is ever shifting, since it rests upon no absolute moral base. Next, there will be changes in the attitude of the medical profession concerning the values of life and death. Since these people are considered to be experts, their evaluations will be accepted without great resistance. (We should always remember that it was the medical profession in Hitler's Germany that took the lead in the planning of abortion, euthanasia, experimentation and extermination.) Finally, the general public, with its apathy and narcissism, who in the name of "rights" grasps for a hedonistic life-style, will quickly fall into line with the new laws and the new body of experts.⁴⁶

The increasing openness of our society to suicide is closely related to the issue of euthanasia. "Right-to-die" proposals in various states and "how-to" books on suicide are becoming common fare. Since our culture regularly entertains the idea that there is some human life which is not worthy to be lived, then circumstances of unhappiness, economic deprivation, emotional instability, physical debilitation and unbearable pain all become legitimate reasons for advocating suicide by the charming title of Dignified Death. In the late 70s, Dr. Ragnar Toss of Sweden, writing in the *Swedish Medical Journal*, advocated opening suicide clinics to medically assist in the suicide of those Swedes who wished to kill themselves. The Hemlock Society and, more recently, the assisted suicides involving Dr. Jack Kevorkian of Michigan have again raised the issue.

Suicide is a specifically human action arising out of the gift of freedom. Unlike animals, humans are able to distinguish between themselves and the life of their bodies. In order to escape defeat, humans are free to commit this ultimate act of self-assertion and self-justification. Because suicide is final, the one who commits it triumphs with unanswerable self-assertion, even if it is self-assertion in the midst of despair. The one who commits suicide is beyond law and beyond criticism from the world. Such an act is a final expression of lack of faith in God.

While the Bible does not contain a theological discussion about suicide, the biblical narratives which describe suicides demonstrate that the act is often the consequence of very grave sin. Saul committed suicide after having intentionally violated God's covenant (1 Sa. 31:3-6). Ahithophel committed suicide after playing the traitor to his king (2 Sa. 17:23). Judas committed suicide after he betrayed Christ (Mt. 27:3-5). To advocate suicide, then, or to develop means for assisting people in suicides is to deny the biblical value that human life, even at its most despairing, is worthy to be lived. Dietrich Bonhoeffer offered some cogent remarks on the issue:

⁴⁶F. Schaeffer and C. Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1979) 102-103.

Such a man [the one who commits suicide] does not believe that God can again give a meaning and a right even to a ruined life, and indeed that it may be precisely through ruin that a life attains to its true fulfillment. Because he does not believe this, the termination of his life remains to him as the only possible means whereby he himself can impart a meaning and a right to his life, even though it be only at the moment of its destruction.⁴⁷

A distinction should be made, of course, between selfish suicide and the sacrifice of oneself for another. To offer the last position in a lifeboat to someone else, knowing full well that this will mean one's own death, is not a selfish or self-assertive act. It is, in fact, an act of love. No higher example of self-sacrifice can be given than the death of our Lord on the cross.

Genetic and Reproductive Technologies

Exploding genetic technology has multiplied the ethical issues currently facing society. The general category of bio-ethics includes the allocation of medicine, reproduction, termination of patient treatment, organ and tissue donation, genetic technologies and cloning. Reproductive technologies include, among others:

- **Artificial insemination** (sperm is introduced into the female reproductive organs without sexual contact)
- ***In vitro* fertilization** (the sperm and egg are united in the laboratory anticipating implantation in the womb)⁴⁸
- **Embryo Transfer** (an embryo produced in the laboratory is transferred into the uterus of a recipient mother)
- **Surrogacy** (the fertilized egg is planted in the womb of a mother other than the genetic parent)⁴⁹
- **Genetic diagnosis** (prenatal screening of embryos for genetic abnormalities anticipating treatment, or in some cases, genetic correction or abortion)⁵⁰

⁴⁷D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1955) 172.

⁴⁸ Louise Brown, the first “test tube baby”, was born in 1978, and many thousands of others have followed since then.

⁴⁹ Pat Anthony, a forty-seven year old grandmother in South Africa, agreed to serve as a surrogate for her own daughter, who had had her uterus removed but could still produce eggs. The daughter’s eggs were inseminated with her husband’s sperm and implanted in the grandmother, who subsequently gave birth to triplets at the age of forty-eight, cf. R. Macklin, *Life Choices*, p. 376, 385.

⁵⁰ A bizarre spin-off of genetic diagnostics is the recent judgment of Cour de Cassation, France’s highest court, in which disabled children were entitled to compensation if their mothers were not given a chance to abort the

- **Embryo freezing** (the preservation of fertilized eggs to be used later)⁵¹
- **Pregnancy reduction** (selective abortion of some embryos in a multiple pregnancy)
- **Artificial selection** (selecting an embryo over others due to gender or other genetic factors)

Other genetic technologies, some of which are spin-offs from reproductive technology, include:

- **Recombinant DNA** (genes from one species are transplanted or spliced to another organism)⁵²
- **Fetal tissue research** (the use of tissue from aborted fetuses to treat disease)
- **Stem cell research** (the use of unspecialized cells to generate replacement cells; stem cells are capable of becoming almost all of the specialized cells of the body and have the potential to generate replacement cells for a broad array of tissues and organs, such as, the heart, pancreas and nervous system)⁵³
- **Cloning** (creating a genetically identical twin to an ancestor by genetic manipulation)⁵⁴

defective fetus. It decided in favor of the families of three children, one with a malformed spine and two born with only a single arm. The same court, a year earlier, upheld a decision in which a mentally retarded boy received damages because he had not been aborted, cf. L. Morrow, *TIME.com* (Jul 16, 2001).

⁵¹ Embryo freezing has introduced considerable legal complications as in, for instance, the case of Mary Sue and Junior Lewis Davis of Tennessee. In the 1980s, because they were unable to conceive a child by natural means, they used a Knoxville clinic to produce embryos, seven of which were frozen for future use. In the late 1980s, they divorced, and the courts were left to decide the fate of the embryos, since both parents vied for custody of the “pre-born children.” The 1989 decision by Circuit Court Judge W. Dale Young was that “human life began at conception”, and therefore, the embryos could not be destroyed, cf. *Life Choices*, p. 376.

⁵² Scientists at Stanford University, the Salk Institute and StemCells, Inc. collaborated to produce laboratory mice in which as much as a quarter of their brain cells were human. A more ambitious project is under consideration in which virtually the entire brain of the mouse will be human. Such research aims at finding treatments for diseases such as Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s and stroke by regenerating patient’s cells with healthy cells, cf. www.ft.com/healthcare.

⁵³ Stem cells can come from either adults or embryos, though many researchers believe the stem cells with the most potential come from about five-day-old embryos that are destroyed in the process of extracting the stem cells. A stem cell “success” is the cure of Blayke and Garrett LaRue, who inherited a rare disorder of the immune system, usually resulting in death by age 10. The boys were transfused with a type of stem cell from a newborn’s umbilical cord and placenta in 1995, and by this year, they were pronounced cured, cf. F. Golden, *TIME* (Apr 16, 2001) p. 61.

⁵⁴ The cloning of Dolly in 1997, the famous sheep in the United Kingdom, raised the possibility of human cloning for research purposes. The cloning of human embryos in hopes of finding cures for Alzheimer’s, Lou Gehrig’s and other fatal or crippling diseases was recently rejected by the US House of Representatives. However, independent researchers have publicly stated at the National Academy of Sciences that they intend to secretly clone a human child to be born late in 2002, cf. *The New York Times* (Aug. 9, 2001), p. A22 and *The Columbian* (Aug. 8, 2001), p. A1.

In the early 1990s, the US government committed 3 billion dollars to fund a 15-year international Human Genome Project. The recent successful completion of the project resulted in the mapping of the hereditary information on the twenty-three pairs of human chromosomes—a 3 billion sub-unit sequence. By early 2001, the genome sequence was published and available to research scientists around the globe and the general public.⁵⁵ The technological horizons include a giant leap forward in gene therapy, the pursuit of cures for genetic related diseases and potential manipulation of human destinies.

Ethical Questions and Implications

The ethical questions from this technology, not to mention the legal complications, are staggering. Of course, since many of these technologies derive from embryos, the paramount question is, “When does human life begin?” At conception, the sperm and egg unite to yield the genetic blueprint for a new person. During the next week and a half or so (the blastocyst stage), this multiplying ball of cells floats freely in the mother’s womb. Many, perhaps as many as 50% of these embryos, are imperfect and fail to develop. After about 10 days, the cells begin to “commit” to different functions, and by about day 14 the cell cluster implants in the mother’s uterine wall. About 15% of conceptions that implant are lost as miscarriages during the next few weeks.⁵⁶ It is during this early stage that many of the techniques are applied. Through *in vitro* fertilization, for instance, scientists can create embryos in the laboratory from which they can extract stem cells, a process that in turn destroys the embryos. An infertile couple, also through *in vitro* technology, can select the best of a set of developing embryos for implantation in the mother, while the rest either are frozen for future use or destroyed. Is this embryonic manipulation a non-consensual experimentation with an actual human person? Any parents considering fertility technologies involving *in vitro* fertilization must realize that a number of eggs will be fertilized, but the majority likely will be destroyed.

Another important question concerns *means* (the methods used to reach goals) and *ends* (the goals themselves when they are reached). Ethics that emphasize means urge that the important thing is to make decisions based on moral principles or rules, not practical consequences. Hence, it is better to act on principle, even if the result is unwelcome, than to use wrong actions to achieve a desirable result. Ethics that

⁵⁵ J. Netting and L. Wang, “The Newly Sequenced Genome Bares All,” *Science News* (Feb. 17, 2001), pp. 100-101. Access for the genome sequence is now available on the Internet (<http://genome.ucsc.edu>). Although expected to have as many as 100,000 genes, the human genetic map contains only about 30,000.

⁵⁶ A. Berry, “Embryology,” *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, eds. D. Atkinson et al. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1995), p.339.

emphasize ends, on the other hand, urge that it is the practical result of the actions, not the theoretical rightness or wrongness of the actions themselves, that count most. Here, the important thing is to make decisions that achieve a good consequence, even if certain methods and principles must be set aside. With respect to embryology, if one emphasizes the benefits of a particular kind of research for curing disease, one adopts an ethics of ends. If one scrutinizes the research procedure itself, one adopts an ethic of means. Of course most people, scientists or otherwise, hope to achieve the best of all possible worlds in which means and ends are consonant. Presently, however, this goal is difficult if not impossible. Virtually all people agree that curing diseases is a good end; many people, however, disagree about the type of means appropriate to that end.⁵⁷

Yet another question, admittedly more philosophical in nature, addresses the burgeoning body of scientific knowledge: is it ethical to know everything that can be known?, or to put it differently, is there a limit beyond which scientists should not go in their pursuit of knowledge? How would one go about defining such a limit? Is knowledge neutral and only its use good or bad, or could some knowledge be evil in and of itself?

Human rights is another issue with several angles. First, do developing embryos have any innate rights (they certainly would seem to have innate rights if one considers them to be human life). Even if one considers embryos to be a form of human life, the question still must be addressed as to whether this prenatal life has the same rights as any developed form of human life (i.e., fetal life, a newly born child, an adolescent, an adult). Since much of the bio-technology has derived from the desire for infertile couples to have children, the “rights” question must be directed toward them as well: is it the “right” of all humans to have children? Biblically, infertility and its inverse was considered to be an act of God (cf. Ge. 20:17-18; 29:31; 30:1-2, 22; 1 Sa. 1:5-6, 19-20; Is. 44:2, 24; 49:5; 66:9; Je. 1:5). Now that scientists have removed some of the “mystery” surrounding human conception, biological determination and gestation, does that mean God’s role over the creation of human life can be set aside in the same way that his control over other “natural” elements have been set aside in the past (e.g., weather, physical properties, stellar bodies, etc.)? The “God of the Gaps” mentality, in which the mysteries of life are assigned to God only until we can explain them, eventually excludes God altogether. However one decides about some of the bio-technical issues, Christians must always be aware that God is involved with all of life—both those areas that can be explained (partially)

⁵⁷ Dr. Chris Klug, a Christian geneticist at the University of Alabama and former post-doctoral fellow in genetics at Stanford University, expressed to me personally his anticipation is that due to stem cell research and the success Genome Project, the choice for Christians within approximately a decade or so will not be whether or not one can be well, but whether or not one ethically can accept the means of wellness.

and those areas that are still largely a mystery. Even if we could explain it all, God would not cease to be actively involved in all aspects of the universe!

The Challenge Before Christians

The challenge for Christians is different than for non-Christians, since the moral foundation is different between them. The Christian frames all decisions in light of revealed Scripture. The moral systems of non-Christians may well include some principles that are in harmony with the Bible, but alongside these principles are usually other considerations that conflict with biblical morality. With regard to the present subject, several biblical axioms are norms for Christians:

- All human life bears the image of God; hence, all human life is sacred.
- The sixth commandment, “You shall not murder,” is binding on all humans for all time.
- God is intimately involved in all aspects of human life, including conception, prenatal life, birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and death.
- Humans are forbidden to “play” God, either by killing other humans, by supplanting God with images of self-designed deities, by countermanding the principles and laws of Holy Scripture, by passing final judgment on the destinies of others, and so forth.

With regard to bio-technologies, Christians must ask themselves the hard questions that flow from these axioms. Can Christians ethically participate in...

... reproduction technologies that destroy embryonic life

... genetic diagnosis that aims at artificial selection

... fetal tissue treatment that depends upon aborted fetuses

... stem cells that depend upon the destruction of the embryos from which they are extracted

... the genetic manipulation that is part and parcel of cloning

The means of all these technologies are at least questionable, and some of them highly questionable. They significantly encroach upon the intrinsic worth and dignity of human beings, since the persons they produce will be evaluated in relation to the genetic aims of the manipulators. If this were not so, then there would be no reason for genetic manipulation in the first place. Hence, the persons produced largely will have functional value, not intrinsic value. Such a pathway toward eugenics (the attempt to genetically improve various sorts of human attributes) could well become the ultimate discrimination. The eugenic benefit is gained at the cost of

individual freedom.

WAR⁵⁸

War is as old as human history. However, the dimensions of war have escalated in relatively recent history so that the problem, if anything, is more acute than in previous periods. From sticks and stones in the most primitive times to the use of gunpowder in the 15th and 16th centuries, from ancient professional armies to national conscription in about the time of Napoleon, from conventional to nuclear weapons...all these escalating shifts bring into sharp focus the intense relevancy of the ethics of war. Today, the human race is capable of exterminating itself.

At one time it was possible to talk of “limits” and “controls,” at least as long as war was conducted along so-called conventional lines, but such an approach is seriously outdated. In the recent past, the two superpowers possessed some 50 to 60 thousand nuclear warheads with a combined destructive power somewhat one million times greater than the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima in August 6, 1945 (which destroyed 60% of a large, modern city). Even after nuclear disarmament the potential for destruction remains great, especially since there is considerable question as to who may have access to the so-called WMDs (weapons of mass destruction). During the so-called arms race that dominated the last half of the 20th century, the USA spent 6% of its GNP on military defense in 1982. About 20 nations either have or could have nuclear weapons. By the end of the Cold War, five were known for certain to possess them (USA, USSR, China, Great Britain, France). Nine others have the current capability to produce them (Argentina, W. Germany, Holland, Japan, India, Israel, S. Africa, Pakistan, Egypt and North Korea). Five more constitute the “threshold nations” which have some level of nuclear expertise (Brazil, Iraq, Libya, S. Korea and Taiwan). With the rapid increase of terrorism, the possibility of such destructive power falling into the hands of an unbalanced radical nation which would not hesitate to use it is unnerving. Thus, the Christian’s ethical position on war assumes new dimensions which it did not previously have.

This ethical examination of war will address both the general category of war as well as the more specific issue of nuclear war.

Attitudes Toward War in Christian History

There are fundamentally three stances toward war that have been adopted by

⁵⁸ Some of this introductory material has been gleaned from the class notes of Daniel B. Clendenin, Ph.D. in his course on “Contemporary Cultural Issues” offered at William Tyndale College, Farmington Hills, MI in 1988.

Christians since the end of the 1st century. These three stances or some variation of them have developed in a chronological way since the post-apostolic era.

Pacifism: End of Apostolic Era to Late Second Century⁵⁹

In the early post-apostolic period, the general stance of Christians seems to have been pacifism, both on the grounds that killing was believed to be incompatible with the mission of Jesus, that soldiers were compelled to participate in emperor worship, and that peace on earth was soon to be realized with the return of Christ. Until the decade AD 170-180 there is no evidence of any Christians who served in the military, but in this decade, there are two pieces of evidence which demonstrate the beginning of a shift. Celsus, a pagan critic of Christians, argued that if everyone behaved like Christians, whom he presumed to be pacifists, then the empire would quickly succumb to the barbarians.⁶⁰ In that same decade, there also is a reference to Christians who served in the Thundering Legion under Marcus Aurelius in AD 173, and from that time onward, the references to Christians serving in the military increase.

This early pacifism was not intended to be insurrectionist, however. The early Christian apologists explained that while Christians did not engage in military battles, they did engage in a more effective spiritual warfare, and by prayer contributed to Rome's victories in justifiable wars. Such writers attempted to demonstrate that those who did not worship the Roman gods could nevertheless be good citizens of the state.⁶¹ Since Rome did not practice compulsory conscription, this posture could be held and defended within the context of patriotic loyalty.

The Just War: Second Century Until the Middle Ages

By the end of the 2nd century, more and more Christians were beginning to serve in the military. To be sure, some groups protested this shift so that it was gradual, but in time, particularly after the accession of Constantine (early 4th century), the pacifist period came to an end. Because Constantine confessed himself to be a Christian and because he had restored the *Pax Romana* by a military action, which he believed was inspired by Christ, he set the stage for a more pronounced shift toward Christian involvement in war.

Ambrose (340?-397) and Augustine (354-430) developed an ethic of war by which Christians could participate, providing the cause was justifiable. (The notion of a war being "justifiable" was essentially understood to be when it was in the interests

⁵⁹ See especially R. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960).

⁶⁰ Origen, *Against Celsus*, VIII.68-69.

⁶¹ D. Wright, "What the First Christians Believed," *Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity*, ed. T. Dowley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 120-121.

of national defense and security and/or in the interests of restoring peace.) Pacifism was relegated to the private and clerical sphere. As more and more Christians came to view Christianity and the State as working together, and as the external threats of the barbarians to the empire became more intense, the ethic of a just war became the order of the day. Just wars, then, were wars that attempted to secure peace and to vindicate justice...wars undertaken only under the auspices of governmental authority and conducted within a code of conduct that forbade wanton violence, looting, massacre, vengeance, atrocities and dishonesty. War under the auspices of divinely ordained government was considered to be legitimate, while private defense was not.

The Crusade: Middle Ages

The just war ethic, like the pacifism before it, also began to shift toward an even further escalation of Christian involvement in war. The influx of Germanic peoples in the empire and their eventual rise to dominance in Western Europe brought with it the elevation of the Germanic ideals of battle, heroic death, and the virtues of the warrior-knight. War efforts were blessed by the Roman Catholic papacy in campaigns against the Muslims in Spain, the Greeks in Italy, the Slavs in eastern Germany, and the Normans in Great Britain, all of which were perceived to be steps toward gaining “right order in the world.”

The crusades⁶² became the highest expression of this third position on war, the belief that war can be divinely willed.⁶³ The crusades were initiated to recapture Jerusalem from the followers of Islam, and “right order in the world” was interpreted to mean Christian dominance, particularly over the Holy Land. The crusader-knights wore a cross of red cloth on their breasts on the way to the Holy Land, and they wore crosses on their backs on the return trip home. They believed that they were chosen to cleanse the world of unbelievers, and even before they set out for the East, they started slaughtering European Jews in a frenzied outbreak of anti-Semitism. Barbarian lust and Christian zeal became strangely mixed. Atrocities in the name of Christ were exalted. Bohemund of Antioch, for instance, sent to the Greek Emperor a whole cargo of noses and thumbs sliced from Muslims in Palestine. In the capture of Jerusalem, piles of heads, hands and feet littered the streets. In the words of one , “...in the temple and portico of Solomon men rode in blood up to their knees and the bridle reins. Indeed, it was a just and splendid judgment of God, that this place

⁶² The word “crusade” which came to the fore derived from the idea of “taking the cross” and expressed the belief that God himself willed the war. At the end of Pope Urban II’s appeal in 1095 to the knights of Europe to rid Palestine of the Muslims, the crowd shouted, “God wills it; God wills it.”

⁶³ E. Burns, et al., *World Civilizations*, 6th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982) 1.447-454.

should be filled with the blood of unbelievers...”⁶⁴

Several crusades were held with varying degrees of success, though in 1244, Jerusalem fell once again to Islam, never to be recovered by the West until 1917. Not only were crusades leveled against the pagans in the East, they also were leveled against heretics in Europe, notably the Albigenses in Italy and the Waldenses in France. Pagans, infidels, and heretics were viewed as opponents to the kingdom of God, and war against them was not merely considered justifiable, but mandated. A favorite Old Testament text was: “Cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood” (Je. 48:10).⁶⁵

The Renaissance and the Reformation⁶⁶

Three situations developed at the close of the Middle Ages which started a Christian shift away from crusades and back toward a just war concept. First, Europe was now made up of a number of sovereign, independent states, each having basically the same culture and each expressing loyalty to Christianity. The wars fought between such states were “gentlemanly” affairs (surely an oxymoron!), that is, they were fought by mercenaries in favorable weather on horseback without cannons.⁶⁷ Rules were carefully observed, prisoners were released rather than executed, ambassadors were safe, and private vengeance was repressed.

Second, a strong sentiment against war began to arise among Christian humanist thinkers such as John Colet and Thomas More in England and Erasmus in Holland. Their reading of the New Testament, which was now available at a far wider range than ever before, convinced them that war and violence should be condemned by Christians. The notion of a Christian crusade was untenable, and war, if it must be fought, should only be resorted to under the concept of a just war theory. Peace was held forth as the highest ideal.

With the emergence of Protestantism in the Reformation, the just war concept returned to full vogue. All the Protestant state churches appropriated the just war theory while rejecting wars of aggression, though all did not condone just wars with the same enthusiasm. Luther upheld the government’s right to use war for territorial defense and the maintenance of order, but he condoned the just war with some reluctance and as a last resort. On the other hand, Zwingli, the Swiss Reformer, went down sword in hand when Protestant Zurich was invaded by Roman Catholics. In Geneva, John Calvin justified war on the terms that “no consideration could be paid

⁶⁴ Bainton, 112-113.

⁶⁵ Bainton, 112.

⁶⁶ Bainton, 122-135.

⁶⁷ While conventional weapons of the times were used, cannons were considered to be diabolical, and those who used them were accused of being a “son of a gun”, i.e., a son of the devil.

to humanity when the honor of God was at stake.” He taught that the state was obliged not only to protect the good and punish the bad but also to support true religion. The various inquisitions in Roman Catholic lands fueled the Protestant approval of the just war, which often was carried out between Roman Catholic Christians and Protestant Christians. Such religious “just” wars lapsed into barbarism on many occasions. One Roman Catholic commander put an entire town to the sword, threw the bodies in the river, and informed the bridge keeper to let their corpses float through since they already had paid the toll. Protestant Huguenots wore strings of priests’ ears and buried Roman Catholics up to their necks in order to play nine pins with their heads.

The Radical Reformation and Thoroughgoing Pacifism⁶⁸

There was one branch of the Reformation that did not follow the just war theory but swung all the way back to a thoroughgoing pacifism. This branch, the Anabaptist movement, came to the viewpoint that nonresistance was the proper way of life, while war and bloodshed have no place in the Christian life under any circumstances. At most, the Christian is allowed to chastise others with the Word of God, because the church, unlike the state, should be motivated only by love. The church and the state were radically separate in the Anabaptist viewpoint. An oath of allegiance to the state was sin. Christians were not permitted to hold a governmental office. Christian communities were organized into a subculture that withdrew from the mainstream culture, and some Anabaptists even called for communal rather than private ownership of property.

Since the time of the Reformation, Christians have, with some modifications, continued to embrace any of the three positions on war described above: pacifism, the just war, and the crusade. While the methods of war have continued to evolve, particularly after the Napoleonic wars, Christians have continued to reflect various positions. The theory of modern warfare was perhaps best expressed by Karl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), who stated that, “To introduce into a philosophy of war a principle of moderation would be an absurdity. War is an act of violence pushed to its utmost bounds.”⁶⁹ With the advance of technology, such absolute war and total repression of the enemy became possible. In the I and II World Wars, national patriotism and Christian commitment were often joined in the effort to defeat Germany and her allies. The atomic bomb dropped twice on Japan signified a new era in which the total decimation of the enemy was possible, including civilians as

⁶⁸ W. Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, trans. W. Heynen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 253-300.

⁶⁹ K. von Clausewitz, *On War*, quoted by Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1959) 182.

well as armies. During the Cold War, the arms race became part of the fabric of modern civilization. Today, some Christians view military superiority as a Christian mandate, following the rubric of Edmund Burke, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” Other Christians decry war altogether as antithetical to the Christian cause.

The Problem of the Old Testament and the Message of Jesus

The ethical question of war is complicated by the fact that war was clearly endorsed in the Old Testament, while nonresistance was counseled by Jesus. To fully appreciate the different positions, it is necessary to review the biblical attitudes toward war expressed in the different parts of the Bible.

Yahweh War in the Old Testament⁷⁰

The problem of war in the Old Testament is not merely that it happened, but that it was ordered and sanctioned by God himself. The concept of Yahweh War is based first of all on the fact that Yahweh himself is described as an *‘ish milhamah* (= man of war) in Israel’s primordial redemptive event, the exodus (Ex. 15:3). Yahweh is the one who has the power to win victories (Dt. 20:1-4; 1 Sa. 17:47; Ps. 24:8), and he is the one who declares war for Israel (Ex. 17:16; Nu. 31:3; Jg. 7:9-14; 1 Sa. 30:7-8; 2 Sa. 5:19-25). One of the most common epithets for God in the Old Testament is *Yahweh Tsabaoth* (= Lord of Armies). The ark of the covenant was a symbol of Yahweh’s warrior-like presence among his people (Nu. 10:35-36; Jos. 6), and the refrain in the Psalms, “Rise up, O Yahweh,” is a prayer for his warrior-like intervention (Ps. 3:7; 7:6; 9:19; 10:12; 17:13; 68:1).

Torah envisions three possible approaches to Yahweh War. The first two concern enemies not within the boundaries of the Holy Land proper. Such a city under attack might be offered terms of peace in which its citizens would be enslaved (Dt. 20:10-11). If such terms were refused, then all males were to be slaughtered, and all other occupants and property became the booty of the victors (Dt. 20:12-15). However, if the enemy was within the borders of the Holy Land itself, that is, the land given to the Israelites by covenantal grant, the procedure was to exterminate everything that breathed—men, women, children, and animals (Dt. 7:1-2, 16; 13:12-16; 20:16-18; Nu. 21:1-3; 1 Sa. 15:1-3).

⁷⁰ The term “holy war” rather than the term “Yahweh War” is more commonly used by scholars to describe the Old Testament conflicts, inasmuch as war is often envisioned in the Old Testament as a religious act, but since this implies that war itself may be holy, an increasingly common designation is “Yahweh War” which conveys the religious character of Israel’s wars without implying that the conduct of war had moral or religious worth, cf. P. Craigie, “War, Idea of,” *ISBE* (1988) IV. 1019. For a fuller discussion of the problem of war in the Old Testament, see P. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

To be sure, some wars were defensive and were called due to a foreign invasion of Israelite territories. Other wars, however, were aggressive crusades, particularly in the land conquests of Canaan under Joshua and David. Many of the greatest heroes and heroines in the Old Testament were military figures, such as, Joshua, Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Saul, David, and Josiah. David, the greatest of all, was a “man after God’s own heart”, and this seems to be at least partly because of his military prowess and commitment to completing the conquest of Canaan (1 Sa. 13:14; 15:28).

The Old Testament Vision of Peace

In spite of the thoroughgoing military character of the Old Testament, war came to be viewed as temporary with the ideal held forth for a future universal peace. The prophets envisioned the goal of such peace to be established in the latter times (Is. 2:4; 11:6-9; Mic. 4:3-4). This prophetic message arose out of Israel’s failure to trust Yahweh. Caught in the vice of power-politics and the aggression of the Mesopotamian empire-builders, Israel began to trust herself and her own armies as well as the political alliances she could make with neighboring powers. God viewed this as disloyalty (Is. 30:1-5; 31:1, 3; Je. 9:23-24; 17:5; Ho. 7:8-11), and he allowed the people to suffer exile because they had forsaken him (Am. 2:13-16). Amos’ blistering prophecies are typical: where once Yahweh had led his people into war, now he led Israel’s enemies against them in a war of judgment (Am. 2:4-5; 5:1-3; 7:7-9; 8:1-3; 9:1-4). However, it also must be mentioned that some prophets inveighed against war crimes (e.g., Am. 1:3—2:3).

Out of the tragedy of exile came the prophetic promise of peace. The weapons of war would be discarded at the coming of the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:5-7). Peace was conceived as not merely an absence of war but as wholeness, health, the absence of evil and injustice, and the presence of righteousness. However, the prophets did not view this era as near but as far. By the time of the intertestamental period, the Jewish national hope was that in the end of the age, one great final war would be fought which would crush the demonic powers that controlled the universe, would conclude the present order of things and would usher in the messianic age, the age of peace. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, this final conflict is described as a war of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness.⁷¹

The Message of Jesus

Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom of God introduced new dimensions that

⁷¹ L. Toombs, “War, Ideas of,” *IDB* (1962) IV.800. For an English translation of the “War Scroll” from the Qumran community, see M. Wise, M. Abegg, Jr., & E. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), pp. 150-172.

altered, at least for his followers, the conception of war (Mt. 4:23-25). The kingdom of God, or more appropriately the reign of God,⁷² was a new eschatological order established in the person and work of Jesus himself. Unlike apocalyptic expectations, this new order was not merely the triumph of Jewish nationalism. The ultimate enemies of God now were not sinful people or pagan nations, but rather, evil spiritual powers. In the person of Jesus, God had entered the plane of human history in kingly power to defeat the powers of evil (Lk. 11:17-20; 17:20).⁷³

In his preaching of the kingdom of God, Jesus taught principles that seemingly were incompatible with the Yahweh Wars of the Old Testament. He taught that the poor, meek, merciful, peacemakers, and persecuted would be blessed as the children of God (Mt. 5:3-12). Hatred was considered to be as bad as murder (Mt. 5:21-22). Retaliation was to be replaced with non-resistance (Mt. 5:38-39; Lk. 6:27-29).⁷⁴ Enemies were to be loved (Mt. 5:43-48). While Jesus was quite frank about the fact that his followers would suffer terrible abuse (Mt. 10:16-25; Lk. 21:12; Jn. 15:18-21; 16:1-2), he also insisted that his kingdom was not of this world and would not take up the military methods of this world (Jn. 18:36). In fact, Jesus quite straightforwardly warned that the zealot ideology of armed resistance to Rome would end in terrible failure (cf. Lk. 19:41-44; 23:28-31).⁷⁵ Jesus himself provided the example of non-resistance in that he refused to oppose those who were killing him (1 Pe. 2:23). Instead of exercising violence, he received violence. When Peter determined to defend his Lord with the sword, Jesus rebuked him with the saying, “All who draw the sword will die by the sword” (Mt. 26:52).

Spiritualization of Warfare Language

Because of the message of Jesus, the documents of the New Testament continued to use the language of war but in a different sense. For Christians, fighting becomes a war of faith against unbelief and the temptation towards evil. Christians are to “fight the good fight” of faith (1 Ti. 1:18; 6:12; 2 Ti. 4:7). Such fighting requires the discipline of soldiers (1 Co. 9:26; Phil. 2:25; 2 Ti. 2:3-4; Plmn 2), but it is not carried out with the weapons of the world (2 Co. 6:7; 10:3-5; Ep. 6:10-18).

⁷² The Greek term *basileia* (= kingdom) primarily means “reign” rather than “realm” or “people,” cf. G. Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) 77-81.

⁷³ For a thorough but succinct discussion of the nature of the kingdom of God, see G. Ladd, “Kingdom of God,” *ISBE* (1986) 3.23-29.

⁷⁴ It may well be that the striking of someone on the right cheek is not to be interpreted too broadly. The situation envisioned is a blow with the back of the hand, which in the East expresses great contempt and extreme abuse, and it is possibly to be read in the context of discipleship and abuse for one’s loyalty to Jesus rather than in a more general way, cf. J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. J. Bowden (New York: Scribners, 1971) 239-240. Nevertheless, the statement still calls for nonresistance.

⁷⁵ For a fuller treatment of this theme, see N. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), pp. 296-297, 322-336, 459-472.

The Three Modern Christian Views of War

Each of the three stances toward war that arose within the history of Christianity since the apostolic period are embraced today by sincere Christians, though with some modifications: the stance of pacifism, the concept of a just war, and the advocacy of the crusade.⁷⁶

The Position of Christian Pacifism

Since the creation, violence has characterized human history. In some cases, this violence has been so marked as to merit divine intervention and judgment by God. Cain, the first murderer, was driven out from his fellows (Ge. 4:10-12). The ancient world was destroyed by a flood because of the wanton violence of the human race (Ge. 6:5-7, 11-13).

While such violence continued to characterize human history from that time until the present, the coming of Jesus inaugurated a new approach to human violence, the approach of pacifism. Not only did Jesus call his followers to nonresistance (Mt. 5:39), he practiced such nonresistance himself, when he refused to resist the efforts against his life. War is the worldly response to violence; pacifism is the Christian response. While Christians are indeed engaged in a struggle, their struggle is spiritual, not worldly, and it is fought with spiritual weapons, not worldly ones (2 Co. 10:4). Since Christians are exhorted to walk as Jesus walked (1 Jn. 2:6), the pacifism of Jesus in his crucifixion becomes the model. Of course, such pacifism is the obligation of Christians alone, those who have experienced a spiritual change in coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Pacifism is neither a political message nor a social program. It cannot be legislated through human government. Rather, it is a spiritual commitment based upon faith in Jesus Christ, and it assumes the separation of church and state.

There are some variations within the general stance of Christian pacifism, and these have to do largely with how much or how little a Christian may participate in war efforts that do not involve explicit violence. Some pacifists are non-combatants only, that is, they will support their nation's war efforts by prayer, in the buying of bonds, though serving in medical capacities, and by cooperating with relief programs. Other pacifists see any such cooperation with the war effort to be inconsistent and call for the total rejection of any and all support of the military in whatever way. This

⁷⁶ One of the clearest examinations of these positions is in the work of Herman Hoyt (Grace Theological Seminary), Myron Augsburger (Eastern Mennonite College), Arthur Holmes (Wheaton College), and Harold O. J. Brown (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) in the book by R. Clouse, ed., *War: Four Christian Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981). Here, both the positions of Hoyt and Augsburger will be treated under the same general category of pacifism (hence, "three" rather than "four" positions).

might even include the paying of taxes.

Christians in the pacifist tradition include Quakers, Mennonites, the United Brethren, and other denominations with roots in the Anabaptist movement. All pacifists are caught on the horns of a dilemma in at least one respect. If they support the war effort through nonviolent means, they will be accused of hypocrisy. If they refuse to support the war effort at all, they will be accused of being anti-patriotic as well as hypocritical since they will enjoy the peace and/or prosperity which war seeks to protect.

The Position of the Just War

It is appropriate at the outset to make clear that war is never anything but evil. To speak of a “just war” only means that in some cases war cannot conscientiously be avoided, and in fact, may lead only to a relative justice. However, this is not to glorify war. It is only to say that in a fallen world, even Christians may be forced to choose between the lesser of two evils.⁷⁷ It is possible that by avoiding war an even greater evil of aggression and terror might go unchecked. Burke’s philosophy summarizes the logic: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

With regard to the scriptures upon which pacifists depend, the just war advocate points out that the sayings of Jesus regarding the nonresistance of evil have to do with personal retaliation and vengeance, not the role of government to defend its people and preserve freedom and peace (Mt. 5:38-39; see footnote 17). To the contrary, Paul clearly affirmed the institution of government by God,⁷⁸ and this includes the use of lethal force when necessary (Ro. 13:1-7; 1 Pe. 2:13-14). If the nonresistance of evil was consistently followed, then Christians ought never to serve as policemen, mayors, judges, or any other governmental forces that use or authorize the use of physical or violent force as a means of enforcement (unless, of course, such execution of duty could be accomplished by an unarmed, nonviolent individual).

The just war theory assumes a moral framework, and in this framework, principles such as the following are typical:⁷⁹

1. *Just Cause*: All aggression is condemned. Defensive war is the only

⁷⁷ Choosing the lesser of two evils falls under the ethical system of negative hierarchicalism, that is, the belief that there are some dilemmas in which there is no right choice, only two wrong ones. In such a case, the Christian is obliged to choose the lesser evil, yet he/she does so with an uneasy conscience and the prayer for grace and forgiveness.

⁷⁸ This does not mean, of course, that God prefers some particular style of government, such as capitalism, but only that he has ordained the role of government in the world so as to preserve law and order.

⁷⁹ A. Holmes, “The Just War,” *War: Four Christian Views*, pp. 120-121.

legitimate war.

2. *Just Intention*: The only legitimate intention is to secure a just peace for all concerned. Revenge, conquest, economic advantage, and ideological supremacy are not justifiable intentions.
3. *Last Resort*: All other negotiations and avenues of reasonable compromise must have been explored, tried and failed before war can be declared.
4. *Formal Declaration*: Military force is the prerogative of governments, not private individuals. Only governments have such authority ordained by God.
5. *Limited Objectives*: Since the purpose is peace, unconditional surrender and/or the destruction of a nation's economic or political institutions are unwarranted.
6. *Proportionate Means*: The use of force should be limited to what is necessary to repel aggression and deter future attacks. Unlimited war is not an option.
7. *Noncombatant Immunity*: Only those agents authorized by the government may fight or be attacked, i.e., armies, navies, etc. Civilians, prisoners of war, casualty victims, and the like, are immune.

Just War advocates are not immune from the dilemma of the pacifists regarding how much or how little to support a war effort if such a war is deemed to be unjust. While pacifists face such a dilemma in every war, just war advocates face the same dilemma in at least some wars. Furthermore, in the face of modern technology, the moral framework that is intended to control war may end up guaranteeing defeat for the just war nation, especially if the aggression of the enemy takes the form of nuclear war or some other method that does not follow the same moral framework (i.e., biological warfare, chemical warfare, etc.).

The Position of the Crusade and Preventive War

Probably no Christians still advocate the crusade in the same sense that it was employed in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, there are modern Christians who go farther than the just war theory and believe that in special circumstances it is justifiable to initiate war, even when it is not exclusively defensive. This is especially true in the face of modern warfare, when merely to wait for an act of aggression might forfeit any chance of victory or even of successful defense.

It is important to distinguish between two kinds of unprovoked war, both of which are considered by some to be legitimate and within a Christian framework. One is the *crusade* which is carefully defined as a war to recover lost entities or to remedy past atrocities. As such, World War II was a crusade in that it attempted to

recover territories from the conquests of Hitler and to restore them to their “rightful” citizens. The other is the *preventive war*. Preventive war is war that is begun, not because of an act of aggression, but in anticipation of an act of aggression. It is a war intended to forestall aggression that has not yet occurred but is expected; it is an effort to prevent a crippling first strike. The Six Day War of 1967 was such an engagement. Faced with the escalating menace of the surrounding Arab states, culminating with the decision of Iraq to place its army under the jurisdiction of Egypt, Israel suddenly attacked Egypt in a lightning-quick and devastating strike. Israel responded out of the fear of imminent danger.⁸⁰ The more recent invasion of Iraq by the United States in view of suspected weapons of mass destruction in 2003 was another. Even though it now appears that the threat of WMDs may have been overstated, the motive underlying the invasion remains as an attempt to preempt aggression on the part of Saddam Hussein.

Even more militant than either of the above stances is the argument that a Christian is duty-bound to obey his/her government and to participate in every war. Since government is ordained by God, civil disobedience is perceived to be a greater evil than civil obedience in an unjust war. Civil disobedience leads to revolution and anarchy, and some argue it is better to fight on the side of order, even in an unjust cause, than to contribute to chaos.⁸¹

It is only fair to point out that the crusade and preventive war advocates must respond to some serious practical problems, even if their position is conceded theoretically. The ability of an individual, or even of a government, to correctly assess the atrocities or threats of another nation is unclear. It would be difficult to gain sufficient knowledge, and it might be impossible, at least on an individual level, to do anything about it even if sufficient knowledge were gained. Furthermore, there is always the imminent danger, given the propensity of humans to seek power, to use such a stance to become increasingly more militaristic.

Nuclear War

The gradual escalation toward nuclear war since the introduction of gunpowder and cannons has been steady and frightful. Large scale bombing operations of civilian populations from the air began during the 1930s when the Spanish town of Guernica and various cities in China were so bombed. Roosevelt

⁸⁰ H. Brown, “The Crusade or Preventive War,” *War: Four Christian Views*, 151-168.

⁸¹ See discussion and evaluation in N. Geisler, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971)158-164. The philosophical side of the dangers of civil disobedience are insightfully treated in L. Waldman, “Civil Rights—Yes; Civil Disobedience—No,” *Basic Problems of Philosophy*, 4th ed., ed. D. Bronstein et al (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972) 279-287.

of the United States and Churchill of England both denounced such bombardment as unconscionable, but by 1942, in response to the German Luftwaffe attacks, Britain had started obliteration bombing attacks on Germany, and by 1943, the USA had joined. By August 3, 1943, Hamburg, Germany had been pounded for 10 days of concentrated air raids, and 60,000 acres of the city had caught on fire. In 1945, Dresden, Germany and Tokyo, Japan were firebombed. Temperatures rose to over 1000 degrees, and the number of corpses was so great that it took weeks to dispose of them. Between 100,000 and 250,000 people were consumed. The peak of such military power occurred on August 6, 1945 when, with the authorization of Truman of the USA, over half the city of Hiroshima, Japan was obliterated by the first atom bomb attack. 70,000 Japanese were killed. Three days later, Nagasaki, Japan became the next victim.⁸² In the latter stages of the Cold War, the superpowers of the USA and the Soviet Union began experimenting with the so-called “Star Wars” weapons, weapons that could be deployed in a space orbit and used for defensive as well as offensive purposes.

The conventional theory of the just war, which is currently accepted by the majority of Christians, or the even more militaristic theories of the preventive war or the crusade war, may be hopelessly obsolete in view of the horrible potential of nuclear war. The notion of limited war is hardly even possible apart from total nuclear disarmament. It can be argued that with the increase in technology, nuclear warheads can be precisely pinpointed toward military targets, but as in any war, can it be realistically hoped that either side will stop at military targets in order to break the will of the enemy? Could *any* kind of nuclear war, which is almost certain to kill masses of innocent people, ever be justifiable? Even if it be granted that the goal of a war might be just, would the use of nuclear weapons render it unjust? Is the possibility of annihilation preferable to the possibility of defeat? Would defeat by even a totalitarian government be a lesser evil than the evil of nuclear war? (It is possible, though difficult, to live the Christian life under totalitarian systems.) Certainly the notion of non-combatant immunity cannot be upheld in a war which is indiscriminate by definition. Because of such despairing questions, many Christians argue for complete nuclear pacifism, even though they might be in favor of the just war or even the preventive war if conventional warfare methods alone were to be used.

Related to, but not the same as, the question of employing nuclear warheads is the question of nuclear war build-up. If the use of nuclear weapons is evil, is not the possession and build-up of such weapons also evil? Prior to the Reagan years, the argument to justify the nuclear arms build-up was that it was necessary as a deterrent.

⁸² Clouse, 189-192.

With the collapse of the former Soviet Union, and the widespread nuclear disarmament of both superpowers, this argument has gained even more ground. On the other hand, would not a unilateral disarmament invite an enemy to exploit a self-imposed weakness? Might not the absence of nuclear arms on the part of one nation make more likely the use of nuclear arms by an aggressive nation? Even if the build-up of nuclear arms is considered to be justifiable, one can only *hope* that they will not be used. To suggest to the enemy that one has them but will not use them only strips the deterrence value from having them in the first place.

Christian Responses

The ethical question of war is inextricably tied to the broader question of church and state. While the New Testament gives a very complete description of the kingdom of God, of which all believers are a part, it gives only a very brief political theology. On the one hand, it teaches that government, in the broad sense of the word, has been ordained by God, and that to resist government is to resist God (Ro. 13:1-7; 1 Pe. 2:13-14; Tit. 3:1). Jesus instructed his followers “to give to Caesar what is Caesar’s” (Mk. 12:17//Mt. 22:21//Lk. 20:25). Of the few soldiers who appear on the pages of the New Testament as followers of Jesus, none of them, as far as we know, renounced their occupations, though admittedly this argument from silence is not particularly strong (Mt. 8:5-13//Lk. 7:1-10; 27:54//Mk. 15:39//Lk. 23:47; Ac. 10). One of the twelve apostles was Simon the Zealot, a Jewish freedom fighter, and while we may assume that he changed occupations when he began following Jesus, we have no record of his sentiments about his former life (Mk. 3:18).

On the other hand, while government was highly respected (even the Roman government), it was not sacrosanct. Christians practiced civil disobedience when allegiance to God came into direct conflict with allegiance to the state. The apostles refused to be silent about Jesus after being forbidden to preach in his name (Ac. 4:18-20, 29; 5:29, 42). Furthermore, there is a certain diversity of perspective toward government in the New Testament. While Paul and Peter both support the role of government, John in the Apocalypse views it as evolving into the epitome of evil, and both of these perspectives were probably shaped by current circumstances, the former in a time of relative peace and the latter in a time of severe state opposition.

Thus, there is tension between these two polarities even in the New Testament. The Christian is a person with a dual citizenship. He/she is a citizen of the kingdom of God but also a citizen of the state. The tradition of pacifism has sought, more or less, to cancel out the citizenship of the state. The just war advocates, and even more to the point, the crusade and preventive war advocates, have given to the state a theological role. While Jesus and the apostles concur that the Christian has a responsibility to both God and country, they do not always indicate where the exact

line of demarcation should be drawn. Americans, of course, have attempted a relatively new experiment in the history of western civilization, that is, the separation of church and state, but this position only exacerbate matters when the two institutions come into conflict.⁸³

It only remains to be said that as Christians struggle with the ethical dilemma of war, they always must keep foremost in their minds that, whatever position they choose, peace is the primary goal. The vision of “peace on earth,” announced at the birth of the Messiah, is still the ideal toward which all of the Bible points, even those portions of the Bible that describe war. John R. W. Stott has offered five ideals, all rooted in Jesus’ beatitude “blessed are the peacemakers,” which call Christians to model peace in the world.⁸⁴

1. Christians must avoid two tendencies. They must not trivialize war on the one hand, and they must not fall into despair and apathy because of the seeming inevitability of war on the other hand.
2. Christians must pray (1 Ti. 2:1-2)!
3. Christians must set an example of peace. Christians who spend their time in theological wars with each other are not very powerful witnesses of Christ’s peace and the unity of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 17:11, 20-23; Ep. 4:2-6). The church itself should be a sign of peace, pointing toward the consummation of the kingdom of God (Col. 3:12-15).
4. Christians must build confidence rather than pessimism. If American Christians continue to view their enemies as nothing more or less than the “evil empire” with no redeeming features, then they will only add to the pervasive attitude of suspicion and fear that already is being regularly preached by the “hawks.” Stereotypes are rarely accurate.
5. Christians must be willing to stimulate and participate in informed discussion. Isolation and ignorance can only be a detracting factor.

THE LAWS OF THE LAND⁸⁵

We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life,

⁸³ R. Linder, “Church and State,” *EDT* (1948) 236-237.

⁸⁴ W. Stott, *Involvement* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell) I.129-150 as quoted by D. Clendenin.

⁸⁵ More precisely, civil law refers to non-criminal law, but here we will use the term in the more broadly conventional sense of law that relates to the citizens of a state, that is, secular law.

liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

The Declaration of Independence

At the theological center of the Psalms, which in turn are at the center of theological life of the Old Testament, is the law of the Lord (Ps. 19:7-11; 119). From the beginning law was prominent in God's dealings with the human race, beginning with the divine imperatives to the first humans and a reckoning if they disobeyed (Ge. 2-3). The remainder of the Old Testament perpetuates this initiative with the giving of the Torah to Moses as the regulating norms for the personal and national life of Israel. The principle of law is so basic that in many cases the individual case laws in the Torah are strikingly similar to case laws in various other ancient Near Eastern law codes.⁸⁶ In the New Testament, while legalism and the Mosaic covenant no longer carry their former weight, the Torah still retains its role of defining sin (cf. Ro. 5:20a; 7:7), while the "law of Christ" is a principle of life that Christians are to serve (Mt. 22:37-40//Mk. 12:29-31; Lk. 10: 25-28; Ro. 13:9; 1 Co. 9:21; Ga. 6:2; Ja. 2:8). While Paul overwhelmingly negates the notion that one can be right in God's sight by obeying the law, he also points out that the law is "holy, righteous, spiritual and good" (Ro. 7:12, 14a, 16b; 1 Ti. 1:8). In the Old Testament, lawbreakers are the ones who defile the earth (Lv. 18:24-30), and in the New Testament it is the law that curbs and rebukes lawbreakers, rebels, the ungodly, murderers, perverts, slave-traders, liars and the like (1 Ti. 1:9-11).

Some Christians have only a marginal appreciation for the laws of the land, emphasizing their freedom in Christ to the point that they confuse spiritual freedom with the right to become a law unto themselves. Christians certainly have freedom, but it is not a naked freedom exempt from the principle of law (1 Co. 9:20-21). Indeed, Christians are commanded to submit unto the governing authorities. The one who rebels against even human law rebels against God, who ordained law and order (Ro. 13:1-5). Christians also can become so disillusioned by politics that they remain as detached as possible from all civil issues. They obey the laws of the land, but they emphasize their citizenship in the kingdom of God and only grudgingly

⁸⁶ Space prohibits a detailed comparison, but codes such as Hammurabi's and others have almost exact parallels to the Torah, especially the principle of *lex talionis* (i.e., "eye for eye, tooth for tooth"). The Ur-Nammu Laws and Assyrian laws all have biblical parallels in their treatment of illegal entry, theft, murder, adultery, slavery, the sale of property, the return of lost articles, mixed seeding in the same field, and incest, cf. S. Greengus, *IDBSup* (1976), p. 534.

tolerate their citizenship in the world. Still others take the role of activists who consider it their evangelistic duty to regulate the laws of the land so far as is possible by Christian theology.

Church and State

The terms “church and state”, when used together, refer to two different institutions of authority. The church is concerned with the temporal lives of Christians and how their lives are affected by spiritual matters. The state is concerned with people’s temporal lives also, but in modern governments, the state usually addresses temporal life as an end in itself with only marginal regard for spiritual matters.

In the Old Testament, church and state were united in a theocracy; civil rulers and religious rulers were joined under a single law code, the Torah. Yahweh was the Great King, the earthly monarch was his vice-regent, and religious figures, such as priests or prophets, sometimes doubled as civil magistrates.

In the New Testament, Jesus clearly distinguished between the two realms when he said, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” Such a distinction was necessary in the period of the early church when civil government was pagan, often embracing religious forms alien to the Christian faith.⁸⁷ In the post-apostolic church, Christians faced the death sentence if they refused to burn the pinch of incense to Caesar as a god, and many lost their lives in the imperial persecutions.⁸⁸ Later, when Christianity became the empire’s official religion, Constantine assumed the right to intervene in church affairs, and the relationship between church and state shifted much closer together. Hence, while the distinction between church and state is generally agreed as biblically mandated, the more intense problem is deciding just where the line of demarcation lies. Christians have obligations in both directions, and sometimes these obligations come into conflict.

Christians long have struggled with this issue. When the capital of Rome moved to Byzantium (Constantinople) in AD 330, the secular ruler came to exercise supreme authority over the church, even in doctrinal matters, though in the West, the church maintained more freedom from civil authority. With the ineffectiveness of political leaders in the West, the Roman bishops often filled the civil vacuum by

⁸⁷ In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, it was common for rulers to consider themselves to be deities to be honored along with the other members of the divine pantheon. They often took to themselves divine titles, such as Savior, Lord, God Manifested, Son of God, and so forth, cf. E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 153-165.

⁸⁸ The *libellus*, a certificate proving that one had offered sacrifice to the Roman gods, was introduced by the Emperor Decius (AD 244-251). Lacking such a certificate, one was liable to imprisonment and execution, K. Curtis and C. Thiede, eds., *The Trial and Testimony of the Early Church* (Worcester, PA: Christian History Institute, 1991), pp. 68-69.

taking responsibility for judicial affairs, military defense, and other state matters. Thus, the relationship between church and state vacillated so that by AD 494 Bishop Gelasius could articulate the doctrine of the two swords:

There are two powers by which the world is chiefly ruled; the sacred authority of the popes and the royal power. Of these the priestly power is much more important because it has to render account for the kings of men themselves...

This concept of two governmental spheres of authority, the spiritual and the secular, was generally accepted throughout the Middle Ages, and the state was considered to be a Christian institution. Not infrequently, of course, there were power struggles between these two forms of authority (particularly during the Carolingian dynasties), and by the 11th century, the civil authorities were clearly subordinate to the Roman Pope. The centers of power continued to vacillate, however, and by the 14th century, papal influence was clearly on the decline, culminating in the Protestant Reformation in which the authority of the Roman Church was broadly challenged.

Several different views of church/state relationships were developed among Protestants. Luther distinguished between temporal and spiritual authorities, but in the Lutheran states, princes often supervised church affairs. Calvin also distinguished between church and state, but in Geneva he transformed the city government into a religious oligarchy in which all legislation had to be submitted to a body of clergymen.⁸⁹ In England, the king replaced the pope as the head of the church, and the king and parliament regulated the church along with the bishops. Anabaptists and other radical reformers separated completely the spheres of church and state, often refusing any and all participation in the political arena. They were severely persecuted as anarchists by other Protestants, Roman Catholics and civil authorities alike. Many of those within the Anabaptist heritage continue to this day their belief that the only way to preserve religious liberty is by the separation of church and state. The state has no right to interfere in religious beliefs or practices, and the church has no right to claim support from the state.

Before 1776, America was both pluralistic and uneven in church-state relationships. Some colonies, such as Massachusetts, had state churches (Puritanism), and dissent from established Puritan beliefs was a crime. Other colonies, like Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware, maintained a posture of tolerance. Eventually, the first amendment in the Constitution established that the Congress could make no law either to establish or to prohibit religion. The founding fathers understood this amendment somewhat variously. Thomas Jefferson, in a now-famous letter, coined the expression of a “wall of separation” between church and state. The

⁸⁹ Dancing, card-playing, theaters and work on Sundays were outlawed. Innkeepers could be prosecuted for allowing clients to eat without saying grace. No one was permitted to sit up after 9:00 PM (unless spying on the conduct of others).

secularist movement currently takes this to mean that religion must be isolated from national life. John Adams, on the other hand, understood the amendment as a protective device to guard against governmental interference in religion so that each state could handle such questions on its own. Today, some interpreters fiercely contend that the United States intentionally was established as a “Christian nation,” though neutral with respect to denominations.⁹⁰ They believe the founding fathers designed the primary documents of the nation in order to perpetuate a Christian order. Others equally champion the United States as essentially a secular institution. All aspects of national life must exclude religion, and the vanguard for litigation in this regard is frequently the American Civil Liberties Union. Freedom of religion means the tolerance of atheism, agnosticism, secular humanism, eastern mysticism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and any and all other religious or non-religious persuasions at a private level. At a public level, religion should be non-existent.

Between these two extremes lie various balances, some giving more influence to the church, others more power to the state. In the last half century, particular issues have become battlegrounds, including but not limited to:

- Prayer in schools or other public assemblies
- Display of Christian symbols, especially during Christian holidays
- Taxation of church properties
- Blue laws (statutes regulating work, commerce and/or amusement on Sundays; they are mostly prominent in the South)
- Parochial education, charter schools, home-schooling
- Church lobbying
- Conscientious objection (for military service)
- Censorship of objectionable materials, especially pornography, but also other materials in movies, books, internet services, etc.
- Payment of taxes
- Political activism by religious special interest groups
- Legislation to limit the activities of what are perceived to be dangerous cults
- Government interference in the practice of what is believed to be dangerous religion (i.e., the federal invasion of the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas)

As Christians wrestle with the social-ethical tensions inherent in the church/state debate, consideration should be given to several factors. First, the Christian view of the state must be different than what was held during much of the Old Testament era, especially during the Israelite monarchy.⁹¹ Next, Christianity was

⁹⁰ N. Demoss, ed., *The Rebirth of America* (USA: Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation, 1986).

⁹¹ There are disclaimers even to this restriction. Reconstructionists like Gary North, for instance, urge precisely that

born in a pagan world with a pagan government, hence the debate in America has no clear precedent in the early church. Still, some Christians in New Testament times served in the government without apparent conflict of interest (Ro. 16:23; Phil. 4:22). However, attitudes toward the government are not uniform. In addition to the very positive statements by Paul and Peter about submitting to the government, there is also the assessment of John in the Apocalypse that Rome had become a blasphemous beast in league with the devil (Rv. 13; 17; 19:19-20). Paul may have described the secular ruler as “God’s servant”, but it is hard to imagine John doing so. Probably these dramatically different perspectives derive from how the state exhibited or did not exhibit religious tolerance.

The church/state debate will doubtless continue, and there is no resolution in sight. Still, some general observations are in order. Since the principle of law is ordained by God, the Christian is free to participate in civil government and its processes at the various levels as did biblical people from Nehemiah to Erastus. It should go without saying, of course, that Christians are bound by a higher loyalty than merely the state. While they are servants of the people, they are also servants of God. Any involvement in civil government must fall within the range of ethical norms that God has established in the Bible, and when there is a conflict in ethics, the ethical norms of the Bible are the controlling ethics.

Following are some important principles that may help define the parameters of political involvement.

- Christians should always stand on the side of biblical principle.
- They should be open-minded about issues, not blindly voting any party’s line.
- They should be scrupulously honest in all reports, including tax reports, payments, and dispensing information.
- Christians should use their right to vote.
- They should use their right to sign petitions, to send letters to public officials, and to contact the media about their positions.
- Before becoming personally involved in the political arena, Christians should pray for God’s will, his empowerment and his grace as well as seek the counsel of other wise Christians.
- Christians should maintain an informed interest in trends, issues and current affairs.
- They should be cautious not to confuse a particular political philosophy with Christianity.
- They should maintain the priority of the gospel over political concern.
- They should be especially sensitive to the vices of greed and power that always beckon.
- The offense of Christianity must always be the cross, not the offensiveness of Christians themselves.

Admittedly, the above parameters sharpen the tension for any Christian who wishes to follow the principle of separation of church and state yet still participate in the political system. A growing popular perception is that conservative Christians wish to impose their beliefs and behavioral norms upon the public, whether the public agrees or not. The influx of Christian value systems into legislative decision-making can be, in fact, a kind of imposition of religious beliefs upon the public. Alternatively, secularism continues to erode Christian values and encroach on the Christian lifestyle. It is now socially acceptable to use conservative Christians as a kind of whipping boy, a reaction that is at least partly attributable to the recent history of political activism from the religious right. In the bigger picture, tension is most keenly felt where legislative decision-making specifically calls into question Christian values.

In the final analysis, Christians must be sure that in their opposition to secularism they do not resort simply to the weapons of the world—power, position, and money. *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does* (2 Co. 10:4a). Rather, as servants of God they are to commend themselves by their pure character in order to avoid being discredited (2 Co. 6:3-10). Their primary weapons are spiritual, not secular (Eph. 6:10-18).

Justice

Any discussion about law in society must address the definition of justice. Diverse concepts of justice have been proposed throughout the history of human civilization, including *punitive equality* (justice is punishment fitted to the crime), *paying debts* (justice is giving each person his/her due, whether benefit or punishment), *the greatest happiness for the greatest number* (justice is social management so that the majority benefits), *enlightened self-interest* (justice is motivated by the principle, “I will behave toward others in the way I myself would like to be treated”), *survival of the fittest* (justice is evolutionary with survivors rising in power to become the ruling class), *obedience* (justice is obeying the law, while the consequences of law-breaking are determined beforehand), *equality* (justice is social evenness with regard to life, liberty and property), and *privacy* (justice is the right to mind one’s own affairs without interference).

Biblical justice does not fit entirely within any of these paradigms. In the Old Testament, punitive justice followed the ancient Near Eastern *lex talionis* (Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:23; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:19-21). The idea of punishment as reformative was not developed. At a social level, the Old Testament forbade favoritism in civil affairs (Ex. 23:1-3, 6-9; Lev. 19:15), and the 8th century prophets emphatically

denounced the oppression of the defenseless by the rich and powerful (Am. 2:6-8; 5:10-13; Hos. 6:6-10; 7:1-5; Isa. 1:21-23; Mic. 2:1-2; 3:1-3). Still, ultimate justice was eschatological and would not be finalized until the close of history (Isa. 42:1-4; Ac. 17:31; Rev. 19:11). At the end, justice would be meted out to both the righteous (Ja. 6:7-9) and the wicked (Ja. 5:1-6). At the same time, while the consummation of justice is in the future, it already has begun in the earthly ministry of Christ, both in his compassion for the weak and helpless (Mt. 12:17-21) and in his forgiveness for the sinner (Jn. 8:1-11; Ro. 3:21-26). In forgiveness, justice is more than retributive; it can be reformative as well.

Capital Punishment

Given the Christian value of human life made in the image of God, how do Christians respond to the social-ethical issue of capital punishment? Is not capital punishment a violation of the supreme value of human life? While many Christians decry abortion, euthanasia, infanticide and suicide, many also support capital punishment. Oddly enough, the liberal agenda in our culture argues for just the opposite. It often endorses abortion, active euthanasia and assisted suicide yet stands against the death penalty. While capital punishment is currently legal in thirty-eight states in the USA, in 1967 the Supreme Court issued a five-year moratorium on this form of judgment, declaring its administration grossly unfair. In 1972, the Supreme Court declared that capital punishment was a violation of the 8th and 14th Amendments (i.e., "cruel and unusual punishment"), though in 1976, the court reversed itself. Nevertheless, the execution of Timothy McVeigh on June 11, 2001 was the first federal execution since 1963 (various states, however, have conducted executions for capital crimes under state laws).

No one denies that capital punishment was instituted by God in the Old Testament. It is part of the very first set of laws God issued for the human race in the time of Noah (Ge. 9:5-6). Later, the Mosaic code called for the death penalty for some eighteen different crimes, including murder, kidnap, rape, adultery, incest, homosexuality, bestiality, occultic practices, and the flagrant rebellion of children against their parents (Ex. 21:12, 15-17, 22-25, 28-30; 22:18; Lv. 20:10-16; 24:10-16; Dt. 13:1-11; 17:12; 19:16-21; 21:18-21; 22:13-21, 25-27). Most ancient Near Eastern law codes contain statutes for capital punishment. Still, times change, and the application of principles may change as well. Ancient Near Eastern law is not American law. The issue for Christians, then, is not whether the Bible ever calls for capital punishment. Rather, it is whether or not punishment by death is still valid, if not for all these crimes, then at least for some.

Theologically, those opposed to capital punishment argue that these ancient codes are outdated. No one advocates capital punishment for all the capital crimes in

the Mosaic code. Is not the selection of only some crimes purely arbitrary, or if not, upon what criteria does one make a distinction? Further, sentences of capital punishment are sometimes commuted, even in the Bible (i.e., David's adultery, Paul's murder of Christians, the woman taken in the act of adultery). Indeed, Jesus countermands the ancient code of "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Mt. 5:38-39). Thus, while the Bible endorses capital punishment, it does not demand it. Most serious for Christians, the person executed for a capital crime has been deprived of the opportunity for repentance had he/she lived.

On utilitarian grounds, which sometimes are shared by Christians and non-Christians, it is argued that capital punishment is not an effective deterrent to crime. It is considered to be a cruel and unusual form of punishment. The death penalty is arbitrarily and unfairly administered, for it is racially and economically biased.⁹²

Theologically, those in favor of capital punishment, in addition to citing the Old Testament texts, point out that the New Testament, also, endorses the right of the state to execute certain offenders (Ro. 13:1-4). Paul seemed willing enough to submit to capital punishment if he had been proved guilty (Ac. 25:11). While the legislation in Moses' law was specified for ancient Israel in a theocracy, the law of capital punishment issued to Noah was for all humans everywhere, though it was only for the crime of willful murder. Thus, while one need not try to implement the entire Mosaic code regarding capital punishment, one should still be faithful to the general principle of Genesis 9:5-6. Capital punishment for willful murder is a punishment that fits the crime.

Utilitarian arguments, again shared by some Christians along with non-Christians, concede that the judicial system, as it is presently administered, is rife with injustice. However, they contend that this is not sufficient cause for abolishing capital punishment *per se*. Rather, it is cause for cleaning up the judicial system. Racial and economic prejudice as well as the extreme delay between sentencing and execution strip capital punishment of any deterring effect it might have. Finally, there is an economic factor, since a life-time incarceration may cost considerably more than an execution without undue delay (though this "fact" has been debated as well).

C. S. Lewis argues against the humanitarian theory of punishment in a more abstract way. The humanitarian theory holds that capital punishment is immoral because it is barbarous and vengeful. Instead, the humanitarian theory contends that the purpose of criminal punishment should be deterrence and rehabilitation, while capital punishment accomplishes neither. Against this, Lewis says that abolishing

⁹² Of the twenty inmates currently on federal death row in Terre Haute, Indiana, for instance, eighteen are minorities, cf. R. Bailey, *Detroit Free Press* (June 12, 2001), p. 6A.

the death penalty does two things. It treats the criminal as psychologically sick, and it deprives the criminal of his/her human rights of responsibility. Above all, humans have the right to be responsible; it is what distinguishes them from all other creatures. By removing from them punishment and the concept of just deserts, criminals are now simply judged to be sick and subjected to forced healing by incarceration. This, in turn, dehumanizes them, for it deprives them of accepting proper guilt and punishment.⁹³

In summary, Christians must guard against two equally wrong attitudes in society. One is the advocacy of criminal punishment which is little more than a desire for revenge. Christians may support the use of capital punishment for the sake of justice and human responsibility, but not for revenge. The other is the tendency to be lenient toward serious offenders because of a general desensitization toward evil. Treating criminal acts as merely diseases blurs the line between good and evil. In a society where that line is already constantly shifting, the definitions of good and evil are increasingly ambiguous.

Civil Disobedience

Given that Christians have obligations to submit to the laws of the land as a divinely instituted authority, the problem must still be addressed as to how Christians should respond to unjust laws, that is, laws that seem wrong or unfair. Is it ever right to practice civil disobedience, and if so, when? What if there is a conflict between what the law requires and what God requires?

Civil disobedience can be defined as a public, nonviolent, and conscientious act contrary to law, usually done with the intent to bring about a change in the policies or laws of the government.⁹⁴ It is public and open, not hidden and secretive. It is nonviolent, not revolutionary. It is motivated by conscience, not private gain. It attempts to draw attention to a state of affairs considered to be unjust.

The fact that obedience to authority can lead to heinous crimes is well known. The Spanish Inquisition, the Salem witch trials, the Nazi war crimes, and the My Lai massacre of civilians in Vietnam are obvious examples. In 1963, social psychologist Stanley Milgram conducted extensive experiments of men from differing occupations and of different ages to see what effect authority figures have on obedience. He discovered that when someone is perceived to be an authority figure, people tend to obey, even in the face of moral misgivings. The tendency is even more pronounced if

⁹³C. S. Lewis, "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment," *God in the Dock*, ed. W. Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 287ff.

⁹⁴J. Rawls, "The Justification of Civil Disobedience," *Moral Problems*, ed. J. Rachels (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 186.

the authority figure wears a uniform.⁹⁵

Civil disobedience has been known from ancient times. Socrates is reputed to have said, “I shall obey God rather than you,” when offered his freedom on condition that he give up his pursuit of wisdom.⁹⁶ In the Bible, the Hebrew midwives, out of respect for God, civilly disobeyed the command of Pharaoh to kill the newborn males, and God rewarded them (Ex. 1:15-22). Jeremiah advised civil disobedience to his fellow citizens in a circumstance of war (Jer. 38:1-4), and Daniel and his Hebrew friends refused to heed the demands of the Babylonian ruler with respect to the practice of their faith (Da. 3:8-12; 6:10-16). Peter and the other apostles were jailed for disobeying the injunction of the Jewish Sanhedrin that they should not preach about Jesus (Ac. 4:19; 5:29).

Probably the best known examples in relatively recent history are the acts of civil disobedience of Thoreau protesting the poll tax that supported the Mexican War, the mass protests of Gandhi against the British government in India, and the civil rights protests led by Martin Luther King, Jr. in the interest of Black equality. Christian civil disobedience has ranged from the refusal of the early Christians to offer sacrifices to pagan gods and/or to recognize Caesar as Lord (for which Justin Martyr and his companions were martyred in the 2nd century), to the refusal of Pastor Everett Sileven to close his Faith Christian School in Nebraska, because its teachers were not state-certified (1984), to the operation rescues in which abortion clinics have been blockaded in the effort to save the lives of the unborn (late 20th century). While some might say the latter is “enforced confrontation” rather than civil disobedience, rescuers have been arrested, tried and sentenced under a variety of laws, such as, trespassing.

Arguments on Both Sides

Some view civil disobedience as on the same plane as other crimes, like arson, burglary, murder and rape.⁹⁷ Others reject civil disobedience because it is an open

⁹⁵ The experiment consisted of participants reading word pairs to a “learner.” They were told that the experiment was to determine the effect of punishment on learning. Each time the learner made a mistake, the participant was instructed by someone in a white lab coat to administer an electric shock. Voltages ranged from 15 to 450 volts and were labeled from “slight shock” to “danger.” Repeated incorrect answers were “punished” by increased voltage. The participants were not actually administering any electric shocks at all and were unaware that the real nature of the experiment was to determine their willingness to administer pain if authorized by someone in uniform. The supposed learners intentionally made many errors, and when the participants increased the shock effect to 300 volts, the learners act out severe physical reactions, some beating on the walls and others falling deathly silent. Of the forty participants, twenty-six continued to obey the instructions of the lab-coated authority to the very end, administering shocks of 435-450 volts, cf. J. Braun, D. Linder and I. Asimov, *Psychology Today: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: Random House, 1979), pp. 614-615.

⁹⁶ Plato, *Apology of Socrates*, 29.

⁹⁷ Former Senator Sam Ervin, for instance, said, “The right of clergymen and civil rights agitators to disobey laws they deem unjust is exactly the same as the right of the arsonist, the burglar, the murderer, the rapist and the thief to

defiance of democratic society. It is viewed as an implicit encouragement to disregard established law with impunity. It can become an avenue to promote conscientious subjectivism where the relativity of widely diverging consciences are allowed to run riot. Civil disobedience becomes an open door to any and every segment of the nation, whether they be farmers, bankers, Catholics, manufacturers, Protestants or Jews, to decide in the name of religion, morality or personal conscience that certain laws are unjust. Hitler began his own rise to power through civil disobedience and so becomes a potent example of its tragic consequences. While civil disobedience is by definition intended to be non-violent, its very practice of producing tensions and crisis-packed situations tends to provoke violence.⁹⁸

Others contend that civil disobedience is mandatory for Christians, even to the point of violence. This was the position of John Brown, the famous abolitionist, who raided the Harpers Ferry arsenal in 1859 and summoned the slaves to revolt. Brown was captured, convicted of treason and hanged. Still, in his own words, he concluded, “I believe that to have interfered as I have done...in behalf of His [God’s] despised poor, was not wrong but right.”⁹⁹ Similar positions have been urged by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Randall Terry, the leader of Operation Rescue.¹⁰⁰

Mandatory civil disobedience in every conflict does not seem to have been the position of the earliest Christians, however. Paul in his letter to Philemon about his slave Onesimus does not urge civil disobedience in view of unjust slavery. Instead, he appeals to Philemon on the grounds of Onesimus’ new status as a Christian (Phlmn 11-21). The apostles did not urge slave revolt, even though slavery itself was contrary to the ethics of the gospel (Gal. 3:28; cf. Col. 3:11). Instead, they counseled slaves to endure their unjust situations for the sake of a Christian testimony (Ep. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22; 1 Ti. 6:1; Tit. 2:9-10; 1 Pe. 2:18-20).

Similarly, the early church also existed in a culture that permitted abortion and infanticide.¹⁰¹ A common answer to overpopulation in Greco-Roman culture was

disobey the laws forbidding arson, burglary, murder, rape and theft,” cf. J. Davis, *Evangelical Ethics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed), pp. 213-214.

⁹⁸ L. Waldman, “Civil Rights—Yes; Civil Disobedience, No,” *Basic Problems of Philosophy*, 4th ed., ed. Bronstein et al (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), pp. 279-286.

⁹⁹ S. Steinberg, *The United States: Story of a Free People* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1958), p. 276.

¹⁰⁰ King, for instance, said, “...wherever unjust laws exist, people on the basis of conscience have a right to disobey those laws,” cf. L. Waldman, “Civil Rights—Yes; Civil Disobedience, No,” *Basic Problems of Philosophy*, ed. D. Bronstein, et al, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 282, and “The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges,” cf. M. King, Jr., “I Have a Dream,” *Basic Problems*, p. 277. Terry, along similar lines, argued that God’s judgment “...will be based solely on one criteria—*action*,” and “*inaction* would be considered disobedience and apathy toward the Savior,” R. Terry, *Operation Rescue* (USA: Randall A. Terry), pp. 74-75.

¹⁰¹ Ancient women had a variety of abortive options, both chemical and mechanical, cf. M. Gorman, *Abortion & the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1982), pp. 15-18.

infanticide, since abortions, though often attempted, were too often fatal to the mother. The unwanted child was simply left on the trash heap or in some isolated place, either to die or to be picked up by slave traders.¹⁰² The early church, while it decried abortion and infanticide,¹⁰³ did not redress this tragedy through civil disobedience. Rather, it forbade Christians to participate in such acts, even though such acts were permissible by law.¹⁰⁴

Thus, it seems that while civil disobedience may be mandatory when the law requires one actively to disobey God, it is not mandatory (though it may be permissible) in the face of unjust laws. Civil disobedience is not a light matter, and its dangers, as pointed out by those who oppose it, must be treated seriously. A critical factor is the link between means and ends. The means affect the character of the end, and they should exhibit as much as possible the character of the desired end.¹⁰⁵

Some Criteria for Civil Disobedience

Clear Conflict: Christians must not disobey the law over marginal issues but only where there is a clear conflict between God and the state. One cannot disobey the law because the law is inconvenient.

Limited to the Area of Conflict: Even when there is clear ethical conflict that seems to justify civil disobedience, one must not embrace anarchy. If the law is clearly in opposition to God on a given issue, it does not follow that one may disobey the law on any other count.

Legal Means Should be Exhausted: Civil disobedience only should be considered as a last resort, that is, when governmental channels for changing legislation have been pursued and have failed.

Publicly and Non-violently: Civil disobedience is not an attempt to hide one's actions or to indulge in violence. Rather, it is an attempt to arouse the conscience of the citizenry.

Acceptance of Penalty: Since the Christian believes in submitting to the law, he or she must be willing to accept the penalty for civil disobedience.

¹⁰² E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 59-60.

¹⁰³ Gorman, pp. 47-62.

¹⁰⁴ "...you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is begotten", *Didache* 2:2; "...we have been taught that to expose newly-born children is the part of wicked men," Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 27; "[Christians] beget children; but they do not cast away fetuses," *Epistle to Diognetus* 5.

¹⁰⁵ D. Gill, "Civil Disobedience," *EDT* (1984), p. 246.

Business Ethics

To say that we live in a different world than the one which existed before the two world wars sounds trite. Still, it may be that we have not yet appreciated how great a transition has occurred. Prior to about 3000 BC, which is the approximate beginning of documented human history, the human family lived in what Jacques Ellul has called the natural environment. Population was scattered, people groups were less numerous, and nature was virtually an omnipotent power over which people had no control. More and more, however, the human family learned to utilize and master nature. Agriculture, domestic breeding, pottery, glass, and metallurgy emerged. Political conflict evolved and escalated as the population grew. All this is no more than is described in the early stories of Genesis (cf. Ge. 1:28; 4:8, 17, 20-24; 10:8-12, 32). During this Prehistoric Period, the attention of people upon animals was gradually replaced by an attention upon other people and weapons, a transition which is evident in the ancient artistry which remains. Social organization increased, and cities and communities grew.

In about the 3rd millennium BC, the human family reached a major point of transition from the natural environment to the social environment. The emergence of the concept of law, the invention of writing, the development of a social hierarchy, and the trend toward totalitarianism increased the complexity of human society. This period, the Historic Period, is much better known than the earlier one, since its character can be traced in the masses of ancient texts, decrees, orders, trade bills, and so forth. Here again, what we know from the researches of historians, anthropologists and archaeologists was also recorded in the Genesis record long ago.

Today human society is also in a transitional period, and we approach a crisis of a different order altogether, the inauguration of the technological environment. The last two centuries of industrialization has been preparing the way for it, but only within our own lifetime has technology begun to impose itself everywhere, to change everything, to take over all forms of social activities and forms, in short, to become a true environment. If the Prehistoric Period was characterized by the natural environment, and the Historic Period was characterized by the social environment, the Post-historic Period will be characterized by the technological environment. This new environment is superimposed upon the previous two, thus modifying and reducing them to a substratum. Within this new environment, the world of business and the overriding human goals of personal happiness are pursued.¹⁰⁶ It is quite correct to say that the rise of urban civilization and the collapse of traditional religion

¹⁰⁶ J. Ellul, *What I Believe*, trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids/London: Eerdmans/Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1989); see review, D. Lewis, *The Ellul Studies Forum* (Dept. of Rel. Stud., U. of S. Florida, Nov. 1989) 3.

are the two main hallmarks of our era.¹⁰⁷

The Ancient Framework for Human Labor

In the Prehistoric Environment, work was ordained as a human creative activity patterned after God's own creative labor (Ge. 1:1, 28; 2:2-3, 15, 18). Far from being a curse placed upon humans after the fall, work was set alongside of nature itself as part of God's creative wisdom (Ps. 104:19-24; Is. 28:23-29).¹⁰⁸ Human rebellion against God, however, produced tragic results. The work that had been a joy now became toil (Ge. 3:16-19). The man and the woman who had been created as partners in work now began to follow the pattern of domination and intimidation (Ge. 3:16; 4:19, 23). The curse of humankind, of course, was not that men and women had to work, but that trials and vexations now intruded themselves upon their work.¹⁰⁹

A concern of Old Testament Wisdom Literature is with a proper attitude toward work.¹¹⁰ Laziness is condemned, since it leads to poverty (Pr. 6:6-11; 10:4; 24:30-34). The excuses of those who refuse to work are held up for sarcasm, such as, evasions (Pr. 22:13; 26:13), excessive sleep (Pr. 19:15; 26:14), rationalization for slothfulness (Pr. 26:16) and procrastination (Pr. 20:4). A lazy person is much like a destructive person (Pr. 18:9). Industry, on the other hand, is a mark of wisdom (Pr. 10:5). Work is the gift of God for humans to enjoy (Ecc. 3:22; 5:18-19; 9:9-10). It leads to self- fulfillment (Pr. 13:4) and profit (Pr. 14:23), and it should be performed with diligence (Pr. 24:27). Still, the Lord himself is to be credited with a person's increase (Pr. 10:22), and work that does not glorify God is futile (Ps. 127:1-2; Pr. 15:16; 11:4). Peace, charity and integrity are more valuable than sheer wealth (Pr. 15:17; 17:1; 19:1).

The Ancient Laws for Business

With the development of the social environment, the ethics of work became regulated by law. Various ancient law codes, such as those collected by Hammurabi, regulated certain aspects of business. The Torah also provided statutes which affected work in the ancient society of Israel, and from these laws can be gleaned some important principles. Primary among them is the basic principle that human work is to be relational, not merely profitable. Work is a means of serving God and one's fellow human being as well as a means of productivity. In a multitude of ways, Torah

¹⁰⁷ H. Cox, *The Secular City*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1966) 1.

¹⁰⁸ W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 2.127-128.

¹⁰⁹ H. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. M. Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), p. 129.

¹¹⁰ D. Kidner, *Proverbs [TOTC]* (Downers Grove, IL: IPV, 1964), pp. 42-43; Wolff, pp. 129-133.

shaped the relational character of work, and if Cain asked Yahweh if he was his brother's keeper (Ge. 4:9), Yahweh in effect said, "Yes, you are!" (cf. Ex. 23:4-5; Dt. 22:1-4).

The Sabbath was a fundamental institution which prevented work from becoming dehumanizing, that is, it prevented the worker from becoming a mechanistic producer of meaningless achievements. God rested after his creative labors (Ge. 2:2-3), and he intended his human creatures to do the same (Ex. 20:8-11; Dt. 5:12-15). To deprive workers of their rest, whether humans or animals, was strictly forbidden (Ex. 23:12). Even the land was to be allowed a recuperation period (Lv. 25:1-3), and God promised to honor those who honored his commandment for rest by blessing their work to make up for the loss (Lv. 25:20-22)

Special concern was to be shown toward the powerless in society (Ex. 22:22-24). The Egyptians had used the Israelites ruthlessly (Ex. 1:13-14), but Yahweh forbade the Israelites to treat others in this way (Lv. 25:43, 46, 53). Special laws for the social support of the disadvantaged gave the poor the privilege of gleaning the excess from fields and vineyards during normal years (Lv. 19:9-10; Dt. 23:24-25; 24:19-22) and gleaning the aftergrowth during sabbatical years (Ex. 23:10-11; Lv. 25:4-7)

The use of capital was carefully regulated. Loans could be made in order to alleviate poverty. However, in order to avoid exorbitant capital gain, they were to be made generously and without the charge of interest (Ex. 22:25; Lv. 25:35-37; Dt. 23:19).¹¹¹ To be sure, this privilege was held only for Israelite citizens, and foreigners could, in fact, be charged interest (Dt. 23:20; 28:12), but it should be understood that the whole concept of loans was primarily in the context of alleviating poverty. Israelite society was not based on a complex commercial and financial structure similar to the modern world.¹¹² Any loans which were still outstanding to fellow Israelites were to be simply written off after seven years so as to avoid the problem of overwhelming debt and the threat of foreclosure (Dt. 15:1-3). Any loans made would have to be arranged with the eventuality in mind that the loan might eventually become a gift, and yet the loans themselves were still to be made with generosity (Dt. 15:7-11). Collateral for short term loans was carefully regulated. Collateral could not be arranged in such a way as to deprive another person of basic necessities, such as, warm clothing and the means of livelihood (Ex. 22:26-27; Dt. 24:6, 12-13). Also, it

¹¹¹ Lending at interest was practiced by all of Israel's neighbors. The vocabulary of interest, *neshek* (= bite) and *tarbith* (= increase), is found in other ancient documents besides the Bible, and the rates were very high, ranging from 20-25% for monetary loans, up to 33 1/3% for loans in kind, and sometimes even more, cf. R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Social Institutions* (New York/Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 1.170-171.

¹¹² P. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy [NICOT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 302.

could not be arranged in such a way as to afford the lender any opportunity to encroach upon the privacy of the borrower or to be selective in his choice of collateral (Dt. 24:10-11). People who were especially disadvantaged were exempted from providing collateral (Dt. 24:17-18). In a society where its citizens were barely subsisting, wages were to be paid daily, since they were needed for survival (Lv. 19:13b; Dt. 24:14-15). Bribery was strictly forbidden (Ex. 23:8).

Other regulations of business practice range from standards for weights and measures, so as to preserve honesty (Lv. 19:35-36; Dt. 25:13-16), to safety measures which aimed at preventing negligence (Dt. 22:8; Ex. 21:28-36). Indentured servitude was regulated so as not to result in slavery (Dt. 25:39-43). Land was not to be sold permanently (Lv. 25:23-24), and land contracts had a maximum tenure of 50 years (Lv. 25:14-17). All land was to be kept in tribal holdings (Lv. 25:25-28). Only a house within a city (which accordingly was not within a tribe's open range holdings) could be sold permanently (Lv. 25:29-31).

Finally, the Israelites were warned that in upward mobility there was always the danger of overweening pride and an attitude of self-sufficiency, an attitude which neglected to give proper honor to God (Dt. 8:10-14, 17-18).

The Message of the Prophets Regarding Business

The lack of business ethics in ancient Israel was roundly condemned by the prophets, because her citizens disregarded the laws of Torah. Glimpses of these censures can be found early, as when free landholders were forced into the corvee by Solomon (1 Kg. 5:13-14). David, of course, had begun the forced labor crews from among conquered foreigners (2 Sa. 12:31), and Solomon followed in kind (1 Kg. 9:20-21). Though Solomon was not accused of enslaving the freeborn citizens of Israel (1 Kg. 9:22), the compulsory service of citizens in the corvee was deeply resented (1 Kg. 12:3). Less than a century later, Ahab was severely condemned by Elijah for his murderous takeover of a freeborn citizen's property (1 Kg. 21).

The harshest judgments, however, came from the quartet of prophets in the 8th century BC, Amos and Hosea in the northern nation of Ephraim and Isaiah and Micah in the southern nation of Judah. The powerless poor were being severely abused (Am. 2:6-7; Mic. 3:1-3; Is. 3:14-15; 10:1-2), and collateral on loans was not returned (Am. 2:8). The *nouveau riche*, who reveled in their wealth, did so at the expense of the disadvantaged in society (Am. 4:1). The landed peasants were being driven from independence into a state of serfdom (Am. 5:11),¹¹³ and bribery and social injustice were rampant (Am. 5:12; Is. 1:23). The Sabbath became a business liability, because greedy merchants did not wish to lose any profits by pausing for a

¹¹³ J. Mays, *Amos [OTL]* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), p. 94.

weekly day of rest (Am. 8:4-5a). Dishonesty in marketing was the order of the day (Mic. 6:12; 7:3), evidenced in the fraudulent measurement of goods, overpricing, and the inclusion of filler in grain to increase its bulk (Am. 8:4-6; Ho. 12:7; Mic. 6:10-11). Land grabbing (Ho. 5:10; Mic. 2:2, 9; 7:2; Is. 5:8)¹¹⁴ forced the citizens to give up their ancestral properties. Those in power exploited their economic advantage over the small farmers and craftsmen, seizing their holdings in times of sickness, crop failure, inflation or other distresses.¹¹⁵

By the 7th century BC, conditions had not improved. Jeremiah scathingly rebuked the southern nation for this same economic oppression of the powerless (2:34; 22:17), thorough-going dishonesty (5:1; 9:8), uncontrolled greed (5:26-28; 6:13; 8:10), Sabbath-breaking (17:19-27), and the refusal to free Israelite slaves who had indentured themselves due to economic setbacks (34:8-20).

To say that Yahweh was angry at this defiant display is an understatement. His blistering denunciations given through his prophets reveal his white-hot wrath against such practices (Am. 2:13; 3:12; 5:19; 9:1-4; Ho. 5:8-15; Is. 5:25; 9:12b, 17b, 21b; 10:4b; Mic. 3:12). The burden of Jeremiah, the prediction of terrible exile for the nation of Judah, occurred in 587 BC as a divine punishment for covenant-breaking.

The Message of Jesus and Its Implications for Business

In many ways the message of Jesus was similar to the message of the 8th century prophets. It was certainly grounded in a full appreciation and understanding of Torah, and many of Jesus' teachings which affect the Christian approach to the business world were drawn from the principles underlying the Torah commandments. Even before one meets Jesus in the gospels, he encounters a social message in the preaching of John the Baptist, who called upon men and women to repent and turn away from their sins, particularly their social sins. John called for generosity, honesty and a renunciation of greed (Lk. 3:10-14).

When Jesus began to preach, his gospel was good news to the poor (Mt. 11:5//Lk. 7:22; 4:18; 6:20). When he said that the poor would always be with us (Mt. 26:11//Mk. 14:7//Jn. 12:8), this was no more than an echo of Torah (cf. Dt. 15:11a), but Jesus did not use this as an excuse to abrogate the further command to be generous (Dt. 15:11b). Rather, he encouraged his followers to give freely to the disadvantaged. The rich young man was so counseled (Mt. 19:21//Mk. 10:21//Lk. 18:22) as well as others (Lk. 11:41; 12:33; 14:12-14, 21). When Zacchaeus made restitution and gave half of his wealth to the poor, Jesus declared that he had been

¹¹⁴ L. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah [NICOT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 296-297.

¹¹⁵ O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12 [OTL]*, trans. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), p. 100.

truly saved (Lk. 19:8-10). Jesus indicted the religious leaders for ferreting out ways of avoiding their social responsibility to even their aged parents (Mt. 15:3-9//Mk. 7:9-13).¹¹⁶

The values which people place upon wealth was a deep concern of the Lord. Constantly he warned of the deceitfulness of wealth that would choke out the good seed of the gospel (Mt. 13:22//Mk. 4:18-19//Lk. 8:14). “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,” he said (Mt. 6:19). If one serves money as master, he cannot at the same time truly serve God (Mt. 6:24//Lk. 16:13), for his heart is really focused upon wealth instead of the kingdom (Mt. 6:21//Lk. 12:34). In fact, the value which humans place upon money is directly in conflict with God’s reckoning (Lk. 16:14-15). The rich and well fed will be empty in the great judgment (Lk. 6:24-25). In the end, they may very well find themselves in hell (Lk. 16:19-24). Larger assets, greater securities, and shrewd investments mean little if one is not rich toward God (Lk. 12:16-21). When Jesus commissioned his disciples, he sent them forth without material resources so that they would depend upon God for their sustenance (Mt. 10:8b-10//Mk. 6:8-9//Lk. 9:3; 10:4, 7), and they lacked nothing (Lk. 22:35). He told them not to worry about material things, for material accumulation is the goal of the godless (Mt. 6:25-32//Lk. 12:22-30). Instead, one should work toward “food that lasts” (Jn. 6:27). Even when one gives gifts, the relative value of the gift is not to be assessed by comparing it with what others give, but rather, the value of the gift depends precisely upon how much the giver has left over (Mk. 12:41-44//Lk. 21:1-4).

On the other hand, though Jesus sternly warned against the entrapments of wealth, he also knew that the commandments about Sabbath rest could be abusive. Legalistic regulations concerning the Sabbath became an excuse for some to withhold mercy and kindness from those in need. As such, Jesus had no qualms about defending his disciples for picking grain and eating it on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:1-8//Mk. 2:23-28//Lk. 6:1-5), and he also healed the sick on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:9-14//Mk. 3:1-6//Lk. 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6). As he said, it was always in order to do acts of kindness (Mt. 12:12//Mk. 3:4//Lk. 6:9), and in any case, the Sabbath was made for women and men, not vice versa (Mk. 2:27; cf. Lk. 14:15-16).

All of these teachings were ultimately grounded in what Jesus asserted were the two greatest commandments in Torah, to love God fully and to love one’s neighbor as one’s self (Mt. 22:34-40//Mk. 12:28-34//Lk. 10:25-28). It is obvious, however, that when Jesus called upon Torah as the final authority, he was more

¹¹⁶ *Corban*, the Hebrew word used in Jewish tradition to refer to something dedicated to God, became a scandal in the eyes of Jesus. In the Jewish legal tradition, one’s personal property could be designated *corban*, thus rendering it unable to be lawfully used for any purpose other than for God, even though it did not need to be actually offered to God but could be retained for personal use, cf. *ISBE* (1979) 1.772. By so dedicating one’s property to God, one could both appear holy and at the same time avoid using one’s resources for the assistance of others.

interested in the spirit of the law rather than a narrow, legalistic interpretation. When one lawyer posed what he thought was an unanswerable dilemma to the broad statement of loving one's neighbor as oneself, Jesus responded with a parable indicating that one's neighbor is any needy person who is encountered (Lk. 10:29-37). One must not turn away from genuine human need.

Finally, Jesus called upon his disciples to renounce the way of power. In the temptation narratives, Jesus himself resisted the urging of Satan to take the way of worldly power (Mt. 4:1-11//Lk. 4:1-12). When two of his disciples entertained visions of grandeur about their positions of power in the kingdom, Jesus instructed the whole group that authoritarianism was not to be sought (Mt. 20:20-28//Mk. 10:35-45; cf. Mk. 9:33-35//Lk. 9:46-48). Greatness is in serving, and titles or positions of status are not to be valued (Mt. 23:5-12//Lk. 11:43; 14:7-11). The coming of the kingdom of God means that in the end the proud, the powerful, and the rich will be brought down (Lk. 1:51-53). Jesus' ultimate gesture of this renunciation of power was at the Last Supper, when he washed his disciples' feet (Jn. 13:1-17). Small wonder that Jesus urged his disciples to count the cost of discipleship (Lk. 14:25-33), for to follow Jesus meant that one must die to oneself (Mt. 16:24-26//Mk. 8:34-37//Lk. 9:23-25).

The message of Jesus concerning values, wealth, power, and the poor has far-reaching implications for business ethics. As is apparent by this time, the message of Jesus is in significant tension with the utilitarianism of American business with its bottom line of profit and loss. To be sure, Jesus speaks of profit and loss, but he speaks in ultimate terms, not temporal ones. "What is your profit," he asks, "if you gain the world but lose yourself?" In ultimate terms, to fail to hear and put into practice Jesus' values about life is the equivalent of a man building a house on a foundation of sand (Mt. 7:24-27//Lk. 6:46-49). Jesus' assessment of values depends more on motives and less on things in themselves (Mt. 15:10-19//Mk. 7:17-23). In the end, every system or lifestyle that does not match God's values will be rooted up (Mt. 15:13).

The Ethics of Work in the Primitive Church

The early church's approach to work, business, money and power was largely rooted in the Old Testament ethic, but particularly, the Old Testament ethic as it was interpreted by the Lord Jesus. Industry and hard work were encouraged and expected (1 Th. 4:11; Ep. 4:28a; 1 Co. 4:12; 2 Co. 6:5). When some Christians decided not to work and to rely upon the generosity of the congregation to support them, Paul pointed them toward the example of their hard-working leaders (1 Th. 5:12-13; 2 Th. 3:7-9). He warned the idle (1 Th. 5:14; 2 Th. 3:6), commanding them to return to work, and he advised them not to expect handouts if they were unwilling to work (2

Th. 3:10-15). Paul himself worked hard for his own support at his tent-making trade (Ac. 18:3; 20:34; 1 Co. 9:6; 1 Th. 2:9), and he did so in order to model the Christian work ethic and at the same time not be a financial burden to his converts (1 Co. 9:12; 2 Th. 3:8-9).

In several exhortations about the proper Christian lifestyle, Paul and others issue specific addresses to masters and slaves. These usually occur in the New Testament household codes, which in turn are Christianized versions of moral and social codes of the Greco-Roman world.¹¹⁷ Slaves were to give good service to their masters, not so much because their masters were kind and good-hearted, for many of them were not (1 Pe. 2:18-20), but because work was to be performed as “unto the Lord” (Ep. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-24), and because the quality of work was a way of making the gospel appealing to the outsider (Tit. 2:9-10; 1 Ti. 6:1). To be sure, slavery as an institution was antithetic to the Christian ideal (Ga. 3:28; Col. 3:11); however, Paul did not try to restructure the entire Greco-Roman social system, since his primary goal was to preach the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus. If freedom could not be gained, the believer-slave was at least free in the sight of God. On the other hand, if emancipation was possible, then so much the better (1 Co. 7:20-24).

Christian masters, also, were instructed to respect and to provide good care for their slaves, since God was the master of both and would show no favoritism between them (Ep. 6:9; Col. 4:1). Christian masters were to remember that their Christian slaves were brothers (Phlm. 16), and Christian slaves were not to take advantage of their masters just because they were Christians (1 Ti. 6:2b).

In the final analysis, work was intended to be relational. The bottom line was not profit and loss, but rather, the ability to “have something to share with those in need” (Ep. 4:28b). All activity in life was to be performed for the glory of God (1 Co. 10:31; Col. 3:23).

If the purpose of work was to glorify God and to have the resources to share with others, a purpose that is closely related to the commandments to love God with all one’s heart and one’s neighbor as one’s self, then it is not too difficult to see why the early Christians had such a different view of wealth than is typical of the modern world. The earliest Christians in the Jerusalem church took Jesus’ teachings seriously enough to practice a form of communal resources (Ac. 2:44-45; 4:32, 34-37). While

¹¹⁷ In Luther’s German translation of the New Testament, the ethical lists in Ep. 5:21ff. and Col. 3:18ff. are headed by the word *haustafel* (household table), and it has now become a technical term for the New Testament household codes or catalogs of domestic duties. Such codes were common in both Jewish and Greco-Roman culture, and they regulated such things as family relationships, social relationships, duties, and hierarchical relationships, cf. O. Seitz, “Lists, ethical,” *IDB* (1962) 111.137-139.

this practice did not last long, and so far as is known did not extend beyond the Jerusalem church in its early days, the ideal that Christians should care for each other was strongly upheld (Ga. 2:10; 2 Co. 8-9). Christians were urged to “excel in the grace of giving” (2 Co. 8:7) and to strive for economic equality (2 Co. 8:13-14).

Wealth was understood to be an opportunity for generosity (2 Co. 9:11), and generosity was viewed as a specific obedience to Christ which should accompany the confession of faith (2 Co. 9:13). Wealth was always dangerous because of its tendency to lead people into harmful pursuits (1 Ti. 6:9). The love of money (which, incidentally, was by no means confined to the rich) led toward unfaithfulness and grief (1 Ti. 6:10). As such, the rich are commanded to turn away from arrogance, to trust God rather than their own resources, and to be generous with their wealth (1 Ti. 6:17-19). James warns the wealthy about their transitoriness (Ja. 1:10-11), particularly the unbelieving rich who increase in wealth at the expense of the poor (Ja. 2:6-7). They plan financial ventures without regard for the fact that God alone controls the future, and they do not intend to use their wealth for the good of others (Ja. 4:13-17). In the end, James declares that such luxury and self-indulgence will testify against them in the great judgment (Ja. 5:1-6; Rv. 18:2-3, 10b-24). Such warnings were not merely for the unbelieving rich, however. Christians with wealth are also warned that while they may suppose that they are self-sufficient, they do not realize that God sees them as spiritually empty (Rv.3:17-18).

Summarizing the Biblical Values and Their Implications

The creation account in Genesis, the ancient laws of Torah, the value of work in the Wisdom Literature, the social message of the prophets, the teachings of Jesus, and the life and teachings of the early church provide a Christian framework within which the ethics of business are to be shaped. Following are some of the most important elements in this framework.

1. *People are More Important Than Products*: Because humans are made in the divine image, they are not to be worked ruthlessly like machines. Their work is a reflection of God’s work, and their rest is important if their work is not to be dehumanizing.
2. *Personal Industry and Quality Work is to be Expected*: It is the foolish who hope to avoid work but still receive its benefits. Christians who are not industrious mar the gospel and are to be reprimanded.
3. *Work is Primarily Relational*: Work is to be viewed as the practical expression of loving God and loving others. When one works, he/she works as “unto the Lord,” and the resources that are generated through work are not merely for self- consumption, but they are intended to be shared with others in need. Special concern should be shown toward the poor and

powerless who tend to be crushed under the weight of economic systems.

4. *Gifts Must Be Given Out of Generosity, Not for Motives of Investment:* Sharing with others must be performed without a profit motive. Wealth without generosity will generate God's wrath, and gifts with strings attached are fundamentally manipulative.
5. *Scrupulous Honesty is Mandatory:* Whether in measurements, marketing, or advertising, Christians must be impeccably honest. The end of profit does not justify the means of dishonest methods.
6. *Security Must Be Sought in God, not Wealth:* Wealth is transitory, and profit/loss as the primary motive in business is an expression of self-love, not love for God or others. Wealth must be approached with an attitude of detachment.
7. *The Way of Power Must be Forsaken as a Means to Accomplish Ends:* Power, like wealth, is dangerous and easily perverted into self-interest and self-preservation. Power rarely has the benefit of the other person in view.
8. *The Final Goal of All Work is to Glorify God:* The profit/loss motive in work culminates in a glorification of self. The relational motive in work glorifies God. Both the labor of work and the rewards achieved through work are to be performed and used to honor God, not self.

Modern Challenges to Christian Business Ethics

There are several areas that deserve special treatment in this biblical framework of business ethics. Our modern world is extremely complex and changeable, and the saturation of business with technology, the more extensive use of material resources, the burgeoning world population, and the dependence of business upon marketing call for special considerations which were not even imagined less than a century ago. Business, to a large degree, is controlled by competence, values and the use of power. Like most other professionals, business people are increasingly losing the confidence of the public due to numerous violations of legal codes, such as, price fixing, tax evasion and bribery, not to mention the various breaches of professional ethics in areas such as deceptive advertising, technological espionage, and dishonest expense accounts. There is an ever-increasing rupture of trust between the consumer and the supplier and a disintegration of honor among business persons themselves. Trust and honor seem to be regularly set aside for the bottom line of profit.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ O. Williams and J. Houck, *Full Value: Cases in Christian Business Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1966), p. xv.

Definition of Business Values

It will be helpful to consider the differences between commonly accepted values in the business world and the values as taught in the Bible.¹¹⁹

<u>Christian</u>	<u>Business</u>
Value of power over individuals as service to help others develop their unique gifts	Value of power over individuals as domination and control of others
Value of power over nature as a stewardship by persons over God's world. Persons are called to transform nature in harmony with the whole of creation.	Value of power over nature as a mandate to produce a maximum of consumer goods and creature comforts
Value of wealth and property as an opportunity for increased service for humankind, yet also as a possible obstacle to salvation	Value of wealth and property as the measure of a person's worth
Value of happiness as achieved through following God's intentions for humankind	Value of happiness as achieved through acquiring possessions
Value of justice as the right of each person to the means of leading a human life	Value of justice as the protection of property already possessed
Value of deferring gratification of wants	Value of immediate gratification of wants
Value of time as reverence for God	Value of time as money

Master Images in Modern Business

The key images of modern business shape the lives of persons in their various business organizations. Following are paradigms for some major image types, all of which tend toward excessive self-regard.¹²⁰

<u>Image</u>	<u>Goal in the Business World</u>	<u>Most Developed Traits</u>	<u>Least Developed Traits</u>
Millionaire	To accumulate capital and live in luxury	Persistence and ingenuity	Sensitivity to the needs of others; justice
King of the mountain	To wield power over others	Toughness and cleverness	Compassion
Craftsperson	To see the job well done	Fidelity to standards	Flexibility

¹¹⁹ Williams and Houck, p. 24.

¹²⁰ Williams and Houck, 63.

Company person	To help people develop, and to protect company interests	Loyalty	Independence from the company and creativity
Gamesman	To be a winner at whatever one does	Coolness under stress and ability to solve problems	Intimacy and generosity
Captain on the Bridge	To maintain control by appeasing special interest groups	Flexibility	Idealism

Affluence, Consumerism and Worldliness

Worldliness is the quality or state of being devoted to this world and its pursuits rather than to religion and spiritual affairs. It is fundamentally an attitude, a way of thinking, a world view. Affluence and consumerism are two concrete expressions of worldliness, expressions that John summarizes as the inward compulsion for self-gratification, the tendency to be captivated by the outward show of things as motivated by greed and the will to power, and the arrogance of one's social station (1 Jn. 2:15-17). Both in the accumulation and the consumption of material things, Christians must constantly guard against worldliness and the fallacy that the ultimate business value is profit and self-indulgence. Also, there are two other fallacies of which Christians must be wary, since they come in the guise of being supported by the Bible, when in reality they are only supported by weak and unbalanced interpretations. They are:

The Protestant Work Ethic

This idea, which developed during the industrial revolution, simply says, "If I work very hard, God will bless me with material prosperity." In no passage does the New Testament advocate such thinking. The New Testament *does* advocate diligent and honest work, and it *does* promise that God is aware of our needs. However, one must take care not to confuse Christianity with an ideal rooted in capitalism and democracy. There have been and are a great many Christians who, because they do not live under a free enterprise system, work very hard but are forced to live very simply. Though a work ethic such as this may be valuable for our American system, one must not sanction in the name of God something that is not clearly taught in the Scriptures.

The Prosperity Gospel

Based on highly questionable applications of biblical passages such as 3 John

2, some Christians advocate the idea that enough quantitative faith will guarantee material prosperity. Others seek prosperity through some sort of “positive confession.” Christians ought to be aware that there is another side to the life of faith. The Scriptures commend the faith of those who were forced to live in destitution and poverty (He. 11:37-39). Jesus did not promise freedom from trouble, but rather, peace in the midst of trouble (Jn. 16:33).

Both of the above fallacies are worldly ways of thinking, even though they come in the garb of Christianity. They are simply a manifestation of the world’s values covered over with a pious and religious veneer (cf. Ac. 20:29-31).

Ecology

Christians affirm that the universe is the good creation of God (Ge. 1:1). No less than seven times in the opening narrative of the Bible is the value judgment, “And God saw that it [his creation] was good” (Ge. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). In the New Testament, Paul says, “Everything God created is good” (1 Ti. 4:4). Nothing which God has created is evil in and of itself (Ro. 14:14), though God has granted freedom to his creatures who have abused their privilege and have turned their wills against him.

Because God brought the entire universe and all that is within it into existence by an act of his sovereign will, it follows that he is the source and the Lord of all that exists (Ps. 24:1). At the climax of God’s creation, he set the humans he had made as stewards over his good creation (Ge. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:4-6). Thus, they have a stake in the world! They are to be responsible for God’s good creation, for if even God does not miss the death of a sparrow (Mt. 10:29), and if he cares for the birds and the flowers (Mt. 6:26-30), women and men, as the stewards of God’s creation, can be no less concerned.

Christians must be more than romantics, who love nature for its beauty and vitality. They must be less than mystics, who worship nature because they think it is divine. They must be different than exploiters, who use God’s creation to satisfy their greed.¹²¹ Rather, Christians must be stewards, using and administering the good world God has made with the same attitude and care God himself showed when he created it.

Humans have not lived up to their responsibilities either socially or ecologically. This was true in the ancient world, about which Paul said, “The creation was subjected to frustration” and is “groaning as in the pains of childbirth” (Ro. 8:20, 22), but it is even more true in the modern world. With the advance of technology, careless greed is currently wreaking a terrible toll on our world. Whether one speaks

¹²¹ D. Hubbard, *Right Living in a World Gone Wrong* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981), pp. 84-86.

of the encroaching deforestation of the Amazon Basin, the chemical pollution of our waterways, the gradual destruction of the ozone layer, the massive production of non-biodegradable refuse, the disruption of the animal world through the extinction of various species, or the threat of nuclear holocaust, the fact remains that humans in general, and often enough Christians as well, have been woefully neglectful. While the killing of wild animals was once a method of gaining food for survival, it is now largely a matter of sport. While we may not be prepared to blanket all hunting as sin, we ought at least to consider the motives which drive us to kill in light of recognizing the world as God's good creation.¹²²

While the present order of things will ultimately be changed (Is. 65:17; 66:22; Re. 21:1, 5), this fact does not exempt us from our mandate to be careful stewards over the world God has made. One cannot honor God while despising his works. Each one must take seriously his/her responsibility to care for the world of nature and to exert whatever powers are available in the business world to do the same.

Truth in Advertising

When Charles Revlon said, "In our factory we make lipstick, [but] in our advertising we sell hope," he described the fundamental methodology of modern advertising. In the late 1950s, Vance Packard called attention to the fact that Madison Avenue was psychologically manipulating consumers and hoodwinking them into purchasing goods and services that they neither needed nor wanted. If left unchecked, he warned that the advertising business would eventually rule our lives.¹²³

Nearly half a century later, his prophecies for the most part have come true. Advertising dictates our food, beverages, clothes, cars and public officials. Ad Alley contributes little tangible value to society, and its primary objective is to keep us spending. Today, ad agency people are scientists, not artists; they merely hire artists. Advertising is the product of elaborate psychological research and market analyses, and it plays upon the deep-seated emotional needs and weaknesses of the population, isolating segments as special targets for particular products, addressing vulnerabilities, open sores, fear, greed, anger, hostility and so forth. The basic premise is that everyone has a button, and if enough people have the same button, it can be pushed in an ad.¹²⁴

In the end, American businesses very rarely sell merely products. They sell hope, and they market products by juxtaposing them with images of hope.

¹²² Some Christians, such as Anthony Campolo, would in fact label as sin all killing of God's creatures for sport, cf. A. Campolo, *20 Hot Potatoes Christians are Afraid to Touch* (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), pp. 133-140.

¹²³ V. Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, rev. ed. (New York: Pocket Books, 1981).

¹²⁴ W. Meyers, *The Image Makers* (New York: Time Books, 1984).

Images of Hope**Companies**

Family Togetherness	McDonald's, Coke, Pepsi, Hallmark
Macho Self-reliance	Marlboro, Camel, Winston
Practicality/Simplicity	Japanese automobiles
Sexual Prowess	Black Velvet, Calvin Klein

The most important American group for marketing is the Baby-boomers, the affluent post-World War II generation. Baby-boomer values, the so-called 5-I's, are directly targeted by advertisers, and the jingles of the marketers suggest that using their products enhances or even expresses these values.

Values**Jingles**

Innovation	"New and improved"
Introspection	"Here's to the man who looks deep inside and finds something extra"
Individuality	"Who says you can't have it all"
Intellect	"Choosy mothers choose Jiff" or "Most hospitals use Tylenol; shouldn't you?"
Integrity	"We make money the old-fashioned way; we earn it" or "Quality is Job 1"

The general population is divided by psychoanalytical advertisers into categories such as the following groups. These in turn become targets for marketing.

Group**Traits****Products**

Belongers	About 33% of population; Traditionalist; cautious; conservative; believes in God, country, family	Coke, Pepsi, Budweiser, Spic 'n Span, MacDonald's
Emulators	About 15% of population; impressionable; in search of identity; lacks self-confidence; discouraged with the future; hedonists	Dr. Pepper; Mountain Dew; Tobacco
Achievers	About 20% of population; upwardly mobile baby-boomers; yuppies	Mercedes; Gucci; designer clothes; Scotch whiskey
Socially Conscious	About 20% of population; in search of inner peace; will try anything once; will hike, jog and bike rather than watch videos; advertising must be "soft"	Mazda; Honda; Volvo; light wines; herbal tea; juices; low tar tobacco
Need-directed	15% of the population; making ends meet; subsistence living	Non-targeted; in Ad Alley, they don't exist

Truth in advertising raises ethical issues for Christians. Is it ethical to sell products by pushing psychological needs? Some levels of truth in advertising, at least the more objective levels, can be controlled by government agencies. Advertisers can no longer put marbles in vegetable soup in order to cause the vegetables to rise to the top or substitute shaving cream for whipped cream. However, the more subjective levels of truth in advertising can only be controlled by moral rectitude and Christian values. If the highest value is profit/loss, then the subjective level of truth in advertising will be increasingly ignored. It is incumbent upon Christians, then, to gauge not only the technical correctness of their marketing, but also, the psychological honesty of their ads

Technology

Jacques Ellul is correct in saying that we are now entering a new human environment, the technological environment. This environment enables us to live. Our gadgets have become as necessary to us as food, lodging and clothing, and it is almost impossible for us to return to earlier forms of production and consumption.¹²⁵ While the technological environment cannot be rejected, its dangers must be fully recognized. Nuclear and ecological risks are compounded because of advancing technology, and this is well- recognized. What is not so well recognized are the risks for ourselves as human persons, particularly in the business world. All human relations are affected by and in many cases mediated through technology. In the business world, technology is the primary means of communication (computer, fax, cell phone, video, etc.). In business, technology controls the future and the lives of persons in the business world, including both the information collected about them and their skills in adapting themselves to this new environment. No decisions can be made in the business world apart from what is technologically feasible or what is dictated by the necessity of technological growth.

The ethical challenge of the technological environment for business is to be able to treat women and men as human beings made in the image of God and not bytes in the technological system. Humans were not intended to be machines, and they cannot function as machines without sacrificing their personhood. Christians must strive to assist men and women to adapt to the total change that surrounds them in the business world without succumbing to the amoral relativity of the machine. Machines have no morals, and therefore, the more humans rely on them, the more susceptible they themselves become to moral ambivalence. Above all, Christians

¹²⁵ J. Ellul, *What I Believe*, trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 133.

must resist the tendency to allow those who adapt most quickly to become an aristocracy that dominates over the others who do not. There are those who will not be able to adapt well, and they will become the powerless in society. It will be very easy for those in the business world who gain the highest efficiency in technology to maintain a stranglehold over all others who are slower.

Social Responsibility

Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is answered with a "Yes" in many contexts, but business is usually not one of them. When the bottom line is profit/loss, social responsibility toward others becomes a low priority. With women in the work force in increasing numbers, new factors of social responsibility have evolved, especially with regard to pregnancy and child care. Christians in the world of business must once again hear clearly the voices of the 8th century prophets who call for social responsibility in the market place. If work is relational, and the Bible clearly indicates that it is, then care for other persons must become part of the vision of business. The usual method is to approach social responsibility from a minimalist perspective, that is, to perform the minimum that the law requires or the minimum that has been negotiated with employees. Here, the goal is to do as little as possible so as to increase the bottom line of profit. Christians in business ought to strive not merely to satisfy the minimum requirements but to work toward the goal of making whole persons, also. Business should include within its vision the values of the family as one of the bulwarks of society, and its decisions with regard to its personnel should be made accordingly. Work schedules, benefits, health, retirement, disability and all other facets of social responsibility should be addressed in the context of not only profit/loss but also in the context of respecting men and women as God's creatures who were created to glorify him. All this may seem rather general, and perhaps obvious, but Christians in business will always be pressured to adopt a minimalist stance.