The Ten Commandments as a theological resource

Graham, Ray Richard Arthur

Roy Richard Arthur GRAHAM,
University of Durham, Department of Theology, MA thesis.

ABSTRACT:

"THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AS A THEOLOGICAL RESOURCE"

In this study we have sought to interpret the Ten Commandments as a resource for Christian theology. This has meant not only seeking to understand them within their Old Testament context but also reading them in conjunction with their interpretation in St. Matthew's Gospel and Calvin's Institutes of the Christian religion.

We have tried to do justice to the conventional historical issues but are also seeking to explore some of the implications of the canonical approach to scripture which focuses on the text as it stands rather than its underlying history. This encourages intertextuality, that is rereading passages in the light of their current literary context and then using that context to make new connections which, in turn, shed further light on the text.

To illustrate this we look at three commandments in greater detail - the Sabbath, murder and adultery. We have tried to show how the ideas they embrace have developed within the canon. This developmental history has contributed to our understanding which in turn has helped us begin to develop a theology for today in these specific controversial areas.

In the case of the sixth commandment we have considered a "linguistic approach" rather than an "historic approach", but in fact these are very similar because the developmental history of the concept of murder is closely associated with the development in understanding of רצח.

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Roy Richard Arthur GRAHAM

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Abbreviations

AJSL = American journal of semitic languages
BA = Biblical Archeologist
BZ = Biblische Zeitschrift.
BZAW = Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche, Wissenschaft,
CBQ = Catholic Biblical Quarterly
ET = Expository Times
FRLANT = Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und neuen Testaments.
HUCA = Hebrew Union college annual
JBL = Journal of Biblical Literature
JSNT = Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSOT = Journal for the study of the Old Testament
JTS = Journal of Theological studies
KuD = Kerygmas and Dogma
NTS = New Testament Studies.
PSBA = Proceedings of the society of Biblical archaeology
SJT = Scottish Journal of Theology
StBib = Studia Biblica et Theologica
ThR = Theologische Rundschau
UEA = United Evangelical action
VT = Vetus Testamentum,
WMANT = Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament. Neukirchen-Vluyn
ZAW = Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZThK = Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche,

INTRODUCTION

In this study we have sought to interpret the Ten Commandments as a resource for Christian theology. This has meant not only seeking to understand them within their Old Testament context, which itself can be done in more than one way, but also reading them in conjunction with their interpretation in St. Matthew's Gospel and Calvin's Institutes of the Christian religion. The reason for choosing St. Matthew is that the first Gospel is the part of the New Testament which most obviously stands in continuity with the ethical concerns of the Old Testament. It also shows how the Christian church, or at least that part of the Christian church from which this Gospel emanates, viewed the ministry of Jesus and his approach to the Decalogue. We have also spent time looking at how John Calvin used the commandments because he is a classic example of a Christian scholar and commentator who made a real attempt to use the whole canon theologically.

Calvin's canonical approach means that he goes beyond the Old Testament and St. Matthew's Gospel; he gives equal weight to the Pauline literature contained within the New Testament. We have decided to avoid any major consideration of this Pauline literature on the basis that the whole question of Paul and the law is a complex subject and worthy of a dissertation in its own right. Recent debates on St. Paul suggest that his real problem with the law concerns the particularity of Israel rather than the role of morality within faith; any attempt to do justice to these issues within the confines of our present study could in fact detract from our concern with the Ten Commandments as a theological resource.

Although in chapter one we have tried to do justice to the conventional historical issues we are also seeking to explore some of

the implications of the newly advocated canonical approach to scripture which focuses on the text as it stands rather than its underlying history. This encourages intertextuality, that is rereading passages in the light of their current literary context and then using that context to make new connections which, in turn, shed further light on the text.

To illustrate this we look at three commandments in greater detail - the Sabbath, murder and adultery. The reason for choosing these particular commandments is that each of them is concerned with issues that are controversial in twentieth century Britain and, therefore, a greater understanding of them can help develop a theology for today in these specific areas. We have also tried to show how the ideas they embrace have developed within the canon and this developmental history has contributed to our understanding. In the case of the sixth commandment we have considered a "linguistic approach" rather than an "historic approach", but in fact these are very similar because the developmental history of the concept of murder is closely associated with the development in understanding of נשׂא.

Finally, in each of the last three chapters we suggest some of the ways in which our theological principles can be applied in the modern world. This has opened up huge areas of thought which, in some senses, must be ongoing and can never be complete. As our society changes so both the Christian theologian and Church have to find anew the relevance of the Ten Commandments to daily life. Rightly appropriated these commandments are a theological resource in enabling Christians to live as the people of God.

Chapter 1

HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO THE DECALOGUE

The primary sources for our study of the Ten commandments are Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21. Studies of the biblical contexts in which the Decalogue is found, together with a consideration of the textual variations between Exodus and Deuteronomy, have raised questions concerning its age, form, origin and development. Much work has gone into trying to solve these problems and any serious study of the Decalogue must take account of this scholarship. We may ultimately conclude that definitive answers are lost in "the mists of time", but such a conclusion in no way detracts from, or minimises, the importance of the work that has been done and the way it enriches our knowledge of the background to this important part of the scriptures. What follows is not intended to be a complete survey of the solutions that have been offered, only an indication of trends. Nor is the aim to offer alternative solutions to these historical problems but rather to see the Ten commandments in the context of critical scholarship.

EVIDENCE OF A COMPLEX DEVELOPMENT

1. THE CONTEXT.

There are features of the contextual setting of the Decalogue, particularly in Exodus, which suggest that a complex process of development has taken place before it reached its present form. Many scholars have noted that the Sinai pericope of Exodus 19-24 would seem to be derived from a number of different sources. M.Noth[1], for example, points out that the account of the Theophany at Sinai falls into several sections :-

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[1]M.Noth - Exodus p.153

(a)19:1-2 - Remarks about the arrival of the Israelites at Sinai.

(b)19:3-9 - A Divine address about the purpose of God delivered to and by Moses followed by the people's answer.

(c)19:10-15 - Moses receives instructions about preparing for the Theophany.

(d)19:16-20 - The Theophany happens

(e)19:21-23 - Warnings against the people coming onto the holy mountain.

(f)20:1-17 - God makes known the Decalogue.

(g)20:18-21 - The people are terrified by the Theophany and ask Moses to act as a mediator.

In general he finds this outline consistent but nevertheless draws attention to certain anomalies - the holiness of the mountain is stressed in preparation for the Theophany, but this subject is taken up again after the event; the people's request for Moses to act as mediator comes after the deliverance of the Decalogue rather than immediately after the Theophany; the oft repeated ascent and descent of Moses on the mountain; changes of the Divine name between *Elohim* and *Jahweh* and the appearance of conspicuous doublets (cf. 19:3a with 19:3b and 19:17,19 with 19:18, 20). He then suggests that these inconsistencies arise from the way the originally independent narratives have been woven together and suggests that 19:1-2a belong to P (which then does not appear again until chapter 24.). From 19:2b to 20:21 we are dealing with J and E and they can be separated by their distinctive use of the Divine name. In E the mighty signs of God's presence appear immediately after the arrival at the mountain so that the people are terrified, keep their distance and ask Moses to act as Mediator. In J the people have to be warned about coming too

close to the mountain before the Theophany happens. It is not possible to make a clear separation between the two sources because the narrative has been subjected to constant editing.

J.P.Hyatt[2] suggests that the literary analysis of the whole section from 19:1 to 40:38 presents unusual difficulties and that there is little agreement as to its exact composition. This difficulty has been created for two reasons. First, the contents of this part of the book were of crucial importance to the Israelites (especially chapters 19-24 and 32-34) and therefore have been subject to much re-working and expansion. Second, at least part of the Sinai material was used in the cult. In this he follows G.Von Rad who maintains that the Sinai pericope was originally a festival legend used at Shechem in a ceremony of Covenant renewal[3], and S.Mowinckel who connects it with Covenant renewal at the New Year festival.[4]

B.S.Childs gives a good analysis of both the Literary-critical and Traditio-Historical approaches which draws out not only the areas of agreement but also where they diverge. This analysis also serves, however, to emphasize the difficulty of finding a satisfactory and definitive answer to the problems of the Sinai pericope. He himself suggests that "different traditions were already combined in the oral stage of transmission which accounts for much of the tension. Moreover even if two literary strands, such as J and E, are present in chapter 19 they share so much of the same oral tradition that a separation is unlikely and without great significance."[5]

Inevitably, then, the question is raised, "was Exodus 20 the

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[2]J.P.Hyatt - Exodus p.195

[3]G.Von Rad - Old Testament Theology vol.1 pp.192ff

[4]S.Mowinckel - Le Decalogue p.123

[5]B.S.Childs - Exodus pp.349-350

original setting of the Decalogue?". Again we use the work of M.Noth[6] to illustrate one approach taken to this. He points out that although the Decalogue uses *Jahweh* it is surrounded by *Elohistic* passages. He suggests that 20:18-21 connects more naturally to the Theophany than to the Decalogue and that 20:1 can be treated as a general introductory remark rather than part of the Decalogue. On the basis of this evidence he concludes that the Decalogue is loosely inserted into this passage and must be considered secondary to the account of the Theophany. This, of course, says nothing about its age or origin. Noth believes it to be a self-contained entity with its own tradition-history, which at an unknown date, was incorporated into the account of the Theophany.

When considering the Decalogue in Deuteronomy we first note that there are a number of literary questions surrounding that book as a whole. Von Rad, for example, sees it as a typical "farewell speech set within a cultic celebration";[7] M.G.Kline[8] (following the work of G.E.Mendenhall[9]) sees it in terms of an authentic Mosaic document cast in the form of an Ancient Near Eastern treaty.

Deuteronomy is associated with the reforms of Josiah (2 Kings 22f) but how much of the book was discovered in the temple is a matter of debate - was it only chapters 12-26 & 28 ("the law" with "blessings and curses") or was it 4:44-30:20 (the whole of the "Second and Third Addresses")? The decalogue itself, however, is generally regarded as an integral part of its present context but questions are raised by

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[6]M.Noth - op cit p.154

[7]G.Von Rad - Deuteronomy pp.22-23.

[8]M.G.Kline - Treaty of the great king, the covenant structure of Deuteronomy, pp.17f

[9]G.E.Mendenhall - "Law and covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East", BA 17 (1955) pp.26-76

the additions and variations in its text compared with that of Exodus. It is suggested that the Deuteronomist used the Exodus Decalogue as a basis but added his own editorial expansions. Some doubt is cast on this by H.H.Rowley when he points out that in both contexts it is treated as "authoritative and peculiarly fundamental to Israel's religion" and if either form of the fourth commandment was accepted in this way before the other was composed it is unlikely that such a great alteration would have been made.[10] We shall look at these textual variations in greater detail later in order to see the way they contribute to the idea of a complex history of development within the Decalogue.

W.Johnstone[11] draws attention to this complex history in a different way. His main concern is to appeal for a "diachronic" reading of the commandments as well as the currently favoured "synchronic" method. The reason for his appeal is the complexity of the Decalogue in its context and He makes the following points :-

(a) The Decalogue is recorded twice. The Deuteronomic version is about 10% longer and there are some 25 differences between the two versions. This, he says, suggests that the Decalogue has undergone a history of development and "justice must be done to that history."

(b) The two editions present two different sets of commandments. If we follow the paragraph divisions of the Masoretic text then in Exodus we have nine commandments and in Deuteronomy ten. (He also notes the different enumerations made by Protestants, Catholics and Jews).

(c) In addition to the two versions we need to recognise that the Decalogue is a composite, and therefore secondary compilation, from

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10H.H.Rowley - "Moses and the Decalogue" in Men of God p.6

11W.Johnstone - "The Ten commandments - some recent interpretations" ET 100 (1989) pp.453-461

various sources. As evidence for this he states that it is emphatically declared, especially in Deuteronomy, that the Decalogue was spoken and written by God (Deuteronomy 9:10), that it was the basis of the Covenant, and even is the Covenant, between God and the people (Deuteronomy 4:13), but only the first two commandments are in the first person, 3-5 refer to him in the third person whereas 6-10 don't refer to him at all. A variety of forms are used - some long, some short; eight negative and two positive; 2-5 have explanations, inducements or threats whereas 1, & 6-10 are bare, absolute prohibitions - and this variety of form may speak of a variety of origin.

2. TEXT

As mentioned above there are a number of differences in the texts of the two versions of the Decalogue. Some of these would seem to be comparatively minor whilst others are given much greater significance. A wide range of interpretations have been advanced to explain these alternative forms - ranging from different editors to a totally different historical development. The aim here is not to attempt a complete exegesis of the commandments but to highlight these textual differences and indicate some of the issues that arise from them. For convenience we shall use the "Protestant" arrangement and numbering.

The first variations occurs in the fourth commandment (Exodus 5:8-11, Deuteronomy 20:12-15). Exodus says, "Remember"(זָכוֹר) whilst Deuteronomy says (5:12), "Keep"(שָׁמוֹר). A.D.H.Mayes[12] suggests that "remember" is the original form and the change should be seen along with "do" (עָשָׂה) in verse 13 as these two verbs together form a fixed idiomatic expression in Deuteronomy for the proclamation of the law

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12A.D.H.Mayes - Deuteronomy p.168

(cf. Deuteronomy 5:32, 6:3,17f,25). Noth[13] sees little in difference meaning between the two words - the purpose in "remembering" was to "keep".

Further additions are made in Deuteronomy; not only do we have the phrase "as the Lord your God commanded you" (also added to the fifth commandment), we also have, "or your ox, or your ass, or any of your cattle"- Exodus simply says, "or your cattle"; Deuteronomy includes, "that your manservant and your maidservant shall rest as well as you." (cf Ex.23:12). Deuteronomy, therefore, would seem to show a greater degree of "humanity" than Exodus which suggests a greater social awareness and therefore could be later. Mayes says[14] that the humanitarianism found in Deuteronomy 5:14-15 is "not even implicit" in the Exodus version.

Exodus links the reason for keeping this commandment with Creation whereas Deuteronomy sees it as a memorial to deliverance from Egypt - the former is associated with P whilst the latter is typical of Deuteronomy.

The obscure origins of the Sabbath make it difficult to assign a specific "history" to this commandment. There are those who would see this "Sabbath emphasis" as being Exilic, or even post-Exilic, and therefore late. Others (Eerdmans, Kohler, Budde, Rowley) see a connection with Mesopotamia and the Kenites and therefore no reason why it should not be regarded as early.

The fourth and fifth commandments are the only two that are worded positively. Although this is "common" to both versions it does lead to speculation on whether or not they, like the other eight, were originally negative and if so what was their original form?

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[13]M.Noth - op cit p.164

[14]A.D.H.Mayes - op cit p.169

As well as the addition already mentioned above, number five (Deuteronomy 5:16, Exodus 20:12) is expanded in Deuteronomy by the words, "and that it may go well with you", which can be taken as a further example of the Deuteronomic editor expanding the Exodus version in order to emphasise the importance of keeping the Law.

The commandments from 6 to 10 are linked together in Deuteronomy by the use of the conjunction which would seem to be a very minor difference. However, N.J.Lohfink[15] sees this "linking together" as a device to emphasise the centrality of the Sabbath Commandment. The reference in that commandment to the exodus from Egypt and the introduction of "..your ox or your ass.." makes what he calls "catchword links" with the beginning and end of the Decalogue. The use of the conjunction then creates a single long unit, which balances that of the first two commandments. These modifications of the Exodus narrative have the effect of pushing forward the fourth commandment as the central one.

In the ninth commandment Exodus (20:16) says "..as a lying witness"(עד שקר) whilst Deuteronomy (5:20) says "..as a witness of emptiness" (עד שוא). There would seem to be no real difference in meaning here, in both cases the verb ענה is used as a technical word for testifying in court. It is, however, worth noting that שוא is also used in the third commandment of Deuteronomy 5:11 suggesting a link relating to the use of the lips in these two commandments.

The tenth commandment (Exodus 20:17, Deuteronomy 5:21) has a different order of words in the two versions - Exodus starts with "house" then "wife", Deuteronomy starts with "wife" then "house" - Deuteronomy also adds the word "field". It is suggested that originally "house" meant "household" and so in Exodus the second half

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15N.J.Lohfink - "Zur Dekalogfassung von Dt.5", BZ 9 (1965) pp.17-32

of the commandment is a definition of "household". Later, in a settled, agrarian community, "house" became associated with "building". The Deuteronomist regards marriage as a relationship of central importance and so "wife" takes precedence over "house", and he adds field to protect the land-owning free Israelite.

Another variation is in the verb translated "covet" on both occasions in Exodus the verb חמד is used whereas in Deuteronomy אוה is substituted on the second occasion, which has the effect of underlining the separation of "wife" from other property. Mayes[16] takes these verbs to be synonymous in meaning. There is, however, considerable controversy about the meaning of חמד : some, like J.Herrmann[17] and Noth[18], take it to include the intention to possess. In view of the eighth commandment G.Beer[19] and others want to limit it to mean an "offence of the mind". A.Alt[20] tries to solve this dilemma by suggesting that the eighth commandment refers to kidnapping a free Israelite whereas the tenth commandment refers to "waylaying" those who are not free.

Thus we see that the context and text of the Ten commandments contain features suggestive of a complex history of development, it is this history to which we now address ourselves.

THE ORIGINAL FORM OF THE DECALOGUE

An obvious possible solution to the textual differences between the two versions of the Decalogue is that behind both is an older form, perhaps an oral tradition, which was expanded (or even in some parts contracted) to meet changing social and cultic patterns. Most

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16A.D.H.Mayes - op cit p.171.

17J.Herrmann - Das zehnte Gebot pp.69-82

18M.Noth - op cit p.166

19G.Beer - Exodus p.203

20A.Alt - Das Verbot des Diebstahls im Dekalog pp.333-340

attempts to re-construct an original Decalogue have approached the task by trying to reduce the present Commandments to their simplest form and to give them an inner coherence by making them all negative. There is no universal agreement, however, that this is the correct approach. Mayes[21], for example, argues against taking the Decalogue as deriving from an ancient collection and maintains that a clear distinction must be drawn between the history of individual commandments and the history of the collection. He does not believe that the prototype can be discovered just by working the commandments back to their simplest form by omitting all motivating material.

E.Gerstenberger[22] suggests that the shortest form cannot necessarily be seen as the "classical one" and that Exodus 20:13ff represents a shortening of prohibitions that were at one time more precise. Noth[23] sees no discrepancy in the fact that some are negative and others positive.

R.Kittel[24] has made an attempted reconstruction taking the form of the sixth, seventh and eighth commandments as a model giving the following results :-

1. I Jahweh am your God: you shall have no other gods beside me.
2. Do not make for yourself a divine image.
3. Do not utter the name of your God Jahweh for empty purposes.
4. Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.
5. Honour father and mother.
6. Do not murder.
7. Do not commit adultery.

21A.D.H.Mayes - op cit p.162.

22E.Gerstenberger - Wesen und Herkunft des 'apodiktischen Rechts WMANT 20 (1965) p.73

23M.Noth - op cit pp.160-161

24R.Kittel - Geschichte des Volkes Israel 1 pp.383f.

8. Do not steal.

9. Do not speak lying words against your neighbour.

10. Do not covet the house of your neighbour.

In this series the positive nature of both 4 and 5 makes them stand out, which encourages both E.Sellin[25] and Alt[26] to give the fourth commandment a negative form, "You shall do no work on the sabbath". To make the fifth commandment negative an extra verb is added giving, "You shall not curse your father or your mother" (cf Exodus 21:17).

K.Rabast[27] believed that older Hebrew statutes were worded metrically with four stressed syllables. This can be recognised in the second, third, ninth and tenth commandments. He further believed that the first table had six clauses corresponding to those of the second table. To accommodate these ideas he divided 1. above into two separate commandments and added between 2. and 3. above, "You shall not worship them." thus producing a dodecalogue rather than a decalogue.

A more recent attempt at a reconstruction has been undertaken by E.Nielsen[28]. He has restored the commandments to short sentences in which he always uses the second-person singular with a direct object, and precedes the verb by the negative particle לא . He makes the eighth commandment refer to "kidnapping" thus allowing the tenth commandment to relate not just to the mental attitude of coveting but also to the attempt to acquire another person's goods. Preference is given to the tradition of placing the commandment against "adultery"

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[25]E.Sellin - Geschichte des israelitisch-judischen Volkes 1 p.383f

[26]A.Alt - Die Ursprunge des Israelitishen Rechts p.317f

[27]K.Rabast - Das apodiktische Recht im Deuteronomium und im Heiligkeitsgesetz pp.35f

[28]E.Nielsen - The ten commandments in new perspective pp.78-86.

before that against "murder". In making decisions about the exact form and content of any commandment he has taken account of the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:23-23:33). This has the following result :-

1. Thou shalt not bow down before any other god.
2. Thou shalt not make to thyself any idol.
3. Thou shalt not take the name of Jahweh in vain.
4. Thou shalt not do any work on the sabbath day.
5. Thou shalt not despise thy father or thy mother.
6. Thou shalt not commit adultery with thy neighbour's wife.
7. Thou shalt not pour out the blood of thy neighbour.
8. Thou shalt not steal any man from thy neighbour.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbours house.

This attempt is much appreciated by W.Harrelson[29] who would however retain the traditional order and believes that Nielsen has needlessly modified the first commandment - his rendering would be, "There shalt not be for thee other gods." He also thinks that the negative form of the fourth commandment should be, "Thou shalt not treat with contempt the sabbath day", and of the fifth, "Thou shalt not curse thy father or thy mother." When considering the commandment against killing or murder he prefers simply, "Thou shalt not kill thy neighbour".

These examples serve to show the way in which attempts have been made to get back to the original form of the Decalogue. Again it would seem important to emphasise that these cannot be regarded as certain reconstructions. The possibility of an authoritative original behind our present Decalogue may well commend itself as a reasonable proposition but we cannot say with certainty that such a written

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[29]W.Harrelson - The ten commandments and human rights" pp.41-42,

document existed and therefore any reconstruction must be treated with caution.

THE AGE AND ORIGIN OF THE DECALOGUE

1. ORIGIN

In The Ten commandments in recent research by J.J.Stamm and M.E.Andrew[30] we have a comprehensive survey of the attempts that have been made to resolve these problems arising from the texts and contexts of the Ten commandments. Commentaries on both Exodus and Deuteronomy, together with any work on Old Testament Law, must inevitably refer to these "solutions" if they are to do justice to their subject. Our concern here is not to give a complete history of the critical approach to the Decalogue, or discuss every interpretative nuance, but rather to draw attention to some of the major suggestions that have been offered and their influence upon decisions regarding the age and origin of the decalogue.

a. Origin within the Cult

A scholarly movement began with regard to the Decalogue because of the work of S.Mowinckel[31]. He propounded an origin within the cult and more particularly in the New Year and Enthronement festival, the existence of which he had sought to establish in an earlier work[32]. To support this cultic origin he suggested that the Sinai Pericope (Exodus 19-24) is a description of the festival and the reading of the commandments probably had its origin here. The New Year and Enthronement festival functioned within the cult as a feast of covenant renewal. Other passages (for example Psalms 50 & 81,

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30M.E.Andrew translates the work of J.J.Stamm and adds his own supplements.

31S.Mowinckel - Le Decalogue pp.19ff.

32S.Mowinckel - Das Thronbesteigungfest Jahwas und der Ursprung der eschatologie"

Deuteronomy 31:10-13 which, although late, "preserves the memory of much older passages") help us understand the nature and content of the festival. The Israelite festival began with an interrogation of those attending concerning the conditions of participation (Psalms 15 & 24 have grown from this situation) and a cultic prophet would proclaim the law at the festival. The main features of the Decalogue are prescriptions for entry into the cult.

Andrew[33] asks whether recognition of the cultic structure of the Sinai Pericope justifies the assumption that its whole content came from the cult and also whether the claimed close connection between Psalms 15 & 24 and the Decalogue can be maintained? Even assuming we accept Mowinckel's cultic structure and Festival setting, Andrew's questions could lead us to suggest that this does not actually "prove" the origin of the Decalogue - the cult and festival could have absorbed something that already existed. What Mowinckel has done is to open up the possibility of seeking the function of the Decalogue in the life of the people of God.

b.Apodictic Law

Mowinckel's work was followed by that of Alt who used form-critical methods on Old Testament legal literature. He isolated two types of law, Casuistic and Apodictic. Casuistic law is characterised by "if-clauses" and can be found in the Book of the Covenant (e.g. Exodus 21:3,4,5). Apodictic law consists of short, imperative or prohibitive clauses such as those found in the Decalogue. Alt claimed that, "Apodictic law is without parallel in ancient Oriental law and its content is permeated with the spirit of the religion of Jahweh."[34]

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[33]J.J.Stamm & M.E.Andrew - The Ten commandments in recent research. p.33

[34]A.Alt - op cit pp.278-332

Its origin is to be found in the festival rather than the secular life of the people and the Decalogue was probably part of the Feast of Tabernacles. Although Alt does not claim a specific link with Moses he does believe that the foundations of apodictic law can be found in the desert. Its creative period was that of the Judges but the Decalogue is a late example of this type of law. For Alt it was essential to contrast casuistic law with the "essentially Israelite" apodictic law. The weakness of his position is that he did not seek, or recognise, extra-Israelite sources for apodictic law; nevertheless his work did lay a foundation for further studies.

c.Treaty form

Mendenhall[35] draws attention to the treaties of the Hittite kings. These Vassal Treaties had a discernible form, namely "preamble and historic review", "conditions", and "conclusion". He suggests that the Israelite festival, to which apodictic law belongs, basically follows this form and that Old Testament covenants also find their roots here, thus accepting that apodictic law was not unique to Israel. Apodictic law need not have originated with the Hittite vassal treaties and other sources are suggested[36]. It would seem inevitable that Alt's claim that apodictic law is Israel's exclusive property must be rejected, at least with regard to *form*, though this claim may still be possible with regard to *intent* in that in Israelite law these prohibitions are seen as the laws of Jahweh.

Mendenhall's work has been accepted by many scholars amongst whom is M.G.Kline[37] who makes the interesting suggestion that the two tables of stone, on which the decalogue was written, were duplicate

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[35]G.E.Mendenhall - op cit pp.27f

[36]J.J.Stamm & M.E.Andrew op cit p.43f suggest Egyptian Wisdom Literature.

[37]M.G.Kline op cit pp.17f.

copies of what amounted to a "treaty document", one for depositing in the sanctuary of the vassal and the other in the sanctuary of the suzerain. A.Phillips points out that both the "tablets were placed in the ark, thereby symbolizing the suzerain's (Jahweh's) permanent presence in the vassal community."[38]

Phillips seems a little surprised that Mendenhall's views have not been universally accepted and believes that the case would be, "immeasurably strengthened if it could be shown that the ten commandments themselves possessed an inner unity which throughout the history of the covenant relationship differentiated them from all other legal enactments, and of which both the book of the covenant and Deuteronomy took note."[39] He seeks to do this by demonstrating that the Decalogue is to be understood as Israel's criminal law code. It is a detailed and careful study but even if it is regarded as totally convincing we might want to question how much it strengthens Mendenhall's case because in itself it does little to overcome objections to drawing too close a parallel between God's covenant with Israel and the Vassal Treaties, especially those that highlight the difference of "intent" between such treaties and Jahweh's covenant with Israel.

d. Clan or Family

One who does not accept Mendenhall's solution is Gerstenberger[40]. He differs from Alt in the way he classifies Old Testament legal material, preferring to speak of "genuine legal clauses" and, in contrast, "prohibitions and commands" which have no stipulation of the legal consequences. Whilst recognising that Alt has

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38A.Phillips - Ancient Israel's criminal law p.7.

39A.Phillips ibid p.10

40E.Gerstenberger - op cit pp.23ff

demonstrated the cultic *use* of prohibitions he sees no satisfactory proof of their cultic *origin*. When he examines the Sinai pericope he suggests that "literary-critical analysis can only come to the negative result that the collections of commandments appear as insertions in the sources, and form-critical investigation can provide only a sketch of the cultic festival and not its exact content."[41].

When examining Mendenhall's work Gerstenberger does not necessarily deny parallels in form and content between Vassal Treaties and the Old Testament Covenant but disputes the conclusion that this is their source of origin. His reasons are (i)the Vassal Treaties are political treaties, whereas the prohibitions have a very different setting; (ii)the Treaties are concerned with a particular man, the prohibitions are not; (iii)stipulations in the treaties are supported by the threat of sanctions, the prohibitions are not; (iv)the Israelite prohibitions tend to be formed into series but there are no such series in the treaties. His alternative solution is to suggest that the prohibitions originate in the Semitic clan associations, and suggests that the themes of the Decalogue correspond with the interests of the clan in daily life. He looks for support for his thesis in the Wisdom literature.

As with other suggestions this does not find universal acceptance. A detailed criticism is attempted by H.Reventlow[42] who questions, (i) Whether placing the origin of the prohibitions in the clan ethos or cult festival needs to be an either/or situation. (ii) Gerstenberger's comparison of "prohibitions" with the hortatory and warning words of the Wisdom literature. (iii) and whether the distinction between apodictic and casuistic law is in fact possible

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[41] J.J.Stamm and M.E.Andrew op cit p.48

[42] H.Reventlow - Kultisches Recht im Alten Testament pp.267-304.

e. The Kenite connection

An ingenious attempt to provide an alternative solution is offered by H.H.Rowley[43] who suggests that Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, described as "the priest of Midian" (Exodus 3:1), served Jahweh and imparted his knowledge to Moses. The Israelites entered Canaan in two waves, Moses led a small band out from Egypt, they settled in central Palestine and there encountered groups who also worshipped Jahweh, but not by that name, and who had settled in the South long before the time of the Exodus. These non-Mosaic groups had learned their religion from the Kenites who had a family link with Jethro (cf. Judges 1:16) and were the smiths of the ancient nomadic peoples, thus facilitating the spread of their religion. Exodus 34 represents, he claims, a primitive law code preserved by these Southern tribes and it is probable this is the ancient "Decalogue of the Kenites".

The tribes led out from Egypt by Moses had come to their Jahwism from a different route. Their story is told in the traumatic and dramatic events of the Exodus, there we see how Jahweh delivered them and entered into their history. This different history led them to refine the ancient Kenite Decalogue replacing ritual demands by ethical requirements.

We shall look at this particular theory, and its weaknesses, in greater detail when we consider its relevance to the origin of the sabbath (chapter 4). Suffice it to say here that it is based on the flimsiest of evidence. The assumptions made about Jethro, the settlement in Canaan, the Jahwism of the Kenites and Exodus 34 are all without real warrant - it remains just an ingenious hypothesis!

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[43]H.H.Rowley - op cit pp.6ff

2. AGE

Decisions about the age of the Decalogue revolve, to a certain extent, around the decisions we make both about its origin and the existence of an original form. Dating can further be affected by our attitude to the contents of individual commandments and whether or not they contain later editorial additions to an existing set of laws. Scholarly opinion is undecided on whether or not the Decalogue has a Mosaic origin, but in this century there has been a greater willingness at least to consider the possibility of a Mosaic origin than was apparent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Stamm and Andrew suggest that this is due to a greater understanding of the origins of Israel itself and the recognition that from the very beginning there was a "spiritual impulse of considerable proportions"[44] quite in keeping with imageless worship and sabbath observance. H.Gressman[45] has removed much of the force that attributed the ethical nature of the Decalogue to the "prophetic spirit" However it would be quite wrong to suggest that a Mosaic origin of the Decalogue is universally accepted and certainly there would be much disquiet about such a suggestion with regard to the received versions of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Most would regard these as deriving from an earlier source and having some interdependence. If a connection with Moses is accepted it is with regard to the origins not the finished product.

As we have seen, Mowinckel[46] saw the origins of the Decalogue in the cult and more especially in the New Year and Enthronement festivals. He believed that the Decalogue, as it has come down to us,

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[44]Stamm & Andrew op cit pp.27ff.

[45]H.Gressman - Mose und seine Zeit pp.473f.

[46]S.Mowinckel - Le Decalogue, pp.19ff.

is late but the literary type to which it belongs could be older and thus earlier origins of the Decalogue are not entirely precluded.

Alt[47], however, would seem to rule out any possibility of Mosaic authorship through his understanding of how apodictic law developed. He contrasted the Decalogue with other series of apodictic law - the former is comprehensive in content and generalised, the latter are specific to one area of life - which leads him to suggest that the natural development would be for "specialised series" to come first and the "collective" series to follow as a synopsis, thus making the Decalogue a late example of this type of law. K.Rabast[48], however, thinks that apodictic law could have developed in the reverse way, that is the "collective series" came first and the "special series" broke away to illustrate more fully specific points. The Mosaic authorship cannot therefore be automatically excluded and, "is it not preferable and better to ascribe the Decalogue, which is a collective series extracting the essential from many subordinate series, to the preeminent personality of Moses, rather than to a later unknown author?"[49].

Similar contradictions appear when we try to use the proposed link between Vassal treaties and covenant law as an aid to dating. It is beyond the scope of our present task to discus a precise date for the Exodus and therefore of Moses, but Mendenhall's original work was based on Hittite treaties made in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries which would put them "in range" of the Mosaic period. Perhaps the more crucial question is when and where did the Israelite

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47A.Alt op cit pp.278-332.

48K.Rabast - Das apodiktische im Deuteronomium und im Heiligkeitsgesetzk p.39f.

49Stamm & Andrew op cit p.39

community encounter this literary form? G.Heinemann[50] decided that the link between Vassal treaties and Israelite law was forged at Shechem, with the consequence that the Decalogue must originate from a time after Israel entered Canaan. W.Beyerlin believes, however, that these treaties would have been known to the Israelites in their nomadic period; he says, "that a primordial form of the Decalogue ..... had in fact arisen in the Mosaic period through the use of the treaty form."[51]. The most likely venue for this development, he suggests, would be Kadesh where they stayed for a considerable time and where their judicial and social structure was organised (Exodus 18:13-27).

Disagreement in dating the Decalogue continue even with the suggested origin within the clan. Gerstenberger[52] is not primarily concerned with applying insights about the origin of apodictic law in general to the Decalogue in particular, but his work would allow for at least some of the commandments to have originated in the clan ethos. He sees the series of ten as originating in the cult and therefore as being late. G.Fohrer[53], however, finds a series of ten in the nomadic period (Leviticus 18) but does not see the Decalogue as original to this time - it is a secondary construction created from different apodictic series.

Rowley[54] surveys the complexities of the various attempts to find a date for the Decalogue but cannot see that any of the

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[50]G.Heinemann - Untersuchungen zum apodiktischen Rechts (1958) (typewritten)

[51]W.Beyerlin - Origins and history of the earliest Sinaitic traditions p.145

[52]E.Gerstenberger op cit, pp.28ff

[53]G.Fohrer - "Das sogenannte apodiktisch formulierte Recht und der Dekalog", KuD 11 (1965) pp.49-74

[54]H.H.Rowley op cit pp.2ff

arguments against Mosaic authorship hold good. He suggests that the Decalogue was known in the time of David (cf. 2 Samuel 12) indicating an early origin. He also believes that the Decalogue would need to be associated with a powerful and authoritative personality for it to have credibility and gain acceptance alongside the "ritual decalogue" of Exodus 34 - Moses would be such a person.

This survey of some of the theories offering solutions to the age and origin of the Decalogue highlights the difficulties but offers no real solution. We have tried to indicate that this must inevitably be so, simply because there is no incontrovertible evidence as to either origin or date. There are, however, some ideas that would commend themselves to most :-

a) Our present versions of the Ten commandments are not "original" but edited versions of older material.

b) Their setting in the Sinai pericope, even in this was not the original setting, gives them a place of great importance in the life and development of the nation.

c) They were perceived as divine in origin.

d) There is a link between the "cult" and the Decalogue.

e) The literary form may owe a debt to non-Israelite material but the content has many unique elements within it because it describes the unique relationship between Jahweh and his people.

f) Definite dating cannot be given.

The biblical history of Israel can be viewed as a record of how the nation developed in their knowledge of God. It is difficult to imagine a time in any community - clan, family or nation - when there would not be some accepted rules protecting life, marriage and property. The difficulty for us is to assign a date for the codification of these rules. In the Decalogue "morality" is linked

to "religion"; duty and responsibility to other members of the community is linked with duty and responsibility to Jahweh - a covenant concept. The setting of the Sinai pericope inextricably links the Decalogue with the Covenant between Jahweh and His people Israel - indeed in Deuteronomy 4:13 the Decalogue is identified as the Covenant. So we could argue that the covenant is perceived as originating from the time of Israel's election and that the moral responsibilities, incumbent upon them as God's special people, form the germ of the Decalogue if not the Decalogue itself.

To accept the biblical link between Moses and the Decalogue is a possible position. The "preface" to the Decalogue reminds the people of their deliverance from Egypt. An integral part of that story is God's choice of Moses to be His representative and to speak for Him. It would seem wholly appropriate, at this formative time in their national history, for Jahweh's special people to receive Divine instruction and direction through the mediation of their divinely appointed leader. To argue that the Decalogue represents an ethical standard that must belong to the time of the prophets because it is far too advanced for the time of Moses would seem to make hasty assumptions about the development of Israel's religion.

The apparent lack of knowledge about the Ten Commandments in other Pentateuchal law and also in the eighth and seventh century prophets may make many cautious about being as emphatic as this. The matter is put in perspective by Von Rad who, whilst acknowledging that the Mosaic authorship of the original Decalogue cannot be proved or disproved by scholarship, says, "Whatever one thinks about the authorship, the fact that the Decalogue, together with other documents of apodictic law, early held a central position in Israelite life

remains as the most important result of recent research."[55]

OTHER "DECALOGUES"

So far all our attention has been concentrated upon the parallel passages of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Fairly obviously these two passages do not exhaust Old Testament legal material and the question is asked, "Are there other collections of laws which could be called a Decalogue?" The identification of other series of ten would reinforce the importance of that number and could possibly also shed light on the way in which such codes were developed. It is also possible for the contents of "other decalogues" to contribute to our knowledge of The Decalogue.

A number of passages are suggested as possible candidates[56]. In most of these we are "struggling" to identify ten rules and often the content has little comparison with the Decalogue. Two of the more important passages are the "Curse Ritual" of Deuteronomy 27 and the "Cultic Decalogue" of Exodus 34.

a. "The curse ritual" of Deuteronomy 27:15-26

Curses have a significant part in the life of ancient Israel (e.g. Genesis 3:14-19) and also within the Near Eastern Treaties[57]. Harrelson[58] suggests that this Curse ritual "is unmistakably a cultic act" and suggests something of the scene when it would have been enacted.

It is difficult to see this as either a decalogue itself or as forming the basis of The Decalogue. "Cursed is . . " occurs twelve times making, if anything, a dodecalogue (which would be appropriate

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55G.Von Rad - Old Testament Theology, vol. 1, p.18.

56e.g. W.Harrelson op cit pp.33-40.

57S.Gevirtz - "West Semitic curses & the problems of the origins of Hebrew law." VT 11 (1961) pp.137-158.

58W.Harrelson op cit pp.27-29

to a cultic act of the twelve tribes). An artificial decalogue can be created by eliminating the first and the last of these curses - the former on the grounds that it belongs specifically to the realm of the cult and the latter on the ground of its generality - but eliminating the first curse is to eliminate one of the closest links with The Decalogue. Examination of the content suggests a different intent; here we seem to be in the realm of personal, private morality but the Decalogue, as the heart of Jahweh's Covenant with His people, is concerned with behaviour in, and to, the community. Individual "curses" could well have a similar developmental history to individual "commandments" but to find an interrelationship between the two codes is somewhat unconvincing.

b. "The cultic decalogue" of Exodus 34

It is this passage that is most usually designated as an alternative decalogue. We have already seen that Rowley believes it is the original Kenite decalogue and was part of Moses' own religious background. Others, although not accepting this Kenite designation, certainly recognise the existence of a decalogue here. Noth[59], like many others, sees the basic material of this chapter as the J narrative of the Sinai Covenant claiming that Jahweh's words in verses 10 and 27 leave no room for doubt about this. He believes that the structure of Exodus, as we now have it, obscures this. The theophany of chapter 19 is part of J as originally written, J then had some part of 24:12-15a followed immediately by chapter 34; no part of 24:1-11 belongs to J and and the story of the "golden calf" and "breaking of the tablets" is manifestly a later addition. He finds affinities with Exodus 20:2-10 (and 23:14-19) but it is difficult to speak of literary interdependence between them and better to see them as two different

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[59]M.Noth - op cit pp.260f

series of apodictic laws arranged into understandable and memorable groups of ten.

Attempts have been made to reconstruct such a decalogue. R.H.Pfeiffer[60], for example, believes there is here an early Canaanite decalogue dating from c.1200 B.C. which has been adapted to the worship of Jahweh and is concerned with the duties of the layman in the cult. There is, however, little agreement concerning its form, content, or enumeration - which at the very least suggests no easy solution and at the most no decalogue!

This section of the Book of Exodus is approached in a very different way by R.W.L.Moberly[61] who sees the events of chapters 32-34 as a coherent unit. The making of the golden calf and the breaking of the tablets are not insertions but are integral to a correct understanding of chapter 34. The sin committed in making the calf was against Jahweh and this determined which aspects of the law needed to be re-emphasised. He advances arguments for linking verse 28b with verse 1 rather than verse 27 and thus proposes that the sequence of events, leading to a correct understanding of the passage, would be: the sin of the calf; the renewal of the covenant emphasising those aspects relevant to this particular sin; Moses is commanded to record these laws; this theme is concluded by the reference to the duration of Moses stay on Sinai; final note stating that, "the decalogue on the tablets, which Jahweh had promised to write again (34:1), was in fact written by him. That these are still the heart of the covenant is taken for granted by the writer who designates them, *the words of the covenant.*"[62]

60R.H.Pfeiffer - "The oldest Decalogue" JBL 43, 1924, pp.294-310)

61R.W.L.Moberly - At the mountain of God pp.95-105

62R.W.L.Moberly op cit pp.104-105.

In view of the complexity of the documentary analysis of Exodus chapters 19-24, 32-34 and the difficulty of finding verse 28's "ten words" in verses 14-26 this latter view is satisfying, not least because it respects the integrity of the received text. It does, however, depend for its credibility upon accepting the golden calf incident and verses 1,4,9 of chapter 34 as original rather than secondary additions, and on the assumptions of what the "writer will take for granted". Not everybody is prepared to do this[63], neither will it easily commend itself to those who maintain that this reads like an "initial covenant making" rather than a renewal.[64] Moberly, however, puts forward a number of reasons which are "important features of covenant renewal and would not read more naturally as an initial covenant making" and suggests that Childs has failed to demonstrate significant differences between the events of Exodus 34 and a Covenant renewal.[65]

We are drawn to the conclusion that the Ten words apply to the familiar Decalogue and not to Exodus 34 or any other suggested alternative. It may be possible, with varying degrees of difficulty and ingenuity, to work other collections of laws into groups of ten or twelve. None of these, however, have the same credibility nor the same authority as Exodus 20/Deuteronomy 5 and they are certainly not given a place of equal standing in the text of the Pentateuch as it stands.

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

We turn now to the question of where this historical approach takes us with regard to our understanding of God?

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[63] J.I.Durham - Exodus p.463

[64] e.g. B.S.Childs - Exodus p.607.

[65] R.W.L.Moberly op cit p.160

Once again we encounter a variety of approaches to this. Most Christian scholars would want to affirm the importance of the Ten Commandments in the life of the community of faith even though this may not always be a natural outcome of their work. One example would be A.H.McNeile who says :-

"It can hardly be necessary to insist that this complicated literary history in no way detracts from its value. In every department of life, physical, social or literary, a product which has been slowly evolved is not less the work of God than one which has appeared complete and ready-made; and it must be judged not by the earliest but the latest stage of its growth. And the value of the Decalogue is not diminished if it received enlargements from many hands, and if other, and different, forms of it have been preserved. As it now stands in the Hebrew Bible it is a monument of priceless worth, and is the basis of all subsequent Christian teaching on our duty towards God and our neighbour."[66]

McNeile further emphasises his position by quoting from Augustine, "Whoever ordered his tastes and life in accordance with them (Old Testament writers), ordered his tastes and life not in accordance with men but in accordance with God who spake through them".[67]

So one approach is to see the complex history of the decalogue as a history of "revelation" - the interaction between Jahweh and His people eventually producing a code of law which is valid for all time.

Not all would agree with this. There are those who believe that the Ten Commandments only have value for the people to whom they were given and cannot be seen as having universal application. This is

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66A.H.McNeile - The Book of Exodus p.114

67Augustine - De Civ. Dei xviii p.41

the approach of F.Crusemann[68] who believes that the Decalogue was specifically addressed to the property owning Israelite farmer who had a responsibility to both the community and his family. It is concerned with the preservation of his rights and freedoms and therefore selectively chooses laws relevant to this theme. He identifies it as originating around 700 B.C. and it cannot be regarded as a statement of ethical principles that have universal validity because it is a product of that time for a particular sort of society.

Others would seek to make specific theological contributions from their studies. Gerstenberger's[69] comments about "law and grace" can be seen in this light. He indicates that it is not possible to equate the Covenant with grace and the commandments with law but rather God's grace becomes known through the demands of the commandments. Andrew discussing this says, "It seems clear to me that the consequence of this is *not* that the Old Testament law is absolute, that it just has to be kept. But it is also clear that the consequence is that God's grace cannot be abstracted from the demand made upon us. It is within this very demand connected with people as they are that the grace of God is most likely to become manifest."[70]

These examples show that the historical approach does not necessarily rule out theological considerations. Often, however, such considerations are obscured by the search for answers to questions about the past, and the development of a deeper appreciation of the theology of the decalogue becomes more difficult. Durham alludes to this when he draws attention to the fact that the commandments are given the setting of an integral part of the sequence of Jahweh's

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68F.Crusemann - Bewahrung der freiheit: Das Thema des Dekalogs in sozial- geschichtlicher Perspektive. pp.1-100.

69E.Gerstenberger op cit pp.145ff.

70M.E.Andrew - The ten commandments in recent research p.71

self-revelation and then he goes on to say, "The Decalogue has so often been taken out of this sequence, for liturgical reasons, didactic reasons and scholarly reasons, that this point has been all too easy to miss".[71] Certainly to interpret the commandments solely within a particular and limited historic context, assigned to them by research, can lead to a neglect of the text as it is and the influence it has had in developing the life and thought of the people of God.

So we have two possible approaches. The "Biblical historian" looks at the texts of the Decalogue and asks all the questions we have been looking at about age, origin, original form and the like. On the other hand the "Christian theologian" looks at the same texts and asks a different set of questions - questions about the place of these documents in the community of faith today.

It would be wrong to suggest that these two approaches are mutually exclusive, or that one is essentially right and the other wrong. We have seen that historical considerations can lead to theological statements. Equally the theologian must take account of both context and history and use them as aids in seeking to understand the full meaning of any particular text - Childs highlights this in his exposition of the second commandment[72]. It is all too easy to pluck a commandment out from its context and history and impose on it a pietistic meaning that that the text will not support. Childs talks about the special place[73] the Decalogue has in the Old Testament and of how the final form[74] functioned within Israel. These

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[71] J.I.Durham - op cit p.278.

[72] B.S.Childs - op cit p.406.

[73] ibid p.397

[74] ibid p.399

considerations lead us to suggest that the "historical quest" is also a "theological quest"; it is a search to understand not just the processes that have taken place but the reasons why. The additions of the Deuteronomic editor were made for theological reasons; if the decalogue originally stood elsewhere then it was placed in the Sinai narrative for theological reasons. In other words the community of faith, the people of Israel, were saying something about God by their handling of torah. It seems reasonable to suggest that this should be an ongoing process; that in every age the community of faith should seek to understand the implications and applications of the Commandments to their particular situation - that they should rightly handle the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). This being so we now consider two approaches that may be termed "canonical", namely how the community of faith represented by St.Matthew's Gospel, and that represented by John Calvin, handled the Decalogue.

Chapter 2

ST. MATTHEW'S GOSPEL AND THE DECALOGUE.

A considerable amount of work has been done on St.Matthew's gospel with regard to its date, authorship and sources, and attention has also been focussed on its relationship to the other Synoptic gospels.[1] Although this work is of tremendous importance and has made an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the Gospel it is not the main concern of this study. Our concern is with the text as it stands in the Canon where it purports to be a true account of some of the things Jesus said and did and is a description of how he dealt with contemporary social and religious problems. This approach retains its value even if other studies lead to the conclusion that the book is of a comparatively late date and owes little to the apostle Matthew. Whatever date we place upon it, and whether we consider it an original work or one that has passed through the hands of a number of editors, it remains a document reflecting the author's (or final redactors) understanding of the life and teaching of Jesus, in the particular church situation that existed when it was written (or finally edited).

In order to explain certain difficulties - for example what appears to be an inconsistent attitude towards Judaism, how the book can be one of the most Jewish and at the same time one of the most anti-Jewish in the New Testament - it has been suggested that there are various layers of editing.[2] However, it is possible to argue that the book shows a theological sophistication which makes

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[1] See most commentaries on the Gospel e.g. F.W.Beare - The Gospel according to St. Matthew pp.44-49, W.B.Davies & D.C.Allison, The Gospel according to St. Matthew vol 1. pp.72ff.

[2] see for eg F.V.Filson - A commentary on the Gospel according to St.Matthew p.5, W.F.Albright & C.S.Mann - Matthew p.clxvff.

different layers of editing an unconvincing explanation of these "apparent inconsistencies"[3]. If this sophistication exists we should be able to find a reasonable consistency in its viewpoints and statements. This we shall endeavour to do.

Despite the controversies over dating, authorship and sources it is important to emphasise that the concern of this study is to use the Gospel of Matthew to shed light on how the Christian church (or one part of it) understood the Decalogue. It should then be possible to compare whatever theological principles we discover with other New Testament writings to see if there is a consistent, or at least non-contradictory, approach to the use of the ten commandments as a theological resource in the service of God.

When considering the origins of the Gospel of Matthew there is a general consensus that it was written for Jewish Christians. This is not a new suggestion for it can be traced back to Irenaeus in the second century A.D. and is also advocated by Origen, Eusebius, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Jerome. Modern scholars draw attention to some of the distinctive cultural and linguistic features of the gospel. Jewish customs such as handwashing at meals (15:2), phylacteries and tassels (23:5), and burial customs (23:27) are assumed to be understood by the readers; the genealogy of chapter 1, which begins with Abraham and focuses on the Davidic monarchy, is very Jewish in style; Aramaic words are transliterated into Greek on the assumption that they will be understood; examples are ρακα (5:22), μαμωνα (6:24) and κορβαναν (27:6). These and other strands of evidence, such as Jesus being called the "son of David", are advanced to show that the writer or editor is anxious to present Jesus in a way that would be readily understood and appreciated by

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[3]e.g. R.T.France - Matthew - Evangelist and teacher p.95

Jewish readers.

This has important implications for our study of the ten commandments. If the readers were familiar with these Jewish customs and ideas they would certainly also be familiar with the Decalogue; it would be part of their background and culture and form the very framework of their lives. There would be no need for it to be constantly reiterated or to argue about its value and importance. There might, however, be a need to free it from traditional forms of interpretation and bring out its full meaning, both in a direct way and by telling stories that encouraged reflection upon it. This perhaps goes some way to explain why there are comparatively few direct references to the individual commandments - they would be as much part of the background of the readers of the gospel as would belief in the creator God and would need as little verification and proof.

JESUS AND MOSES

It is suggested that in Matthew's gospel the new law giver, Jesus, is likened to the former lawgiver, Moses[4]. Evidence of this "Moses Typology" can be found in the birth narratives as well as in the Baptism, Temptations, Transfiguration and giving of the "sermon on the Mount". Reference is made to "Moses legends" in which there is a prophecy about the birth of a redeemer for Israel (attributed either to astrologers or a dream of Pharoah), and so the order for all Israelite males to be killed at birth is a reaction to this rather than a simple desire to control the Hebrew population. The legends also tell how Moses' father was inspired to save his son through a dream. These have obvious parallels with the nativity stories in Matthew, as has Moses' "vision" to return to Egypt after the death of

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[4]R.T.France op cit p.186.

Pharaoh with Jesus' return from Egypt after the death of Herod.

These "Moses legends" may well have been current at the time the Gospel was written[5]. In Stephen's sermon (Acts chapter 7) reference in made to Moses being forty years old when he visited his brethren (verse 23) and receiving his vision at the burning bush after being in exile 40 years (verse 30). These details are not recorded in Exodus and so perhaps here is evidence that stories of Moses were current in an expanded form. It is certainly true that Stephen is making some sort of comparison between Moses and Jesus.

However it would be wrong to over-emphasise this typology or the writers' intention to draw a parallel between Jesus and Moses. In view of the way in which our attention is drawn to the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, particularly in the birth narratives, we might well expect some specific reference to Jesus as the "new Moses" through quoting a passage such as Deuteronomy 18:15,18. Furthermore the Baptism of Jesus would seem to be more about association with, and approval of, John the Baptist than with making a Mosaic link through coming up from the water. It could also be argued that the temptations are more comparable with the Israelites' forty years testing in the wilderness than with Moses' forty days and nights on the mountain.[6] If there is a typology here it is more "Jesus as the New Israel" than Jesus as the "new Moses".[7] In the story of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8) we are told that Jesus' face and clothes took on a new brightness and light - a Mosaic type experience (compare Exodus 34:29f). Yet the thrust of the event as narrated in Matthew seems to indicate that Jesus is more than Moses. He was not

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[5]see Josephus Antiquities ii pp.205ff, Philo, Moses 1.9 pp.15ff.

[6]see R.T.France - Matthew p.98

[7]See R.T.France - Matthew Evangelist and Teacher p.186

only with the great lawgiver but also with the great prophet but unlike Moses he was proclaimed as "the Son of God".

D.C.Allison suggests[8] four reasons why the readers of the Gospel are intended to associate the giving of The Sermon on the Mount with the giving of the law on Sinai and therefore to see Jesus in terms of the new Moses. He points out that Jesus sits, which is the teaching posture of the Rabbi (5:1); Second, Jesus goes up the mountain (ἀνεβη εἰς το ὀρος - 5:1) and in the Septuagint rendering of the Pentateuch ἀναβαινω is used with εἰς το ὀρος eighteen times and most of these references are to Moses. Third, just as 5:1-2 can be linked with Old Testament texts about Moses so 8:1, which closes the sermon, is almost identical to Exodus 34:29 which recounts Moses' descent from Sinai. Fourth, 5:1-2 cannot be separated from the preceding birth narratives, the baptism of Jesus by John and the Temptations, all of which forge links with the Moses tradition because every major event in Chapters 1-5 has its counterpart in the the Exodus.

It may be that readers, well versed in Old Testament literature, would make the link with Moses on Sinai but it is also worth noting that T.L.Donaldson[9] has suggested that the dominant typology expressed by the mountain motif is that of Zion, the mount of assembly, rather than Sinai.

As with the other examples of "Mosaic typology", it seems reasonable to suggest that the link to be made is not so much that Jesus was another Moses but rather that he was "greater than Moses" (cf. 12:6,41,42). Matthew does not see Jesus as a lawgiver like Moses but as the Christ - the one to whom Moses and the prophets looked

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[8]D.C.Allison - "Jesus and Moses" - ET 98(1986-87) pp.203-4

[9]T.L.Donaldson - Jesus on the mountain - a study in Matthean theology pp.200ff.

forward, greater than all who have been before. He is compared with greatly venerated Old Testament personalities and institutions to emphasise his superiority and authority. The writer applies Isaiah 7:14 (cf. Matthew 1:23) in a unique way to emphasise that Jesus is greater than all men and, as we shall see later, all cultic institutions - he is Emmanuel, God with us. If there is a "Moses Typology" in the gospel it is used not to draw attention to the role of Jesus as a Lawgiver, comparable with Moses, but as a Christological device to emphasise Jesus' uniqueness and superiority to all others, including the great Moses.

JESUS AND THE LAW

Matthew would seem to have a special interest in the law, as is seen from the way in which he inserts νομος into the text[10]. The Septuagint uses νομος to translate *torah*. It has long been recognised that the English word "law" is not really an adequate expression of the concept of torah because of the way in which civil law, moral law, and the total Hebrew understanding of Jahweh's way of life, are interwoven in this one word. Similarly in the New Testament νομος is a complex word; it can relate not only to written torah but also to Jewish explanations and traditional interpretations of Old Testament, Mosaic "law" . For our purposes this creates the problem of deciding which type of "law" is meant with any particular use of the word - the Ten Commandments, authoritative Mosaic law other than the Decalogue, or Jewish traditions and halakhah?

There is also some debate on the status of Jesus. P.Sigal[11] suggests that Jesus was an early proto-rabbi whilst E.P.Sanders says

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[10]e.g. cf. Matthew 23:23 with Luke 11:42 & Matthew 22:36 with Mark 12:28

[11]P.Sigal - The halakhah of Jesus of Nazareth according to the Gospel of Matthew p.3.

that he was not a rabbi in the traditional sense but that, "Jesus is better seen as a charismatic - either (with Vermes) a charismatic healer like Hanina ben Dosa and Honi the Circle-Drawer or (with Hengel, Theissen and others) a charismatic prophet".[12] Neither of these viewpoints would seem to do justice to the Jesus of Matthew's Gospel. As we have said, Matthew gives him a unique status - that of Son of David and Emmanuel - and with this unique status a unique authority which was recognised as different from their traditional teachers (Matthew 7:29).

Whatever status Jesus had, he disputed with the religious leaders of his day on matters relating to "law" and the demands made in its name on himself, his followers and the people of God in general. It is important to realise, however, that there was no unanimity in interpretation of torah amongst his contemporaries. There were considerable differences of emphasis and practice between the various religious groups - Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes - all of whom had their own criteria which created the disagreements. Perhaps even more significant are the disagreements of identifiable sections within these groups - the vigorous debate between the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai is well documented. Sanders[13] is very firmly of the opinion that the majority of disputes between Jesus and representatives from these diverse religious groups fell within the parameters of contemporary debate about the way the law should be applied.

This leads to two important questions which we now consider.

a) What do Chapter 5 verses 17-20 mean?

These verses would seem to be an unequivocal statement that the law,

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[12]E.P.Sanders - Jewish law from Jesus to Mishnah p.3

[13]E.P.Sanders op cit pp.94-95

which to Jewish minds included not only the written but the oral law,[14] has an eternal value and must be kept without question by all who would serve God. This raises difficulties as it would seem to conflict with the teaching that follows in the Sermon on the Mount (especially 5:21-48) and other parts of the Gospel.

There is considerable debate on the authenticity of this section. Some consider it a creation of the Matthean church reflecting an orthodox Jewish position in relation to the law;[15] Barth[16] seeks to explain the reasons that lay behind the additions and alterations made in the Gospel to material that already existed in the Christian tradition; Banks,[17] in making a detailed examination of these verses, finds good reasons for accepting them as authentic sayings of Jesus. Since our particular concern is the portrayal of Jesus' attitude to the law in Matthew's gospel we need to examine how these verses are interpreted to see whether or not there is a conflict between the statements here and teachings attributed to him elsewhere.

Verse 17. There is no direct parallel to this verse in the other Gospels but similarities are found in Matthew 10:34. There μη νομισητε is used as a device to emphasise the positive nature of the second half of the verse; it is reasonable to assume that it is used in the same way in 5:17.

The real disputes concern the meaning given to καταλυσαι and πληρωσαι. A.Merx[18] has used the Rabbinic practice of relaxing commandments to explain καταλυειν but this seems too moderate for the

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14See G.Barth - Tradition and interpretation in Matthew p.86

15See R.Banks - "Matthew's understanding of the law - authenticity and interpretation in Matthew 5:17-20" JBL 93 (1974) p.226

16G.Barth op cit pp.62ff.

17R.Banks -op cit pp.226-242

18A.Merx, Das Evangelium Matthaus pp.73-75.

context. H.J.Ljungman,[19] on the other hand, prefers to give it the meaning of "tearing-down" which is an appropriate translation of the word elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g. Galatians 2:18) and would make a subtle link with the use of οἰκοδομεω in chapter 7 at the end of the sermon on the mount. However, it would seem more appropriate in this context to translate it (with Sigal, Banks, Barth, Moo etc.) as "abolish" or "annul".

Much more complex is to decide on the meaning that should be given to πληρουν. One fairly common suggestion[20] is that it means "set forth in its true meaning" and in that sense "complete"; verses 21-48 are then seen as fulfilling this function. This leaves us with the problem that "to fulfil a word" does not normally mean to modify or clarify its contents but to perform what the word says. An alternative approach is to translate it as "to establish, validate, confirm" by linking it with קים [21]. The difficulty with this is that the LXX never translates קים by πληρουν. G.Barth,[22] following the suggestion of E.Schweitzer, believes that πληροω should only be interpreted according to normal Matthean usage. It is pointed out that in the LXX, πληρουν = עשה , and that wherever it refers to the written or spoken word it means "to bring it to realisation by deed". Barth then goes on to say, "but the context does not speak of Jesus' 'doing' of the law; in what follows it is rather the teaching of Jesus that is decisive".[23] This leads to his suggestion that the most satisfactory understanding of πληρωσαι in Matthew 5:17 is "to establish the law and the prophets" and this establishing of the will

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19H.J.Lungman, Das Gesetz erfullen pp.58-61.

20e.g Klostermann, Allen, Dibelius, cited by G.Barth op cit p.67

21e.g. G.Dalman, Jesus/Jeshua pp.57ff

22G.Barth op cit, pp.68-69

23G.Barth op cit, p.69

and law of God Jesus does in his teaching.

Banks does not find this explanation wholly satisfactory.[24] Along with A.Descamps he recognises that although "realisation" is the basic meaning, this "realisation" involves something qualitatively new - as exemplified in the teaching of Jesus. In fact he goes beyond Descamps in suggesting that exactly the same meaning should be given to πληρουν when it is used of the law as when it is used of the prophets. The prophetic teachings point forward to the actions of Christ and have been realised in them; the Mosaic law points forward to the teachings of Jesus and has been realised in them. For Banks πληρουν in 5:17 has within it elements of continuity and discontinuity - that which is more than the law has now been realised, but that which transcends the law is something to which the law itself looked forward. We agree with D.J.Moo[25] that Banks is probably right, especially in view of the way in which πληρουν is used with the formula quotations to declare the fulfilment of Old Testament prophesy (e.g. Matthew 1:23, 2:15 etc). So in verse 17 Jesus is depicted as saying that he has not come to destroy the law but through his teaching the perfect will of God, and therefore the intention of the law, is fully realised.

Verses 18 and 19. (compare Luke 16:16-17). The central part of verse 18 is a clear affirmation of the lasting validity of the law but the ἑως clause before and after it seems to impose limitations. We also need to give some thought to the meaning of του νομου in this particular context. The first ἑως clause - 'till heaven and earth pass away - is not a particular problem and is best taken to mean

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[24]R.Banks op cit pp.231-233.
[25]D.J.Moo - "Jesus and the authority of the Mosaic law" - JSNT 20 (1981) p.25-26

"until the end of the present world order". The second ἑως clause - "until all is accomplished" - is more complex. What meaning should we give to παντα γενηται? There would seem to be three possible approaches: (i) it refers to the eschatological events at the end of the age (as with the first ἑως clause), (ii) the accomplishment of the law or the will of God (B.Weiss relates it to Matthew 6 verse 10), (iii) the fulfilment of the Old Testament scriptures in the person of Christ.

Although the first of these is perhaps the easiest to accept on linguistic grounds (cf. Matthew 24:34) it would seem least likely because it would simply be a reiteration of the first part of the verse. The second suggestion would seem to be somewhat contradictory, namely that by fulfilling the laws demands Jesus somehow made the law superfluous, so we are left with the third possibility. This immediately raises the problem of the meaning of νομος in this context. In verse 17 "law and prophets" are used to designate the scriptures but here only "law" is used. It would not seem unreasonable to take νομος as meaning the scriptures; perhaps Matthew is deliberately placing the emphasis upon the law because it was Jesus' attitude to, and support for, the law that was under attack. Such a view would receive support from Filson who says, "the law, rather than the prophets is the real concern in this section"[26]. In view of the meaning we have given to πληρουν in 5:17 it is logical to view the law as pointing forward to the ideal which would become a reality in the teaching of Jesus and so παντα refers to the demands of the law which are regarded, not just as commands, but as signs looking

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26F.V.Filson op cit, p.83.

forward to the new dispensation of God's glory in the teachings of Jesus. Support for this concept of a new era, following the law and the prophets, is found in Luke 16:16 where the evangelist speaks of a "new age" beginning with John the Baptist. So here we have a statement suggesting that it is within the teaching of Jesus, and the way he expresses the demands of the Kingdom of God, that the law has a continued and lasting validity.

Verse 19 continues this theme. τουτων could refer to the Decalogue and the Rabbinic custom of making a distinction between "light" and "heavy" commandments but this is fairly unlikely. More satisfactory is to see it as forming a link back to the last part of verse 18 and, therefore, referring to Christ's own teaching. There is some debate about whether or not a particular adversary is in view, be it Hellenistic Christians (Bultmann and Barth), Pauline antinomianism (Manson and Beare) or Jewish Christian antinomianism (Sweitzer and Davies) but Banks[27] suggests that much of this debate is misplaced because the object of attack is not so much antinomianism but a lax attitude to the teachings of Christ. This being so, we would suggest that although ἐντολη in Matthew normally refers to Old Testament commandments it can also refer to Christ's own demands (compare use of ἐντελλομαι in Matthew 28:20).

Verse 20. The emphasis here is clearly upon the outworking of teaching in life. The teaching that is about to be given attaches great importance not only to the "letter" of the law but also to its "spirit". The Scribes and Pharisees were great teachers of law but throughout the Gospel they are attacked for their own spiritual

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[27]R.Banks op cit, p.239.

short-comings and failure to understand the full implications of God's commands (e.g. 15:14). This really expresses the same idea as 23:2-3 where the Scribes and Pharisees are honoured for their devotion to the teaching of the law but condemned for their failure to practise the law.

It can be seen from this discussion that Matthew 5:17-20 reflect what are common concerns of the whole Gospel, namely the importance of the Law, the need to see the Law in the context of the Christ, and criticism of the religious hierarchy for their spiritual blindness.

b) Did Jesus abrogate the law?

One of the key passages here is 5:17-48, (in which we have just considered in some detail the meaning of verses 17-20). Verses 21-48 represent what are usually called "the antitheses", and a number of them refer directly to the Decalogue. Here Jesus quotes part of their tradition and then gives his own teaching on that particular subject: "you have heard . . . . but I say to you". This formula suggests that Jesus is quoting the Old Testament, as it is usually heard by his audience, and then puts forward his own interpretation. However, Moo points out that the designation of these interpretations as "antithesis" may be misleading since ἐγω δε λεγω ὑμιν allows at least three different nuances of translation - "you have heard" followed by, (i) but I, in contrast to that, say to you, or (ii) and I, in addition to that, say to you, or (iii) and I, in agreement with that, say to you[28].

The question we need to consider is whether or not the teaching of

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[28]D.J.Moo op cit, p.18

Jesus is so revolutionary that, *ipso facto*, it amounts to a new teaching that has the effect of abolishing the old, thus contradicting verse 17.

5:21-26 refer to the sixth commandment, and verses 27-30 to the seventh commandment. Clearly these sections do not in any way deny or abrogate the decalogue but represent an interpretation in line with verse 20. Jesus sets before his followers a standard of behaviour, and attitude to the law, that would seem to require far more from them than the teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees. Thoughts and motivations are given an equal place with actions.

Verses 31-32 deal with divorce and in dealing with divorce extend the definition of adultery, which we shall need to look at later. A similar passage is found in Matthew 19:3-19 and there are parallel sayings in Mark 10:2-11 and Luke 16:18. The importance of this for our present consideration is how it relates to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and whether or not Jesus is revoking the Mosaic permission for divorce: certainly Mark and Luke seem to suggest that this is so whilst Matthew's allowance of divorce on the grounds of πορνεια would be much more in accord with Deuteronomy. We need to note, however, that divorce is never "commanded" only permitted and Jesus sees this permission as a concession to their "hardness of heart" (Matthew 19:8). In an ideal world there would be no divorce (Mark and Luke) but the disciples had to live in the world as it was (and is), but even in this world where the "hardness" of human hearts is all too evident divorce should not be allowed for trivial reasons. Marriage discipline was an area of current debate and the sayings of Jesus conformed more nearly to the strict attitude of the house of Shammai than to the lax attitude of the house of Hillel. He is not abrogating any Old Testament law, certainly not the ten commandments. He upholds

the ideal standard but at the same time makes allowance for human frailty.

The next section, verses 33-37, concerns oaths and vows and relates to the third and ninth commandments. Again there were considerable differences of opinion on this matter at the time of Jesus. It would seem that the Essenes did not allow any oaths, apart from their oath of admission[29]; the Pharisees recognised the usefulness and validity of oaths but on this, as on many other matters, there were disagreements between the houses of Shammai and Hillel. The text of Matthew 5 supports the more rigorous attitude of the Essenes, and in Matthew 23:16-22 Jesus is represented as being utterly scathing about the religious leaders for their detailed system of valid and invalid oaths. There is further criticism of the way in which their tradition allowed oaths to be used to avoid the responsibilities laid upon them by the Decalogue (Matthew 15:3-6 cf. Mark 7:11). Clearly Jesus is not abolishing the written Old Testament law but setting it above their traditions.

The final two "antitheses" (5:38-42, 43-48) do not contain direct references to the ten commandments but could be seen as having relevance to the real meaning and application of those commandments concerned with "duty to neighbour". Verses 39-42 could be seen as abrogating the legal entitlement of *lex talionis* but equally they could be seen as setting out a more perfect way, namely not demanding one's rights but instead showing love. Verse 43 has interest in that it is not a direct quotation of any Old Testament passage. The first part (about love for neighbour) comes from Leviticus 19:18 but the second part (about hating enemies) is not

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[29]see E.P.Sanders op cit, p.53

found in the Old Testament; A.H.McNeile[30] suggests it could be a Rabbinic inference from a passage such as Deuteronomy 23:4-7. Once again there is no suggestion of abrogating the Decalogue but rather setting out its demands in terms of Matthew 5:20.

From the above discussion we see that the antitheses of Matthew 5:21-48 do not abrogate any of the ten commandments but, in certain cases, could be regarded as superseding, and perhaps therefore abrogating, the oral traditions of the Jews as propounded by some groups among the Scribes and Pharisees. This raises the further question of whether or not the Christian church of Matthew's day recognised and maintained a distinction between different types of law - written and oral, ceremonial and moral?

Although Judaism did not, in theory, distinguish between moral and ceremonial laws there is evidence that distinctions within the law existed and were accepted. We have already mentioned the practice of dividing laws into "light" and "heavy" categories and in Matthew 23:23 Jesus is able to describe moral attributes as the "weightier matters of the law" in contrast to the ritual requirements of Jewish practice. It may be that this distinction was one that would be readily understood and appreciated by a Jewish audience. We have also seen that Jesus was critical of the practice of declaring something "korban" to avoid responsibility to parents (Matthew 15:3-6). Furthermore he seems to be critical of the food laws, or at least on the spiritual implications drawn from food regulations (Matthew 15:10-20). This latter example is of particular interest both because it relates to the written law of Leviticus 11 and also because Mark has, "thus he declared all foods clean" (7:19b). Since Mark is traditionally regarded as the "interpreter of Peter" his statement may

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[30]A.H.McNeile - The Gospel according to St. Matthew p.71

reflect what happened to that apostle at Joppa (Acts chapters 10-11)[31]. Matthew's omission of Mark 7:19 is explained by Davies & Allison on the grounds that "the first evangelist could not abide such a sweeping dismissal of OT law"[32] or by France who says, "the principle for the abandonment of the food-laws is there, but there is as yet no specific pronouncement on that subject".[33] It would certainly appear that the early church, as a whole, were by no means as certain on this matter as Mark (cf. Acts 10, 11, 15, Galatians 2:11-12), but what is clear is that the conflict, both in Matthew 15 and Mark 7, is initially and essentially, about the tradition of ceremonial handwashing and not about law. Even so we should note that Jesus does not actually declare the food laws invalid; instead he emphasises that purity or impurity is demonstrated by action and, in Matthew's list, the impure actions that defile are all directly related to the ten commandments. The differences in Matthew and Mark could well find their explanations (as with Acts 15) in the people for whom they were written. Matthew writes for Jews who want to relate their inherited beliefs to the person of Jesus whilst Mark writes for a wider audience.

From the available evidence Moo concludes that a clear distinction must be made between the written laws, oral laws and the customs of the day. With respect to the written law it cannot be demonstrated that Jesus violated any of its commands but that with respect to oral law and customs his behaviour seems to have been dictated by the needs of ministry rather than by a sense of subservience[34]. Banks would

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31W.F.Albright & C.S.Mann - Matthew - p.185.

32W.D.Davies & D.C.Allison - Matthew vol.2 p.535

33R.T.France op cit, p.245

34D.J.Moo op cit, p.5.

also emphasise the need to distinguish different categories of law and Sigal makes a helpful distinction between "essence" and "form" which, he says, are two separate aspects of a whole which together constitute religion, consisting of theology (or doctrine) and halakhah (or practice); Biblical principles were forever, but detailed forms were not[35].

Later we shall look at the Sabbath controversies, but in general terms the picture of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel is that of a Jew who upheld the law. He may well have made a distinction between various categories of law but nowhere does he abrogate any of the ten commandments.

DIRECT USE OF THE DECALOGUE

There seems to be no direct reference to three of the commandments - the second, third and tenth. If the gospel was written for Jewish christians then the omission of two and three is not particularly surprising since image-free worship was part of their heritage and God's name was always treated with great reverence amongst the Jews[36]. The tenth commandment, against coveting, is directly concerned with attitude of mind which is a major concern of the Gospel. So although it is not directly quoted its influence can be seen in many passages (see 6:19-21, 25-34, 15:19, 20:10-15 etc). The other seven commandments are all referred to in a specific way. This in itself is important because it demonstrates the special authority given to the commandments at the time of Jesus and the early church. On a number of occasions, however, the way the individual commandments are used has particular implications for our present study.

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[35]P.Sigal op cit, p.12

[36]Perhaps Jesus' "criticism" of oaths and vows in 5:33-37 and 23:16-22 is connected with the use of God's name and the danger of using it in an irreverent way. It is also made clear that not all those who call on the name of the Lord are acceptable to him (see 7:21-23)

(a) The Sabbath

12:1-8, 9-14 are two incidents of particular significance with regard to the use of the fourth commandment in Matthew's gospel. In the first Jesus and his disciples were walking through the fields when the disciples plucked grain and ate it. Since it was the sabbath day they were accused of breaking the law. There was considerable debate at this time on what activities were permitted on the sabbath - Sadducees and Pharisees differed one from the other as did the Shammaites, Hillelites and Essenes. The crux of the matter is the definition of work and what is meant by the hunger of the disciples - from some viewpoints they could be accused of "reaping" or "grinding" (rubbing grain) and the seriousness of their action would depend on whether or not their "hunger" was life-threatening. Sigal[37] tries to suggest that the disciples had adopted a particular, thought-out, position with regard to various traditions and that this was a conscious action within their understanding of these traditions. It would seem more likely that it was a spontaneous and quite normal action of people out for a stroll. Whatever the truth on this, of greater significance is the response of Jesus to the accusation. First he uses the example of David satisfying his own, and his followers', hunger by eating the bread of the presence when fleeing from Saul (1 Samuel 21:2-7). Second he refers to the priests in the temple "profaning" the sabbath. Usually this has been taken to refer to the work involved in temple sacrifices described in Numbers 28:9-10 (something about which the Shammaites and Hillelites had a vigorous debate) but E.Levine[38]

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[37]P.Sigal op cit, p.131.

[38]E.Levine - "The sabbath controversy according to Matthew" NTS 22 (1975) p.481

suggests it refers to the analogous practice of reaping the first sheaves offering (Leviticus 23:10-14) on the sabbath - a practice defended by the Pharisees but condemned by the Sadducees. By this second example Matthew, unlike Mark, moves the justification from the disciples' hunger to the person of Jesus. This is made clear by 12:6, "something greater than the temple is here". If a mortal like David could violate the law with impunity, and if temple ritual enabled the priests to violate the sabbath and remain guiltless, those who served the "Son of Man" who "is lord of the sabbath" (verse 8) should be able to satisfy their hunger without guilt. Thus Matthew introduces a clear Christological concept into a proper appreciation of the Sabbath.

The use of Hosea 6:6, which Jesus quotes here and in 9:13, is significant. Its use is not intended to make the moral law (mercy) superior to the cult (sacrifice) nor, we would suggest, is it intended to allow "love" to be an acceptable excuse for breaking the commandments[39]. Its purpose would seem to be to ensure that the sabbath law is applied in a way that fulfils its original intention. In both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 the fourth commandment contains a strong humanitarian element; the consideration of human need and well-being is just as important to a right observance of sabbath as the needs of temple and cult.

The second passage projects a similar motivation. Rabbinic tradition allowed medical attention to be given on the sabbath when life was in danger, but apparently not otherwise - hence the significance of verse 10. In verse 11 Jesus uses an example from their own tradition and current debates, which leads into verse 12 which not only puts sabbath observance into the context of human

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[39]W.B.Davies & D.C.Allison, op cit p.315

well-being but also, into the context of serving God (through doing good which must be pleasing to him). In this instance he does nothing that can be construed as breaking sabbath law in the sense that he mixed no ointments and performed no action, save that of asking the man to stretch out his hand. Nevertheless the teaching given in this sabbath incident reinforces the humanitarian content of the original commandment.

(b) Adultery

It is often stated that according to Hebrew custom "the man can only commit adultery against a marriage other than his own, the woman only against her own"[40]. It can be argued from the Old Testament that fornication was also judged as a serious moral offence rather than just as an offence against property.[41] When we come to the New Testament period J.D.M.Derrett says, "Jewish moral teaching in the time of Jesus already extended the scope of the seventh commandment to cover any sexual activity outside marriage"[42] and S.T.Lachs[43] cites various Rabbinic texts to show that lustful thought was included. This is certainly the thrust of Matthew 5:28 where the concept of adultery is extended so that the thought behind the action is equated with the actual doing of the deed. Some interesting ideas about adultery are developed in the antithesis on divorce that follows (verses 31-32) and later in 19:3-10. From the Mosaic law of Deuteronomy 24:1 Jesus goes back to the creation story of Genesis 2:24 and re-affirms the original declaration about the permanence of

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[40]Stamm & Andrew - The Ten commandments in recent research, p.100

[41]H.G.Reventlow - Das Heiligkeitsgesetz formgeschichtlich untersucht p.78

[42]J.D.M.Derrett - Law in the New Testament, pp.370ff

[43]S.T.Lachs - A Rabbinic commentary on the New Testament, Matthew, Mark & Luke pp.96-97.

marriage. His concern is with a man[44] who divorces his wife thus making her an adulteress and, if he remarries, becomes an adulterer himself. It is often inferred from this that a divorced woman, who was unable to return to her father's house, would be forced to cohabit with another man as her only means of survival[45] but Lachs disputes this[46]. What is certain is that marriage was the norm in Jewish society and what Jesus seems to be saying is that remarriage following a divorce for any reason other than adultery creates a situation that is contrary to the precepts of the ten commandments. Sigal[47] takes this even further by suggesting that when Jesus describes a man who remarries as "an adulterer" he is elevating the status of women to a new level in sexual matters and forbidding men their former power to abuse. His reason is that when a man remarried he married somebody who in law was single. If this can be described as adultery then it is no longer simply an offence involving another man's wife but an offence involving any woman married or not. This idea, together with the concept of fornication, potentially has far reaching consequences in applying the sixth commandment in the sexual climate of today, although we do need to recognise that the differing nature of society makes the issue highly problematic.

(c) The greatest commandment

Matthew 22:34-40 records the question asked by a Pharisee concerning which was the greatest commandment in the law. Although Jesus' reply was not a direct quotation from the Decalogue, what he said has

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44Mark speaks of a woman divorcing her husband (Mark 10:12) but this was unknown in Jewish law but was in Roman law and so probably reflects Mark writing for a wider audience than Matthew who wrote for Jews.

45See for example H.B.Green - Matthew p.83

46S.T.Lachs op cit p.97

47P.Sigal op cit p.94

implications for our present study. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 - part of the Shema, advocating total love for God - and the second half of Leviticus 19:18 - advocating loving one's neighbour as oneself. The two are coupled together as being similar in importance.[48]

This passage raises a number of important issues. G.Bornkamm[49] and Barth[50] both put the emphasis upon love and see verse 40 as the key. With W.Bauer they take κρεμαννυμι to mean "depend on". Just as a door "hangs on" (depends on) its hinges so the whole of the law and the prophets depend on the love commandment and the whole meaning can be deduced and expounded from these commands to love God and love one's neighbour. Thus this becomes the standard by which the whole of the law and prophets are understood. For Barth[51] it is a dominant theme of the Gospel; not only is it the principle of interpretation for the law and prophets, setting limits upon the sabbath commandment (eg. 12:12), it also determines the conception of God as loving, gracious and merciful (9:13, 12:7) and places an obligation upon disciples to be loving as a response to God's love (18 verse 12ff). Although we would not wish to minimise the importance of either the love of God to mankind, or the response that this love demands, it must be held in balance with many other interpretative principles. Earlier we suggested that "human concern" was not an excuse to avoid full sabbath observance but that the sabbath was to be kept in a way that upheld both its obligation to God and its humanitarian intention. Love should not limit it because love was already built into it. Nor must we imagine that Matthew so emphasised

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[48]A.H.McNeile op cit, p.325

[49]G.Bornkamm op cit, p.31

[50]G.Barth op cit pp.77-85

[51]G.Barth op cit pp.75-85

love that anger and judgement were ignored; Jesus proclaimed these as well as the need to love (e.g. Matthew 23:13-37). In other words love itself needs interpreting in the light of the full revelation of God and cannot be used as an alternative to obedience.

A different approach is taken by J.B.Stern[52] who points out that it was normal practice to cite just a few words from the beginning of a text as representative of the whole passage and so what Jesus is doing is drawing attention to the whole of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 9:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41) and the weekly portion known as the קדושים (approximately Leviticus 19). In these two passages we have a combination of ethical and ritual material which leads Stern to suggest that by this selection Jesus is affirming the organic unity of the whole law. Whilst not disputing the method of citing scripture there are several objections to Stern's conclusion. The first is that it is by no means certain that Jesus (or Matthew) would give this sort of unqualified approval to the ritual laws. Although this is not a major concern of this study it becomes obvious, even from a superficial consideration of the law in Matthew that there is no unanimity of opinion on the attitude of the Gospel. Jesus seems to have lived within the bounds of the whole law himself but there can be no certainty that he expected his followers to do the same: certainly he defended them when they were criticised for breaking the "tradition of the elders" (12:1-8, 15:1-9) and one of the major concerns of the "Sermon on the Mount" would seem to be that of giving priority to "attitude of mind" rather than formal outward observance of ritual. The early church did not see the Old Testament ritual laws as having Christ's unqualified approval nor as being obligatory for

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[52] J.B.Stern - "Jesus's citation of Dt. 6:5 and Lv. 19:18 in the light of Jewish tradition" - CBQ 28 (1966) pp.312-316

all Christians, as is clear from both Acts and the Pauline literature. Second, Leviticus 19:18 has been cited twice before - 5:43 and 19:19 - in neither case can it be taken to represent the whole of the chapter. Thus we have doubts about Stern's hypothesis and would suggest that he is seeing too much in these particular quotations.

It would seem more satisfactory to understand these two quotations as representing the two tables of the Decalogue - Deuteronomy 6:5 summarises the first four commandments (duty to God) and Leviticus 19:18 summarises five to ten (duty to others). The ten commandments have a unique place in scripture[53] and are the centre of the whole Torah. Jesus is affirming this uniqueness and the absolute centrality of these precepts in living as the people of God. Duty to God cannot be avoided by emphasising love for neighbour; equally behaving correctly to one's neighbour is an essential part of loving God. Nor should these responsibilities be hidden or obscured by giving ritual an equal priority, instead they require the total response of mind and will in a meaningful love.

(d) Eternal life.

Matthew 19:16-26, Mark 10:17-30 and Luke 18:18-30 (compare 10:25-30) all record the story of the Rich man asking what he must do to have eternal life. The outline of the story is the same in all three Gospels: the man asks his question and is encouraged to think about who Jesus really is through the term "good" which should only be applied to God.[54] It is then suggested that the answer to his question lies in keeping the Decalogue and the fifth to ninth commandments are quoted (with the fifth transposed to the end of the

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[53] e.g. B.S.Childs - Exodus pp.397f

[54] F.V.Filson seems to miss the point when he suggests that Jesus actually rejects the term good. See op cit p.209

list presumably for emphasis). Matthew also adds Leviticus 19:18. There is some uncertainty as to why the tenth commandment was not included. R.V.G.Tasker[55] suggests the reason for this omission is Jesus' realisation of how attached the man was to material things: an attachment that amounts to coveting. What is obvious is that the specified commandments can all be related to observable action rather than inner attitude and so it is possible to measure how well they have been kept. On this superficial level the man affirms that he has observed them, but then asks what more he needs to do - expressing an awareness of need.[56] The reply he gets is that if he is serious about being right with God then he needs to sell everything he owns and give the proceeds away. Childs suggests that the implication of this answer is in fact that the man "lacked everything because he had not loved God with complete abandonment".[57]

Clearly this incident suggests that godliness can in some way be measured by how we live in relation to other people. It is perhaps surprising that the first four commandments were not included, thereby placing an equal emphasis upon duty to God. We need to remember, however, that it was a rich Jew who asked the question; the cult would play an important part in his life and he would be able to make his temple offerings. Certainly from the disciples' reaction to Jesus' teaching (Matthew 19:25) it seems to have been assumed that the rich had a "better chance" of being saved than the poor. In the context, fulfilling one's responsibilities to others is seen as part of one's responsibility to God.

However, the story also makes it clear that living by the letter

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55R.V.G.Tasker - The gospel according to St.Matthew p.187

56R.T.France - Matthew p.285

57B.S.Childs - The New Testament as Canon pp.183f

of the law is not sufficient. By suggesting that if this rich man really wants eternal life then he needs to get rid of his riches, Jesus takes the discussion from the level of outward action to inner priority. in effect he is saying, "are you prepared to make God the most important thing in your life or must he take second place to your riches?"

This emphasis on intention is a constantly re-occurring theme in Matthew. It is highlighted in the "antitheses" and in Jesus' response to the question which is the greatest commandment. People are judged by their fruit (Matthew 7:20) but the fruit of good living comes from a God-centred life. It seems that the rich man was not prepared to put God before possessions so he went away sad. Obedience to the ten commandments is essential to eternal life, but obedience cannot be formal; it must be a true reflection of loving God with the whole being (Matthew 22:37).

THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Although there is much more that could be said about Matthew's attitude to the law, in all its forms, our particular concern is the ten commandments and the theology underlying their use. We now seek to draw these theological ideas together so that we can assess their value to us as a theological resource and see how they relate to other parts of the New Testament. We find the following principles :-

a. The ten commandments are authoritative.

The Old Testament clearly states that God gave the ten commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai - they were his direct command. Far from being questioned in the Gospel of Matthew this is accepted and supported, Childs[58] says that Jesus did not differ from the Judaism of his age in that he regarded the Decalogue as the revealed will of God.

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[58]B.S.Childs - Exodus - p.429

It is, therefore, no accident that when Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment he implicitly pointed his questioner to the Decalogue. When he was asked about eternal life he again used the commandments in his reply. In speaking the words that God spoke he demonstrated his acceptance of their special authority and importance. As we have indicated it is not easy to decide exactly what attitude Jesus is presented as taking to oral and ceremonial law, but his unequivocal attitude to the ten commandments is shown by 15:1-9 where he attacks the religious leaders for using their own traditions to nullify the fifth commandment.

b. The ten commandments are to be kept.

This follows naturally from understanding the Decalogue as God's revealed will and although it seems fairly obvious it is something that is worth repeating in the light of much modern thinking. It is also clearly said in the Gospel. The commandments are not seen as an idealistic and unattainable standard (cf. Deuteronomy 30:11-14), they are set forth as a practical and realistic standard for everyday life. In 7:21 we are told that those who will enter the kingdom of heaven are those who do God's will and in Jesus' conversation with the rich man it is made clear that God's will is revealed through the commandments. It is also important to notice that this man was not told, "try to keep the commandments" but to keep them (19:17). If we follow Tasker's suggestion, mentioned earlier, that in telling him to sell his goods Jesus was telling him to observe the tenth commandment as well as five to nine so to "be perfect" (19:21) is linked to keeping the commandments. The only other place "perfect" (τελειος) occurs in the gospels is also in Matthew (5:48) where, following the antitheses, Jesus says that his followers are to be perfect just as their heavenly father is perfect. Again perfection is linked with

fulfilling the commandments and seen not as an ideal but as something than can be attained.

c. The "spirit" must be kept not just the "letter".

The commandments have a deeper meaning than just the obvious - this is the substance of the antitheses. Jesus takes the commandment about not murdering and says, in effect, that it is really about all the motivations behind murder. It is about the hateful, angry thought; it is about feeling and showing contempt; it is about murder with the tongue and in the heart as well as the actual deed. The same stance is taken with each of the commandments mentioned in this particular passage - since adultery begins in the mind, lustful thoughts are wrong; it is not sufficient to avoid stealing and to honour parents because the spirit of the commandments implies that God's people are those who show real concern for others and whose "yes" and "no" can be trusted. Harrelson[59] points out that Jesus never allowed observance of the formal requirements of law to get in the way of the deeper purposes and intentions of God though Torah. This is the theme of much of the sermon on the mount. We have already mentioned the antitheses which so clearly show the need to live by the "spirit" rather than just the formal "letter" of the law. The same teaching can be found in chapter 23 - the "woes" against the Scribes and Pharisees. Verses 23-24 talk about their punctilious observance of the outward forms of religion but also of their neglect of the weightier matters[60] which really express rightness with God. Verses 25-26 are about their concern with externals rather than internals and verses 27-28 are a terrible condemnation of their desire

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[59]W.Harrelson - The ten commandments and human rights pp.157-172

[60]S.T.Lachs (op cit, p.370)points out that this may be a reference to Micah 6:8 and that "weightier" here is not the light and heavy commandments of Matthew 19:24 but the important and the trifling.

to put on a show of outward righteousness, whilst ignoring the true spirit of God's law.

d. The commandments must be interpreted consistently.

We mean by this that no part of a commandment should be emphasised in a way that means another part, of that or any other commandment, is violated. We have touched upon this in our discussion of the "sabbath controversies" of chapter Matthew 12. There we have suggested that the use of Hosea 6:6 is really an appeal to fulfil the whole of the fourth commandment. Jesus is not saying that the sabbath is out of date and need not be kept, but rather that the sabbath needs to be kept in a way that satisfies both the requirements of God and the needs of humanity. The ten commandments are not seen as isolated laws, which are to be set one against another, but as a complete rule of life which connects religious responsibility to God with moral obligation to our fellow human beings. This would seem to be the real significance of Jesus' response to the questioner who asked, "which is the greatest commandment?": the use of Deuteronomy 6:5 with Leviticus 19:18 links together duty to God and duty to people as complementary responsibilities.

Further support for this is again found within the Sermon on the Mount. 5:23-24 also link together responsibility to God and responsibility to others - an offering to God is pointless if the offerer is at enmity with a fellow human being - both tables of the law need to be observed. Likewise the link between duty to God and others is suggested in the eschatological passage of Matthew 25:31-46; those who receive a reward from the Son of Man, who enter the Father's kingdom, are those who have served their fellow human beings; those who are rejected are those who have not served others. Again duty to God cannot be separated from duty to others; a vital part of true

religion is the fulfilling of moral responsibilities.

e. Keeping the commandments gives "freedom".

It could be argued from Matthew 23:4 (even with the omission of "hard to bear") that the religious demands made by the Scribes and Pharisees were sometimes regarded as a heavy burden by the people of God. In contrast Jesus claims to ease that burden by giving them a lighter yoke (Matthew 11:28-29) . As we have seen from his conversation with the rich man, and his definition of the greatest commandment, the yoke he lays upon people is the right observance of the Decalogue.

It is interesting to link 11:25-29 with the story of the miraculous paying of the temple tax in 17 verses 24-27, because there Jesus says, "the sons are free" (verse 28); free from the obligation to pay the temple tax but could it not also, by implication, mean free from all legal requirements imposed by men? Having made this declaration Jesus then freely chooses to pay the tax. So we can reflect on the one hand upon the "babes" who have received the revelation of God (11:25) and the "sons" who are free from legal obligation (17:26) and on the other between those who accept the "yoke" of Christ (11:29) and those who freely choose to fulfil the requirements of law (17:27).

Certainly it would seem to be true that living by the standards of the commandments, the spirit as well as the letter, gives freedom to be truly human. Anarchy destroys real freedom and we would suggest that "spiritual anarchy" not only destroys freedom but actually destroys humanity. When Harrelson writes about this he says, "the prohibition of adultery is a liberation rather than an enslavement - a real freedom".[61]

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[61]W.Harrelson op cit, pp.173-193

f. The commandments must be understood in the light of the person of Jesus.

Although we have left this until last it is probably the most significant theological principle in understanding the use of the Decalogue in Matthew's Gospel. Most commentators recognise that the uniqueness of the Person of Jesus Christ is a salient feature of the Gospel. This is seen in the Nativity narratives, the emphasis on the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy in the person of Jesus, the authority of Jesus as a teacher, and the titles attributed to him such as Son of Man and Son of David. Filson, speaking of Jesus, says, "He is the central figure of the entire Gospel. The author does not mar his presentation by personal parade or by detours undertaken to indulge secondary interests. Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the rightful King of the Jews, the Lord and final judge of all men, is the constant object of loyal attention."[62] Or McNeile says, "The special impression which S.Matthew embodies is that of royalty: Jesus is the Messiah."[63] We see the significance of this with regard to the ten commandments in 12:8 where Jesus' lordship over the sabbath is declared. In essence God is Lord of the sabbath because he created it, but in this verse the Messiah, who is greater than the temple and who can correct a wrong emphasis on how the sabbath should be observed, is given equal lordship. He does not use this position to destroy the ancient commandments but to establish their real meaning.

This is not an isolated example of the authority given to Jesus over the law. We have seen many examples of how he not only corrected wrong emphases but also brought out the real meaning of the commandments (adultery, murder, etc.). In connection with the law he

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62F.V.Filson op cit, p.2.

63A.H.McNeile op cit, p.xvii

claimed divine prerogatives - he could forgive sins (9:2); he could judge between those who were faithful and unfaithful to the law (25:31ff); and he claimed that his teaching was the basis of proper service of God (7:24-27). Moo (like Banks) suggests that Matthew's real concern is not so much to depict how Jesus stood with regard to the law but how the law stood with regard to him, he says, "Jesus claims an authority over the law such as only God possesses. The validity or abrogation of laws is decided entirely by their relationship to Jesus and to the new situation which his coming inaugurates".[64]

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[64]D.J.Moo op cit, p.2.

Chapter 3

CALVIN AND THE DECALOGUE

There can be no doubt that Calvin has an assured place in the history of the Reformation and that his work merits serious consideration. He treats the Old Testament scriptures with great reverence. His aim is to discover their meaning and relevance within a Christian theology, but he is also concerned to do justice to the context in which they are found and their meaning in that context. This becomes clear from a consideration of his work on the Ten Commandments[1]. Before embarking on an exegesis of the individual commandments he sets out the principles behind his interpretation. These principles could be very important for our present study. If it can be shown that they (or some of them) are still valid, then they may well provide a valuable theological resource in our search for a deeper understanding of how the Decalogue can be used in contemporary Christian thinking.

It is important to understand that Calvin treated the scriptures (the Old and New Testaments) as a unified whole and much of his exegesis reflects this Christian understanding. We shall seek to show, however, that much, if not all, of what he says is an appropriate way for Christians to read the Old Testament as it stands within the Canon of Scripture today.

One way of looking at Calvin's interpretive methods is to group them under two basic headings - first, "the nature of the commandments" and, second, "the nature of human response". It is these two areas we now examine in greater detail.

1.THE NATURE OF THE COMMANDMENTS.

a.The elliptical nature of the commandments

Calvin means by this that there is a dimension to each of the

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[1] J.Calvin - Institutes of the Christian Religion Vol.1, pp.429-491

commandments beyond that expressed in the words actually used and that it would be ridiculous to limit the "spirit of the law to the strict letter of the words"[2]. He suggests that each of the commandments is really a summary of a whole collection of similar wrongs which aims at developing a total hatred of all those sins in the hearer[3]

His position is further clarified when he says, "We must consider, I say, how far interpretation can be permitted to go beyond the literal meaning of the words, still making it apparent that no appendix of human glosses is added to the Divine law, but that the pure and genuine meaning of the lawgiver is faithfully exhibited."[4]. Clearly this rules out any suggestion that we are entitled to impose whatever meaning we like upon the commandments; on the contrary great care must be taken to apply them in ways that are in harmony with their original intention.

This original intention can be discerned, he suggests, by considering not only "the principle" but also "the end" of the individual commandments. He uses the first and fifth commandments as examples of this. The principle of the first commandment is that God alone is to be worshipped, and the end is true piety; namely that true worship is acceptable to the Deity but impiety is an abomination. The fifth commandment has as its immediate principle the honouring of parents and Calvin suggests its end is to render honour to those on whom God has bestowed some distinction.

In his exegesis of the individual commandments there are many other instances of how this principle is applied. A brief summary of its application would be that the second commandment is against all

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[2]Calvin op cit p.437

[3]Calvin op cit p.438

[4]Calvin op cit p.437

forms of superstition; the third against any irreverence towards God;the fourth upholds the need to meditate upon the Kingdom of God; the sixth is against violence and injustice of every kind; the seventh is against all forms of impurity; the eighth exhorts us to render to every man his due; the ninth urges the cultivation of truth; the tenth suggests that any feelings of an adverse nature must be totally banished.

There are those, like K.Barth[5] and W.Harrelson[6], who apply the commandments to a wide range of human problems. Others are less convinced that this is an appropriate use of the material. As we have seen, much effort has been put into the search for the origin of not only individual commandments but the Decalogue as a whole. Very often exegesis is then limited to the exact meaning of the words in their proposed original setting. Such an approach leads M.Noth, for example, to say that the fifth commandment "does not apply to children who stand under the *patria potestas* but to adults who themselves exert the *patria potestas* and are to show due honour to their aging parents"[7]. In considering the seventh commandment others[8] emphasise that in ancient Israel adultery by a man was an offence against another person's marriage, whilst for a woman it was against her own marriage; exegesis is then limited to this area of life.

Does this mean that Calvin's belief in the "elliptical" nature of the commandments is outdated by more recent scholarship or are there arguments in its favour?

It is important to understand that Calvin's approach differs from those scholars who seek to understand the commandments within a

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[5]K.Barth - e.g. Church dogmatics 3.4 pp.397-470.

[6]W.Harrelson - The ten commandments and human rights pp.51-154

[7]M.Noth - Exodus p.165

[8]e.g. J.P.Hyatt - Exodus p.214

reconstructed, original historical setting. F.Crusemann[9], for example, would limit the interpretation of the Decalogue to the social and historical circumstances from which it arose (in his opinion c. 700 B.C.) and insists that it does not have general applicability. Calvin, on the other hand, expounds the commandments within their total canonical context - which for him includes both Old and New Testaments. The question we have to ask is whether or not this is an appropriate way for Christians to read and use this material today. We suggest that it is in that Calvin does not impose on the commandments a set of New Testament, Reformation ideas that are completely divorced from Old Testament thinking but his exegesis recognises a continuity of thought within the canon and in subsequent Christian theology. Thus we shall seek to draw out the way in which the main elements of his exegesis are parallelled by Old Testament concerns.

Calvin says the seventh commandment is against all forms of impurity. The Old Testament does not have a great deal to say on the matter of sexual relationships between the unmarried or unbetrothed, at least in direct terms. In Proverbs young men are warned about the dangers of consorting with strange women or unfaithful wives (Proverbs 2:16-19, 5:2-14 etc.) and prostitution would seem to be condemned by the prophets (Amos 2:7) and again in Proverbs 6:25-27. It is also true that in various places the Hebrew scriptures link adultery with other sexual misdemeanours. In Leviticus 18 and 20, for example, we have lists of prohibitions against various sexual acts and adultery is included in both lists (18:20, 20:10) thus suggesting the sort of linkage proposed by Calvin.

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[9]F.Crusemann - Bewahrung der freiheit; das thema das dekalog in sozial- geschichlicher perspektive pp.1-100.

This absence of explicit commands regulating sexual matters, outside the recognised relationships of marriage and betrothal, could lead to the conclusion that it is dangerous to apply this commandment to anything other than these carefully defined areas of human life. However, the advice in Proverbs that young men should behave in a chaste manner, together with the fact that society expected evidence of female virginity in marriage (e.g. Deuteronomy 22:13-21) suggest that the Old Testament sees marriage, and marriage alone, as the normal context for the expression of human sexuality. This assumption leads us to look for less explicit and more subtle evidence that would support the application of this commandment to a wider area than just adultery.

Some of the most telling teaching in the Old Testament is given by means of stories - an event is recounted and the reader is left to reflect upon the spiritual lessons. We have, for example, the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11: 2 - 12:25). David and Bathsheba commit adultery with the consequent result of Bathsheba's pregnancy. We then have the scheming by David to get Uriah, the husband of his latest love, killed. Then comes the story within the story: Nathan the prophet cannot tackle the king head on so he invents a story to get his challenge heard. The result is David's repentance.

Almost immediately after this event another family story is included - the rape of Tamar by her half-brother Amnon, David's eldest son (2 Samuel 13:1-22). It is emphasised throughout the story that Amnon is David's son (verses 1, 4, 5); David is used (however unknowingly) to procure Tamar (verse 6-7); Tamar invokes the king's name to try to divert Amnon from rape, but he will not listen (verse 13). When David hears what has happened we are told that he is very

angry but he does nothing (verse 21). P.Trible[10] suggests the reason for David's inaction, and apparent helplessness, is that his own adultery, with Bathsheba, had deprived him of the right either to act or make moral judgements. The proximity of these stories within the canon, and the profile given to David in the second story, makes it reasonable to suggest the reader is being asked to consider Amnon's action in the light of his father's adultery - different men, different times but the same category of sin.

Can a similar link be found between respect for parents and respect for those on whom God has bestowed honour?

It is not the purpose of this study to discuss the structure of the Israelite community. We simply point out that throughout the history presented in the Old Testament there were figures of authority - in the patriarchal period we have the patriarchs themselves as authoritative family heads; Moses and Joshua were leaders with great authority, likewise the Judges - and this structure was further developed with the creation of the monarchy. It is important to understand that in Israel positions of authority are seen as given by God. Saul was made king at God's command (1 Samuel 15:1) and he was replaced by David, at God's command (1 Samuel 16:12-13). David's awareness of this divine dependence is clearly and beautifully expressed in 1 Chronicles 29:10-12. We also see that respect for old age was something to be encouraged (Leviticus 19:32), and that those who honoured God's servants were rewarded (2 Kings 4:8-17) whilst those who dishonoured them were punished (2 Kings 2:23-24).

The suggestion of a link between honouring parents and honouring those whom God honours can be found in the narration of two incidents

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[10]P.Trible - Texts of terror, the whole of Chapter 2.

during the pursuit of David by Saul. In 1 Samuel 24 we have the story of Saul going to relieve himself in a cave where David and his men have taken refuge. David has the opportunity to kill Saul but refrains on the ground that he will not dishonour the one whom God has honoured (verse 6). When the king is far enough away for the danger to be over David calls to Saul and addresses him as "father" (verse 11) - in response Saul calls him "son" (verse 16). Similarly in 1 Samuel 26; David has an opportunity of killing Saul but refuses to do so for the same reason as before - Saul is anointed by God (verse 9). In the ensuing conversation Saul again calls David "son" (verses 17, 21). Respect is shown for the one whom God has chosen, not on the basis of son-in-law/father-in-law but on the basis of a subject and his anointed king. Similarly we find that Naaman was called "father" by his servants (2 Kings 5:13), the King of Israel calls Elisha "father" (2 Kings 6:21) as does Joash when the prophet is on his death-bed (2 Kings 13:14). The use of "father" and "son" in these instances encourages us to reflect on the possibility of extending to all in authority the same respect as we are commanded to give to parents.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that scripture endorses uncritical acceptance of all authority, whether it is that of parents or those who have power through the state. We are encouraged to reflect upon the complexity of the father-son relationship through the stories of Saul and Jonathan. Jonathan is set before us a loyal and loved son (1 Samuel 20:2) who is prepared to die with his father (1 Samuel 31:2-6). He does not, however, accept his father's authority in the matter of David; instead he takes David's side (1 Samuel 20). Scripture seems to approve of Jonathan's rebellion, God is cited as witness to their friendship (1 Samuel 20:42), and David is the

successor to Saul chosen by God himself. This change of kingship is another instance of how the reader is encouraged to reflect upon rebellion against authority. In 1 Samuel 16:1-13 God tells Samuel to go against his king and anoint another ruler in his place (and to be "economical with the truth").

Calvin says, "Since the Lord takes pleasure in his own ordinance, the degrees of dignity appointed by him must be held inviolable."[11] If this means that all authority must be accepted without question and that the fifth commandment is always on the side of maintaining the *status quo* then this does not seem to accord with what scripture, as a whole, actually suggests. The biblical emphasis is upon God's sovereignty and that human authorities are only worthy of respect when, and whilst, they act in accordance with his will. B.S.Childs says, "The fifth commandment lends the strongest support for the divinely appointed authority of the parent within the family to provide a training in faith. The commandment, however, offers no warrant for submission to the authority of ruling classes or estates in general, but is directed solely towards the goal of the exercise of God's rule."[12]

It would seem, therefore, that this "elliptical principle" has value in helping us see that the commandments can have a wider application than is often recognised; throughout the Canon we find narratives that encourage us to reflect upon this wider application. We would not, however, accept all the details of Calvin's own use of this principle and would want to apply it with greater caution to ensure that we do not impose "human glosses" nor obscure "the purpose of the lawgiver". We recognise, however, that these two caveats raise

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[11]Calvin op cit, pp.466f

[12]B.S.Childs - Old Testament theology in a canonical context p.74

enormous hermeneutical problems: how do we ensure that we are not imposing "human glosses" and that we are not obscuring the will "of the lawgiver"? Childs helps us with this problem when he gives us five "exegetical controls which have emerged from a study of the Decalogue and which should aid in testing the validity of each fresh attempt to deal seriously with the text."[13] He then says, "The theological challenge for the church today is to give to the divine commandments a form of 'flesh and blood' which not only strives to be obedient in the hearing of his word, but is equally serious in addressing its imperatives with boldness to the contemporary world."[14]

b. Negative and positive aspects of the commandments.

This is really a particular application of the elliptical principle. Calvin says, "There is no need of proving, that when good is ordered, the evil which is opposed to it is forbidden. . . . It will also be admitted without much difficulty, that when evil is forbidden, its opposite is enjoined."[15] As part of his exegesis of the sixth commandment Calvin says, "Accordingly, we are required faithfully to do what in us lies to defend the life of our neighbour, to promote whatever tends to his tranquillity, to be vigilant in warding off harm, and, when danger comes, to assist in removing it."[16] Of the ninth commandment he says, "Though the commandment is only directed against falsehood, it intimates that the preservation of our neighbour's good name is recommended."[17]

Again this gives the commandments a meaning beyond that of any limited historical setting in which they may have originated. We

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[13]B.S.Childs - Exodus p.438

[14]B.S.Childs op cit, p.439

[15]Calvin op cit, p.438

[16]Calvin op cit, p.470

[17]Calvin op cit, p.479

would, however, suggest that it is an appropriate way to read the commandments in their canonical setting of the Old and New Testaments. For example in his exegesis of the sixth commandment Calvin says it is not sufficient to refrain from killing our neighbour but we must also defend his life, property and well-being. Clearly this interpretation is in harmony with the teachings of the New Testament (e.g. Matthew 5:43-44, Romans 15:2 etc.) but it is not divorced from the thinking of the Old Testament where similar concerns can be found.

The avoidance of harming others seems fairly basic to much of Old Testament law and moral teaching. It could be argued that this is the purpose of the Decalogue for it sets out the responsibility that each individual has to care for others. This care is seen as an appropriate response to God's saving acts. A positive expression of this biblical concern is found in Micah 6:8 where the prophet declares that God requires justice and kindness from his people. Equally positive is Leviticus 19:11-18, especially verse 18, where the command is given to "love your neighbour as yourself". There are also a number of narratives where people are shown kindness instead of being killed. One such instance is the story of the baby Moses being found by Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:1-10). Her father's law was absolutely clear but she chose to ignore it and gave Moses a life, with opportunities of personal growth and education that would have been denied him even if he had survived to live as a slave. The results of her mercy and kindness were to have a dramatic effect upon her own people!

Another such incident is when the Syrians came to Dothan to capture Elisha (2 Kings 6:11-23). The enemy soldiers are struck blind by the hand of God and taken to Samaria. The king of Israel wants to kill them but instead Elisha commands that they be fed - they are

given a great feast and returned home - fairly unusual conduct in a world without the Geneva convention!

A third incident is David's treatment of Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9). The normal and practical way of preventing other claimants from conspiring to take the throne was simply to kill all members of any rival, royal family. Instead of doing this David treats Saul's grandson (and great-grandson) with kindness. David had promised Saul that he would not destroy his family (1 Samuel 24:21-22) but ways were sometimes found to negate these promises (e.g. Shimei, 2 Samuel 19:23 cf. 1 Kings 2:8-9; 44-46).

Reflection upon these stories may well encourage us to find support for Calvin's handling of the sixth commandment.

However, this approach raises other problems. Many modern commentators[18] seek to distinguish between the different types of killing in scripture and conclude that the word used here (רצח) is nearly always used of the killing of a personal enemy and occasionally of accidental killing (Deuteronomy 4:41-43, 19:1-13). This distinction enables them to separate the prohibition of killing, in this commandment, from killing in war or from state execution. Thus the wars and the killings by God's people in the course of their history - often at his command - become acceptable. It is difficult to equate these actions with seeking the good of others and suggests a conflict between the way Calvin interprets this commandment and how it was understood by the people of Israel. Harrelson[19] discusses this problem and suggests that to say "life belongs to God" is very different from saying "life is sacrosanct" and although he believes this commandment rules out capital punishment he recognises the

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[18]e.g. J.P.Hyatt - Exodus p.214

[19]W.Harrelson op cit pp.107-122.

possibility of arguing that to execute a murderer is in fact protecting society. In warfare it is probably a question of relative values - prosecuting a war with mercy and restraint is probably better than a war in which no mercy or restraint is shown and it may be less caring to avoid a war than to use violence to protect others.

Childs[20] draws attention to the story of Moses killing the Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-12) and the way in which this act was understood (or misunderstood) by at least one Hebrew (Exodus 2:14-15). The text makes no comment on the morality of the act - it is not praised as a selfless act in the defence of the helpless, nor is it condemned as an unwarranted destruction of human life - the reader is simply left to ponder the complexities of the issues involved.

So once again we can only give a cautious approval of Calvin's approach. It would seem reasonable, certainly on the level of personal conduct between individuals, to accept that the sixth commandment not only prohibits murder but also suggests a positive attitude towards the well-being of others. However in the world of today, and the world of the Old Testament, choices are never that simple; we find ourselves condoning the "least bad" course of action rather than the "absolute good". We have unanswered questions especially with regard to the killings that took place during Israel's conquest of Canaan under Joshua - did the people misunderstand God's wishes and indulge in killing for mistaken reasons? Has the morality of killing changed with time? Was it a necessary one-off evil for the greater good of God's chosen people? The Old Testament has a different perspective on life and death from twentieth century Western civilisation and central to any understanding of this commandment is the fact that life is created by God (Genesis 2:7), it is in God's

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[20]B.S.Childs - Old Testament theology in a canonical context .p76

hands (1 Samuel 2:6) and man must recognise this divine prerogative as was expressed by the king in his moment of anguish when asked to heal Naaman (2 Kings 5:7).

Does a clearer picture emerge if we examine Calvin's treatment of the positive aspect of the eighth commandment? He says, "the purport is that injustice being an abomination to God we must render to every man his due."[21] We have previously noted Alt's[22] suggestion that this commandment originally had in view the kidnapping of a free Israelite man, but if this does form part of the background it has been lost sight of in the received text, where the form is against all "acts of misappropriation".[23] Calvin sees misappropriation not just as stealing property but as any action that steals from another human being his rights. This affects every human relationship - rulers and ruled, ministers and congregations, parents and children - all must fulfil their obligations one to the other and failure to do so is a kind of theft. Courts of law can "steal" from society by favouring the rich, or the poor, rather than judging impartially.

This would all seem to be in line with the standards taught, and expected, in the Scriptures. Amos condemns God's people for greed and the lack of justice which degrades the poor (e.g. Amos 2:6, 4:1), the prosperous farmers were to share the bounty God had given them with the poor (Leviticus 19:9-10), property and freedom were protected by the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:10). One of the clearest indications that this commandment can refer to more than material possessions comes in Jeremiah 23:30 where reference is made to prophets who steal God's word; clearly they are denying people the

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[21]Calvin op cit, p.475

[22]A.Alt - Das Verbot des Diebstahls im Dekalog pp.333-340.

[23]B.S.Childs op cit p.81

right to hear what God is really saying and so are thieves.

We are further encouraged to reflect upon the seriousness of denying ordinary human rights to others through the horrific and heart-rending story of the unnamed concubine told in Judges 19-20 but especially chapter 19. Throughout the story the woman is treated with contempt. She flees from the Levite in anger but that is the last free act she does; we are not told how her father received her, but we are told that he gave the Levite a tremendous welcome when he came looking for her; we are not told whether she went back with him willingly, but we are told how he willingly sacrificed her to save himself; we are not told whether she was dead after the night of abuse, but we are told that her body was dismembered so that he could gain revenge. It is the story of a human being who is denied any humanity or consideration from those upon whom she depended - love, protection, respect, consideration are stolen from her as she is utterly degraded by God's people.

Although these reflections encourage us to give validity to Calvin's principle we have reservations about the way it is applied. Once again he seems to use it to support the *status quo*, he says, "This commandment, therefore, we shall duly obey, if, contented with our own lot, we study to acquire nothing but honest and lawful gain. . . . . On the other hand let it be our constant aim faithfully to lend our counsel and aid to all so as to assist them in retaining their property"[24] (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:20-22, Philippians 4:11). It is, however, worth noting that this criticism is made from the perspective of twentieth century British democracy and exposure to all the present-day pressure groups for equality - Calvin lived and wrote in the very different world of the sixteenth century. It is perhaps

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[24]Calvin op cit p.476f

unfair to expect him to have the insights it has taken us so long to learn and we easily forget that women were only given equality with men in our electoral system in 1928, that the Catholic emancipation act was not passed until 1829, women and children were exploited by industry until the mines and factory acts of 1842 and 1847, and slavery was not abolished until 1834. Childs points out, "the fact that every interpretation reflects a large amount of cultural conditioning should not be misunderstood".[25]

Writing from a modern perspective Harrelson[26] suggests that this commandment should actually be used against those who amass wealth at the expense of others, often confident that they will be protected by the law. God's people cannot support the maintenance of an unjust society nor work for the preservation of property that has been obtained unjustly; the right of all people to share in God's bounty must be protected.

Perhaps, as before, we should put the emphasis upon personal responsibility[27]. Whilst being content with our lot we should seek to improve the lot of others, at the same time others will work to ensure our well-being and to ensure justice for us. The eighth commandment is about our personal responsibility to ensure that we do not take anything that rightly belongs to another, and it follows that if everybody was able to accept this responsibility the world would be fair and just; no person would have their "due" stolen either by an individual or society.

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[25]B.S.Childs - Exodus p.438

[26]W.Harrelson op cit, pp.138f.

[27]The verb used is in the second person singular. Noth (Exodus p.162) describes this as "the collective second person" and takes it to mean the nation as a whole. Hyatt (Exodus p.209) says, "they are addressed to the individual within the Israelite community."

c. The commandments are concerned with motives as well as with actions.

Calvin declares that "in the Law human life is instructed not merely in outward decency but in inward spiritual righteousness."[28] This is based on the fact that God is not only concerned with the outward appearance but with purity of heart (1 Samuel 16:7) and Calvin is able to make the transition from the "outward" to the "inward" by considering the nature of the lawgiver. God is spiritual, therefore "he speaks to the soul not less than the body".[29]. The very nature of God means it is not sufficient to obey the outward forms and requirements of the law because real obedience demands that it should be kept in and with the mind as well. This is what Jesus teaches in the antitheses of St. Matthew's Gospel where the commandments against murder, adultery and theft include the prohibition of wrath, lust and covetousness. For Calvin God's nature makes this not just a valid understanding of the commandments but a self-evident truth.

This highlights the problems encountered by commentators in distinguishing between the eighth and tenth commandments and which led to Alt's hypothesis, mentioned earlier, in which he suggested that the eighth commandment prohibited kidnapping and all other categories of theft are prohibited by the tenth. For Alt the last five commandments are concerned with protecting the fundamental rights of the free Israelite - his life, his marriage, his freedom, his reputation and his property. Most do not accept Alt's suggestion but, as we saw earlier, there is disagreement on whether or not "covet" includes "the intention to possess". However we resolve that problem it is clear that the tenth commandment has some concern with motive, or intention,

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[28]Calvin op cit, p.434.

[29]Calvin op cit, p.435

rather than just objective action. Calvin suggests that all the commandments have this same concern and when we look at this in the canonical context there does seem to be an abundance of passages which suggest that God is primarily interested in attitude of mind and also that right motivation inevitably leads to right action. We give a few examples. In Deuteronomy 5, after the commandments have been recorded, our attention is drawn to the fearful reaction of the people to the theophany, followed by their request for Moses to act as mediator. We then get Jahweh's response, verse 29, "Oh that they had such a mind as this always, to fear me and keep all my commandments" - the right mental attitude leads to the right action. In the story of how David was anointed king (1 Samuel 16:1-13) Eliab was rejected by God who said to Samuel, "man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart" (verse 7). In Deuteronomy 13:3-4 we again have the suggestion that love of God results in obeying his commandments. Furthermore David speaks of the importance of motivation (1 Chronicles 29:17); Solomon is commended for asking for an "understanding mind" (1 Kings 3:9); Jeremiah condemns the people for having a "stubborn heart" which means that they have turned aside from God's way (Jeremiah 5:23). The message is that right attitudes lead to right action and right action cannot be done without right attitude. This theme is continued in the New Testament. St. Matthew's gospel makes a very clear link between motive and action (e.g. 5:28, 15:18). Jesus is recorded as saying that a person's nature is known by their actions (7:16) which applies not only to good people but also to the ungodly (12:33-35).

When we consider individual commandments little needs to be said about the tenth. Even if the verb used has within it the intention to acquire illegally what belongs to another, it certainly also has to do

with the mental attitude that leads to the action - B.S.Childs says, "it seems to denote subjective rather than objective emotion."[30].

The ninth commandment requires slightly longer treatment. "False witness" applies primarily to public declaration and there are those[31] who do not believe it can be extended from the legal realm to include lying. However our concern here is whether or not we can establish some link between an attitude of heart and mind and the breaking of this commandment. In the Old Testament the concept of truth does apply to facts (Deuteronomy 17:4, 1 Kings 10:6) but it is also used to describe a moral attribute - commenting upon or assessing the dependability, and reliability of a person or a group of people (e.g. Genesis 42:16). Hezekiah did "what was good and right and faithful (אמת) before the Lord his God" (2 Chronicles 31:20) and in complete contrast those who were false-witnesses against Naboth are described as "sons of worthlessness" (בְּנֵי־בְלִיַּעַל :1 Kings 21:13), suggesting that their willingness to tell lies in a legal context was simply a reflection of their normal pattern of behaviour (cf. Proverbs 6:12). Certainly God's love of truthfulness is proclaimed in the Psalms (e.g. 15:2) and Proverbs (e.g 12:22) whereas those who act as false witnesses are marked out as liars (Proverbs 12:17) and associated with things that the Lord hates (Proverbs 6:16-19). In Isaiah 44:20 a specific link is made between a "deluded mind" and the inability to discern truth and Isaiah 59:13 refers to the fact that lies originate in the heart. The biblical view of a false witness would seem to be that such a person is one who regards faithfulness, honesty and integrity towards his neighbour as unimportant. Those who give false testimony in court, or who lie to their fellow men, do so

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[30]B.S.Childs - "Exodus" p.425

[31]e.g. A.D.H.Mayes - Deuteronomy p.171.

because they lack moral integrity; their heart, their mind, their motivations are not subject to the will of God. Hence since "false-witness" originates from a "false heart" we can, in the light of the wider canonical context, interpret this commandment as giving support to Calvin's belief that the decalogue is concerned with motives as well as with actions.

2.THE NATURE OF HUMAN RESPONSE

Some of the things that we are including in this category could equally well have been placed in category 1 above. The reason for putting them under this heading is that they require the response of faith; they are about how the people of God should respond to this unique collection of rules rather than about specific interpretive tools.

a. Right response recognises the Lawgiver.

The ten commandments claim to be God's message to his people, they are spoken by him (Exodus 20:1, Deuteronomy 5:4,22); failure to keep them brings forth his anger (Deuteronomy 11:26-28). This is crucial to Calvin's interpretation of the commandments. He is not concerned with the issues of origin and development that often dominate modern work on the Decalogue but only with the received text being from God. In his exposition of a number of the commandments he relates what is said to "the lawgiver", for example when considering the seventh commandment he says, ". . . . . let us consider who the lawgiver is that thus condemns fornication."[32] In the general conclusion to his exegesis he says, with regard to the whole Decalogue, "For therein God has so delineated his own character that any one exhibiting in action

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[32]Calvin op cit, p.474.

what is commanded would in some measure exhibit a living image of God."[33]

This is perhaps most clearly expressed in his commentary on the first commandment.[34] He makes it clear that for him it is comparatively unimportant whether, "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." is included as part of the first commandment or treated as a separate preface. It is, however, important to see it as introducing the whole Decalogue. By the use of the word "Lord" and by reminding them of his kindness God states his right to command; this in turn should bring from them the response of gratitude.

More controversially Calvin also sees in this sentence the claim that God is "the God of the Church". When he delivered them from Egypt he made them his chosen people (cf. Jeremiah 31:33) which is the same relationship given to the church, as inheritors of the promises of God, through the work of Christ. This, however, is in keeping with a canonical reading of scripture; one approach is to see the community of faith of the New Testament (the Christian church) in some way standing in continuity with the community of faith of the Old Testament (the people of Israel), so the God of Israel is the God of the church. Our particular concern at this juncture is to illustrate, and examine, the importance Calvin attaches to "understanding God" as an integral part of "understanding the commandments".

The first commandment sets before the chosen people the absolute and basic requirement of the Almighty. Because he has chosen them they are to have no other gods before him; they are to abstain from any activity or thought that would diminish the glory of His divinity.

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[33]Calvin op cit p.483.

[34]Calvin op cit pgs. 442-447.

They are to approach Him with adoration (rendering homage to his majesty), trust (secure resting), invocation (betaking ourselves to him as the only source of aid) and thanksgiving (gratitude that ascribes to him praise for all blessings). For Calvin this is the right response of the chosen people to the Almighty God who has delivered them.

This raises theological questions about how we know God. An obvious answer is through his own self-revelation, but do the commandments actually give us a complete and clearly discernible understanding of God? W.Zimmerli[35] sees a tension within God's self-revelation as we have it in the Sinai narrative. In the prologue we have a loving God who delivers His people, in the second commandment we have a jealous God who punishes children for the sins of their fathers up to four generations. This doesn't present Calvin with a problem: because of the sinful nature of all humanity those "children" will be punished for their own sin and not by unjust hatred on the part of God. A jealous God, who will brook no rivals, and a loving God, who delivers his people from bondage, are just two facets of the total picture of God given through his law. Yet the questions Zimmerli raises, by pointing out these tensions, are important and are raised time and time again in the Old Testament. The book of Hosea encourages us to reflect upon God's relationship to his people, consisting of love and jealousy, through the story of Gomer. The story of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16), the story of Achan (Joshua 7), the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12) are examples of stories that give rise to reflection upon God's judgement and forgiveness. Perhaps they don't add anything new to our knowledge of God but they do seem to highlight matters in a different

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[35]W.Zimmerli - Old Testament theology in outline p.109f

way.

C.J.H.Wright draws attention to a different nuance when he says "What God is like is to be seen in what he does or has done."[36] This is part of the importance of the prologue which clearly reminds the people of Israel that the commandments are from Jahweh, the God of their history and the God of their salvation.

It may well be true that in the Decalogue God's character is "delineated" and a perfect understanding of it would lead to a perfect understanding of him. In practical terms, however, we need help from other sources to grasp the fullness of God. The Bible describes the way he acts as well as the commands he gives; the way he enters into dialogue with his people (e.g Moses at the burning bush, Exodus 3-4, Abraham and the city of Sodom, Genesis 18:16-33), the questionings that occur in the Psalms from a position of faith. These all contribute to our understanding of God and the response that he requires from his people.

It is important to recognise that the commandments are from God and although we can tabulate a whole list of divine characteristics it is not always as simple, as Calvin seems to suggest, to reconcile these different characteristics and relate the individual commandments to them.

b. Right response recognises human unworthiness.

Calvin says, "by promulgating the rule of his justice, he charges us both with impotence and unrighteousness." and, "contrasting our conduct with the righteousness of the law, we see how very far it is from being in accordance with the will of God, and, therefore, how unworthy we are of holding our place among his creatures, far less of

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[36]C.J.H.Wright - Living as the people of God p.26f.

being accounted his sons"[37]. This is an idea that is found in the New Testament, Jesus pointed out human sinfulness (Matthew 7:11, 19:7) as did Paul (Romans 3:23, 7:18-20) but the same idea is found frequently within the Old Testament; for example Isaiah says, "all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (64:6), or the Psalmist says, "there is none that does good" (14:1). A general declaration of the sinfulness of humanity is not the same as saying that the commandments show us human sinfulness. This is stated in Pauline literature (Romans 3:20, 7:7 etc.) but, as stated in the introduction, Paul and the law is beyond the scope of this study. We do, however recognise a measure of conflict and discontinuity between the approaches of Paul and Matthew - Matthew writes as a Jew for Jewish Christians who need to interpret their own history and traditions through the person of Jesus Christ: Paul, on the other hand, writes as the "Apostle to the Gentiles" and is concerned with how much (or little) Jewish practices, traditions and attitudes are obligatory for non-Jews embracing Christianity from paganism. The issue for us, however, is whether or not Calvin has here adopted a Pauline position that lacks continuity with the rest of the canon.

Although the conclusion that the Ten commandments illustrate human unworthiness is not explicitly stated outside St. Paul, the ingredients for this conclusion are found elsewhere in the scriptures. We have already looked at Calvin's claim that the Decalogue reveals God's nature and holiness and although we have some reservations about the idea of a complete revelation just within the commandments , we have no hesitation in accepting that they do demonstrate many of the characteristics of God and are a proclamation of the behaviour God expects from his people. As such they present a criterion for

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[37]Calvin op cit, pgs.431f

judgment - faithful people keep them, the unfaithful don't. Harrelson draws attention to this when he says, ". . these words mark the paths that lead, respectively, to death and to life. They clearly lay out the way of death, the way on which all who do what is here prohibited are embarked".[38] Childs expresses a similar idea; he says, "Commandments which serve the faithful as guides to life similarly work death to the disobedient. This dual side of the law is highlighted throughout the Pentateuch, both in the ceremony which sealed the covenant (Exodus 24) and in the ritual of blessing and cursing. The execution of judgment announced by the prophets was contained within the law itself from the beginning".[39]

Certainly the prophets would seem to use the principles of the Decalogue as a standard for right conduct both in proclaiming what should be done and in condemning the covenant people for their failure of Jahweh (Amos 8:4ff, Hosea 4:1-3, 13:2, Micah 6:6-8). Similarly we have seen how, in St. Matthew's gospel, the evangelist presents Jesus as suggesting that the commandments are a proper criterion for deciding who is worthy of eternal life (19:16-17). Thus it is possible to suggest that one of the ways the commandments function within the canon is to keep before the community of faith God's requirements and therefore to invite God's people to measure their conduct by them.

The second ingredient is the canonical recognition of human sinfulness, cited earlier (Psalm 14:1, Isaiah 64:6, Matthew 7:11 cf. 19:17) together with the recognition of unworthiness that comes when people are confronted by the holiness of God (Isaiah 6:5, Job 42:5-6, cf. Romans 3:23, 7:18-20). God is holy. The Holy God has set his way

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[38]W.Harrelson op cit p.160

[39]Childs - OT in Canonical context. pp.56-57

before humanity but they have not kept it. When human conduct is measured by God's law then it is found wanting and so God's law demonstrates human unworthiness to those who are willing to measure their conduct by it.

Of course it did not, and does not always have this effect. The commandments have often been broken by those who know them best, and that without a twinge of conscience. In 1 Kings 22 we have the story of about 400 prophets telling the king what he wanted to hear and attributing the message to God (verse 6) - surely a breach of the third commandment! When the prophet Micaiah comes with the real message of God there is no repentance only abuse for God's servant (verse 24). Or there is the story of Elijah fleeing from the wrath of Jezebel (1 Kings 19) and making his complaint before God that the people have killed the prophets, thrown down God's altars and forsaken the covenant with its obligation to keep the commandments (verse 10) - seemingly a case of the law of God being treated with contempt rather than bringing about repentance and a sense of unworthiness. It is not only those whom the scripture portrays as wicked that fail to repent, sometimes good people are shown to have "blind-spots"; one such example would be king Jotham who is said to have done what was "right in the eyes of the Lord" but is criticised because he did not remove the "high places" (2 kings 15:34-35) which, in the total canonical context, implies a breaking of the second commandment.

This opens up a whole area of theological discussion about human response to God's revelation which is outside the scope of this study. We simply note at this point that although God's dynamic action in choosing Israel to be his people (and in Christian terms the gift of Salvation through Jesus) must never be undervalued, neither must we undervalue the response that he requires - Joshua challenges the

people to choose (Joshua 24:15). The commandments require the same response - if they are approached through faith they enable us to see God as he is and ourselves as we are. Calvin says, "We cannot be permitted to measure the glory of God by our own ability; whatever we may be, he ever remains like Himself."[40]

c. Right response is obedience

This follows naturally from what we have said about recognition of unworthiness. Because God is our creator, says Calvin, he should be regarded as father and master and should receive from us fear, reverence and glory. We are not free to do as we please, "but are bound to obey him implicitly, and to acquiesce entirely in his good pleasure."[41] Later he has some hard things to say about the Schoolmen whom he interprets as implying that the Law is something to be kept by monks but is "optional" for ordinary people. He firmly believes that it is for all Christians at all times, to this end he quotes Augustine, "When the Lord forbids adultery he forbids it in regard to the wife of a foe no less than to the wife of a friend; when he forbids theft he does not allow stealing of any description whether from a friend or an enemy."[42]

Response to God is a complex issue and much has been written on the subject. A full study would need to consider the use of "hear" (שמע) "keep" (שמר) and "do" (עשה) all of which are connected with obedience[43]. We also note that this subject has been discussed both from within the historical context and from the viewpoint of individual responsibility emerging from corporate

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[40]Calvin op cit pp.431

[41]Calvin op cit p.431

[42]Calvin op cit p.488

[43]e.g. W.Zimmerli op cit p.142

identity. This provides a different perspective from those who seek to examine Old Testament theology within the canonical context; it is this latter position that is most in accord with Calvin's approach to scripture. Childs discusses these different perspectives[44] and suggests that the Old Testament canon itself gives hermeneutical guidelines for a proper theological understanding of Israel's response; the key is God's activity. He says, "God is the source of all justice and he seeks to evoke from Israel a response commensurate with his holiness."[45] - a sentiment that would receive wholehearted approval from Calvin!

When we look at this with specific reference to the ten commandments one of the most interesting areas of consideration is the Sabbath commandment which, particularly in Deuteronomy, uses the language of obedience. Commandments 6-10 have a self-evident value as rules for ordering the life of any community; giving sole allegiance to a god and only using his name in the right way, are understandable demands of almost any cult. The prohibition of images and the keeping of the sabbath are harder to understand. Within the received text the Sabbath commandment is justified on humanitarian grounds (generally accepted as later additions), but there is evidence within the Old Testament (and certainly in society today) that these humanitarian reasons were found irksome but obedience was still demanded and given (Amos 8:5). Failure to obey the Sabbath law was seen as a reason why Israel knew God's wrath and exile (Nehemiah 13:17-18). There is opportunity for further reflection on obedience to Jahweh's Sabbath requirements in the story of the manna (Exodus 16) which we shall

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[44]B.S.Childs - Old Testament theology in a canonical context pp.204-221

[45]B.S.Childs - op cit p.220.

discuss more fully in the next chapter. The people were moaning because of lack of food. Although Moses and Aaron are the direct objects of their complaint the narrative makes it clear that they are really complaining about the way God has treated them (verse 8). God meets their need through the provision of the manna and calls them to a new obedience - they have shown ingratitude despite his mighty act of deliverance and they need to re-affirm their commitment to him through obedience. The story is structured around the importance of the Sabbath, and the way the sabbath is kept by obeying the command not to do any work on this one special day in every seven (verses 22-30). The story emphasises that obedience is something God merits at all times; if they try to gather manna on the Sabbath then they go hungry, if they disobey and gather too much on other days then it rots. The manna was a mighty act that required (and enforced) the response of obedience.

In this study we have seen how Calvin extends the application of the commandments to areas beyond their immediate, obvious meaning through his elliptical principle, his recognition of the counterbalancing prohibition or exhortation, and the concern with motives as well as action. We have sought to show that this is a fair reading of both Old and New Testaments if one adopts the canon as the appropriate context of meaning. We have also seen how many narratives encourage reflection upon aspects of the decalogue. In considering human response to the commandments we have seen how Calvin sets before us areas with enormous theological implications - the need to recognise the one who gives the law, the fact that they illustrate human unworthiness and the need for the response of obedience - and again we have looked at these in the context of the canon. In the light of

Calvin's acceptance of the Bible as a unified whole, it is not surprising that his work shows a marked similarity to the "theological principles" that emerged from our study of Matthew's attitude to the Decalogue, in chapter 2. There may be some reservations about, for example, his identification of the the Old Testament covenant community with the New Testament church - in his exposition of the first commandment he links together the declaration, "I am the Lord thy God . . " with Jeremiah 31:33 and Matthew 22:32 and thus declares, "he is the God of the church"[46] and lays upon Christians the responsibility to keep the principles of this (and all the commandments) - yet it is difficult to reject his position if one accepts that the New Testament community of faith in some way stands in continuity with the Old Testament community of faith. As we shall see, in the next chapter (on the sabbath) Calvin does also recognise a degree of discontinuity between the two testaments when interpretation and application are affected by the coming of Christ.

It would also seem appropriate to express some concern about the impression Calvin gives of absolute certainty in his understanding of both God's self-revelation and God's will. There seems little room in his theology for questioning God, and there are few grey areas in his application of God's law. Yet questioning seems to be a legitimate activity for the community of faith. Childs draws attention to the canonical "re-ordering" of the Psalter so that Psalm 1 stands as an introduction to the whole collection, he says, "As an introduction it designates those prayers which follow as the medium through which Israel now responds to the divine word"[47]. The Psalms are full of laments and questionings. One of the ways the people of God respond

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[46]Calvin op cit, p.443

[47]B.S.Childs - op cit p.207

to him is by pouring out their puzzlement over his actions in his world and in their lives. It is surely this very process of questioning by the community of faith that makes for a living relationship to the creator God and enables the decalogue to be applied to the problems of each generation.

Because Calvin was "a man of his time" there is an inherent limitation in his approach, that left certain historical issues untouched. He did not have before him the findings of form, textual and traditio-historical scholars and so neither the controversies nor the insights that have come from seeking the origins of the commandments were available to him. The result is that he has nothing to say about things such as the process of theological reflection, within the community of Israel, that led to our final form of the fourth commandment. Nor does he give any explanation for the differences between Exodus and Deuteronomy.

For the same reason we must expect the controversies of his day to have a place in what he writes - his concern with the theology of the Schoolmen must be seen in the light of the conflict between Roman Catholicism and the newly emerging Protestantism. It is for these reasons that we have been more concerned with the principles behind what he says than with the details of his exegesis.

Despite these reservations Calvin's principles of interpretation, and his theological insights into the ways people should respond to the commandments, can make a significant contribution as we try to find solutions to modern problems. When we study his exegesis we see the way the commandments are related to each other - they are not just individual commandments, applying to separate areas of life, but are God's rules covering all aspects of life. It may be that the teaching of more than one commandment can apply to any given situation. For

example when we consider the implications of the fourth commandment in twentieth century Britain, we may need to take account of Calvin's application of the the third, eighth and tenth commandments as well. If Calvin were alive today he would have pertinent things to say about human rights, women's issues, democracy, emerging nations, green issues, family life, human sexuality, economic structures and every part of our being where one person's life touches that of another. In all this he would never lose sight of "the lawgiver" who created humanity to enjoy life with him and who gave his law to set the bounds of legitimate activity.

Chapter 4

THE SABBATH AND THE DECALOGUE

When seeking to discover the theological implications of the decalogue the fourth commandment is a particularly rich source for investigation. Not only is it the longest of the commandments, suggesting that it has been more widely edited than the others, but there are also the greatest number of differences between the two versions of Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15.

This particular commandment brings into sharp focus the differences between Jewish and Christian approaches. A Christian Commentator such as G.Wenham says, "with the creation of man the creation account reaches its climax"[1], whereas in Judaism there is a tendency to see the Sabbath as "the crowning feature of creation"[2]. Christians (especially Protestants) tend to find the governing of religious life by a whole series of detailed regulations irksome; in contrast the Jew, or at least the Rabbinic schools, delight in the law; Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz says, "Each commandment, law and insight illuminates and warms Jewish minds and hearts no less than rays of the sun illuminate and warm the earth."[3].

We draw attention to this contrasting approach as a reminder of the need for caution in looking at the sabbath in the Hebrew scriptures. It is all too easy to assess the material in the light of a New Testament, Christian, twentieth century understanding - and thus undervalue those processes that led to the development of the sabbath in the Old Testament.

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[1]G.Wenham, Genesis 1-15 p.27

[2]Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz - Bereshis vol 1 p.xxviii

[3]Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz ibid p.xliii.

THE ORIGIN OF THE SABBATH.

It is not the purpose of this study to solve the problem of the origin of the sabbath (even if that were possible). Nevertheless the work that has been done by many eminent scholars in seeking to find an extra-biblical origin for the fourth commandment - both in terms of the etymology of the word "sabbath", and with regard to the traditions and laws governing the seventh day of the week - is important. If it can be shown that the sabbath has evolved from an already existent institution it might have a considerable bearing upon our theological understanding of this Hebrew institution. In general terms the origin has been sought either in association with the planets, and particularly with the moon or Saturn, or as a development of social customs and institutions.

Attempts have been made to place the origin in ancient Babylon. J.Meinhold[4], for example, saw a close link between the Babylonian "sapattu" and Hebrew root שבת. Following the work of T.G.Pinches[5] it is now generally accepted that "sapattu" should be identified with the fifteenth day of the month - the day of the full moon.[6] Another significant discovery was originally made by G.Smith who writes, "In the year 1869 I discovered among other things a curious religious calendar of the Assyrians, in which every month is divided into four weeks, and the seventh days, or 'sabbaths', are marked out as days on which no work should be undertaken".[7]

Much work has been done on these ideas since that time. Many

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[4] J.Meinhold - "Zur Sabbathfrage", ZAW 48 (1930) pp.121-128.

[5] T.G.Pinches -"Sapattu, the Babylonian Sabbath." PSBA 26, (1904) pp.51-56)

[6] But N.H.Snaith, The Jewish New Year Festival p.103f, believes that sapattu refers to the "new- moon day" and not the "full-moon day".

[7] G.Smith - Assyrian discoveries: an account of Explorations and Discoveries on the site of Ninevah during 1873 and 1874 p.12

believe that the origin of the sabbath is to found in this ancient calendar and in the link with the moon's phases; a view that is perhaps re-enforced by Biblical references to "new moon and sabbath" (e.g. 2 Kings 4:23, Amos 8:5). A natural outcome of Meinhold's lunar-link is his suggestion that the sabbath was originally a monthly festival and the "weekly sabbath" originated with Nehemiah during the time of the exile.

Although there is an obvious similarity between the words "sapattu" and "sabbath" the link between the Hebrew sabbath and these days of taboo, or ill-omen, is somewhat tenuous and unconvincing. For example the Old Testament sees the sabbath as a day of joy not of evil omen; a day for God's people to celebrate their relationship to him, not to go in fear of reprisal. We also note that the Sabbath occurs every seven days regardless of the phases of the moon, not in dependence upon them. The suggestion that the weekly sabbath was an exilic institution is dealt with very convincingly by W.W.Canon[8] who demonstrates that the four sources, Deuteronomy, J, H, E, three of which are most likely pre-exilic, all agree that the sabbath is a weekly event and in Nehemiah there is no indication of something new but rather the enforcing of an older law.

An alternative theory is linked to the Kenites and associated with the worship or veneration of the planet Saturn. The sabbath as a day governed by Saturn was advocated as long ago as 1874 by A.Kuenen;[9] it was so unfavourable for work that labour was omitted. Over 50 years later it was revived by B.D.Eerdmanns[10] who further claimed that it

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[8]W.W.Canon - "The weekly Sabbath" ZAW 49 (1931) pp.325-327)

[9]A.Kuenen - The Religion of Israel p.276

[10]B.D.Eerdmanns - "Der Sabbath" ZAW 41 (1925) pp.79-83

was the Saturn day of the Kenites. This "Kenite hypothesis" has a considerable number of advocates amongst whom are K.Budde[11], H.H.Rowley[12] and E.Nielsen[13]. The Kenites are assumed to have been a tribe of itinerant smiths for whom fire was absolutely essential (Saturn is associated with the God of fire as well as having the seventh day named after it). The Israelites encountered them as they settled in the promised land but Moses had already learnt his Jahwism from Jethro who is said to have had a Kenite connection (Judges 1:16). It is suggested that Exodus 35:3, with its prohibition of lighting fires on the sabbath, reflects this connection, as perhaps does the event recorded in Numbers 15 verse 32ff. Amos 5 verse 26, with its reference to "Sakkuth" and "Kaiwan" names of Assyrian deities (or a single deity) associated with the planet Saturn, is cited as evidence of Israel having absorbed alien forms of worship from the Kenites in the Mosaic era.

Earlier we indicated that the evidence for this theory is flimsy. E.G.Kraeling says the assumption that Exodus 35:3 and Numbers 15:32 represent Kenite tradition, "is a very large one due to the lateness of the documents"[14] (we might well want to say that it is a "large assumption" even if the documents are early!). Furthermore he suggests that the prohibition of fire making points more to a comparison with primitive fire taboos rather than to the smiths. But his strongest objection is that, "the whole hypothesis rests on the assumption that the Kenites had a seven-day week, and, what is even more dubious, a week in which the respective days were dedicated to

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11K.Budde -"The sabbath and the week" JTS 30 (1929) pp.1-15

12H.H.Rowley - "Moses and the decalogue" in Men of God pp.1-36)

13E.Nielsen - The Ten Commandments in new perspective pp.102f

14E.G.Kraeling - "The present status of the sabbath question" AJSL, 49 (1932-33) p.219

the planetary gods. That is something that one can never expect to see proved". Meinhold also attacks the idea[15]. He denies that the Kenites were smiths and doubts that the Kewan of Amos 5:26 was Saturn or that Siccut is identical with Sakkut. We should also point out that the incident in Numbers is directly concerned with gathering sticks not with making a fire.

Another possible origin is that the sabbath developed from market days. An agricultural community might need to stop its normal work in order to sell its produce. One advocate of this is M.Weber[16] who accepts that "sabbath" and "sapattu" probably have a common heritage and says that the seventh day in Israel was a joyous day of cessation from labour - an idea that fits in well with a market day. Another is E.Meyer[17] who agrees the sabbath has this economic-social origin but rejects any connection with Babylonian "sapattu". The problem with this suggestion is that there is no biblical evidence to support it and in fact trading on the sabbath is prohibited. Amos, for example, complains about the attitude of people who long for the sabbath to be over so that they may return to their corrupt trading practices which have been temporarily interrupted by the need to observe this day (Amos 8:5). We also have Nehemiah going to considerable lengths to prevent the sabbath being profaned by trade (Nehemiah 13:15-21). It is difficult to account for this if the day had originated as a market day.

Some have sought the origin of the sabbath in the etymology of the verb שָׁבַת and noun שַׁבָּת. We have already seen one suggestion, i.e. that the word is either derived from the Accadian "sapattu" or at

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15G.Meinhold - op cit pp.121-128.

16W.Weber - Aufsatze zur religionssoziolgie vol.III p.159ff

17E.Meyer - Geschicte des Altertume vol. II" pp.318f

least has a common origin. Others[18] are attracted to the importance of the number seven in Hebrew thought and suggest that just as שבע (to swear) is denominated from it so there could be a link with שבת (though it is difficult to see how שבע became שבת).

G.Robinson has produced a detailed and careful study[19] of the Hebrew roots that are often translated as expressing the idea of "rest", namely זעל , נוח , and שבת . His object is to show that the idea of "rest from labour" is not basic to any of these roots and concludes that it is impossible for שָׁבַת to be the denominative of the noun שַׁבָּת , nor could שַׁבָּת have been derived from the verbal root שבת . He also suggests that perhaps the Hebrew verb and noun, together with the Accadian "sapattu" have a common linguistic heritage in the ancient orient - perhaps there is some link with שוב (making a turn). Inevitably this work is somewhat speculative and I would prefer to go along with those who accept that both the verb "to rest" and the noun "sabbath" are derived from the root שבת - and it is worth at least noting that this is the etymology suggested by Genesis 2:2-3.[20]

This survey illustrates the inconclusive nature of attempts to find the origin of the Hebrew sabbath outside Israelite tradition and religious writings. Other communities may well have had sacred days, days of rest and special days of celebration but the Old Testament sabbath seems independent of all known rhythms of nature and unlike anything that existed elsewhere; it is presented to the reader

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[18]e.g. W.Weber, op cit.

[19]G.Robinson - "The idea of rest in the Old Testament and the search for the basic character of the sabbath". ZAW 92 (1980) pp.32-42)

[20]e.g. N.E.A.Andreasen - The Old Testament sabbath, a tradition-historical investigation p.9, R.De Vaux - Ancient Israel, its life and institutions p.475

as entirely God-centred thus making historic comparisons with the special days of other nations difficult to explore. The only real and certain source of information about the nature of the sabbath is the Hebrew scriptures and it is to these we now turn.

THE DECALOGUE.

As indicated earlier the sabbath commandment is presented differently in the two versions of the Decalogue. Elsewhere we have discussed something of the history and development of the commandments and the fact that behind them there was an older tradition. Whether this tradition was oral or written is to a large extent immaterial for our purposes. The original fourth commandment would perhaps have been something like :-

"REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY",

and I see no particular need to give this a negative structure. However this is not the form of the commandment in the text; we have the expanded forms of Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15 and it these we need to look at first.

If the original precept was a brief command to keep the sabbath holy, then we now have not just the commandment but also an explanation and justification. It tells us something of what it means to keep the day holy and why this should be done. It is easy to understand how this process could take place as an interaction between the concern of "teachers" to ensure that the law was properly fulfilled and people's desire to know how they should behave. By some such process the commandment could have been expanded to include the "model answers". It seems clear that this is not just the commandment but reflection upon that commandment. This reflection is of considerable significance for us and later we shall look in greater detail at some of the theological implications of the sabbath as a

holy day, a day of rest, a day of rest for all, and the link that both versions make with God's activity.

Because the most explicit references to the sabbath as holy occur in later literature (e.g. Isaiah 58:13, Nehemiah 13:22, Ezekiel 44:24 etc.) we cannot avoid the suggestion that this is a product of a process of reflection that may have developed around the time of the exilic or post-exilic period. J.Pedersen, however, argues that the evidence for the holiness of the sabbath in early Israel is so overwhelming that it cannot be doubted.[21] It was a day to visit a holy man (2 Kings 4:23), a day to visit the temple (2 Kings 11:4-12), a day which even the fraudulent would cease their activities, however unwillingly (Amos 8:5).

In Deuteronomy the form of the commandment is similar to Exodus, though there is perhaps a greater humanitarian concern in that the need for servants to rest as well as masters is emphasised and the list of those who share in the rest is extended to include "ox and ass" as well as cattle. These additions give added emphasis to the fact that ploughing and travel are activities that specifically interfere with proper rest, and thus desecrate the sabbath.

Of greater significance is the different reasons given for sabbath observance. In Exodus it is a remembrance and recognition of God's creative activity, but in Deuteronomy the people are called upon to remember their captivity and slavery in Egypt. Various suggestions are offered to explain these different motivating clauses. De Vaux, for example, sees both motives as being connected with the covenant and suggests that Exodus places the emphasis on the "god of the covenant" whereas Deuteronomy has "in view the people of the

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21 J.Pedersen - Israel, its life and culture III-IV pp.288-289.

covenant".[22] B.S.Childs, whilst recognising that different motives are given, sees little point in discussing which has priority since they are "two sides of the same coin". He says, "within the context of the canon the two motivations interpret each other, God's creative activity is liberating and God's activity as liberator is creative."[23] (the latter part of this is quoted from J.Siker-Giesler[24])

An alternative approach would suggest that the reference in Deuteronomy 5:15 to servitude in Egypt is primarily a reason for allowing servants to share in the sabbath - their own salvation history presents God's people with a challenge to deal humanely with all people. This occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament; Deuteronomy 24:18,22 Exodus 22:21, 23:9 and Leviticus 19:34 are other examples of where their captivity in Egypt is used to remind the people of the need for humane action. In essence this is the view of Andreasen who examines the structure of Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15 in detail[25] and, amongst other things, notes that Exodus 20 verse 11b corresponds stylistically to verse 8 and is also introduced by כִּי־שֵׁשֶׁת. Similarly, Deuteronomy 5 verse 15b is strikingly similar to verse 12a and is also introduced by כִּי־עֶבֶד. His analysis encourages him to suggest that 15a is not a reason for sabbath observance but rather represents the Deuteronomists interest in salvation history and implies that on the sabbath day Israel is to remember her Exodus deliverance. If this is accepted then it gives these verses a wider concern; the prime concern is obedience to God and from that obedience flows humanitarian concern. This suggestion, however, does not tell

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[22] R.De Vaux - op cit p.481

[23] B.S.Childs - Old Testament theology in a canonical context p.70

[24] J.Siker-Gieseler - "The theology of the sabbath in the Old Testament: a Canonical approach" StBib 2 (1981) p.16

[25] N.E.A.Andreasen op cit pp.131-134 & 170-171

us why God's authority is specifically emphasised in this one commandment. The decalogue as a whole is perceived as coming directly from God and thus already has a unique claim upon the obedience of the covenant people (Exodus 20:1-2, Deuteronomy 5:6). The absence of such an explanation encourages us to think, with Childs, that the community were expected to keep the sabbath, and in their sabbath keeping to show concern for others, as a response to the creative and liberating activity of God. Thus reflection upon the ancient sabbath command has led, it would seem, to the conclusion that their salvation-history puts God's covenant people under obligation to act humanely. Indeed one of the unique features of the decalogue as a whole is that it puts duty to others into the context of duty to God. To "remember the sabbath day" became a central expression of the covenant relationship and in a unique way it demonstrated both dependence upon Jahweh and the essential fact that there is a spiritual dimension to the life of man. God is the creator of all things and one who, from the beginning of time, had planned a pattern of work and rest ideally suited to the needs of his creation, therefore cessation of labour is integral to a proper keeping of sabbath.

THE CANONICAL APPROACH

An alternative to trying to trace the developmental history of the sabbath is to interpret Israel's story as it stands within the Pentateuch and other biblical literature. The editing of the individual books and the arrangement of the canon as a whole can be seen as a deliberate, conscious process through which we are presented with a set of theological ideas and understandings. This is discussed fully by, for example, Childs who says, "It is a basic tenet of the canonical approach that one reflects theologically on the text as it

has been received and shaped."[26] This enables us to look at the sabbath material in a different way. Historical studies approach the material diachronically but the "canonical approach takes the development of traditions as a whole and views it synchronically, sensing when these traditions highlight certain aspects or nuances and de-emphasize or ignore others. The task of the canonical approach is to discern these peaks and valleys in order to understand the theological shape of these texts."[27] Later we shall discuss some of the theological principles that the text highlights in this way.

In its canonical setting the creation story of Genesis 1:1-2:3 takes on a new importance with regard to the sabbath. Now it is not written to support the exilic understanding of the sabbath but rather that the weekly structure of six working days followed by a day of rest stems from the creative activity of God. The writer of Genesis, according to Driver[28], seems to have in his mind the idea that God's sabbath intervened between the close of his work of creation and the commencement of what we would term his sustaining providence. Since, therefore, it comes between two types of "work" it is a prototype of the weekly recurring sabbath of the later Israelites. Although the seventh day is not called the sabbath in Genesis 2:3 the divine example is clear and from the very beginning of all things the weekly pattern of life is established - six days of work followed by a seventh day of rest. The seventh day is hallowed by the fact of God's rest and, according to Rabbi Rav Saadich, "the blessing and sanctification prophetically refer to those who observe the sanctity

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26 B.S.Childs op cit, see especially chapter 1 pp.1-17

27 J.Siker-Gieseler op cit p.14

28 S.R.Driver - The book of Genesis p.18

of the sabbath for they will be blessed and sanctified."[29] Certainly in Exodus 20:11, like Genesis 2:3, God's resting, blessing and hallowing are all inseparably linked together, leading Siker-Gieseler to say, "God's resting on the seventh day calls forth his blessing of the sabbath; the blessing of the sabbath is God's hallowing it as as a solemn day of holy rest, set apart from other rest. God also freely gives the sabbath to Israel not as a possession , but as a holy gift Israel is to observe. God's sharing the sabbath with Israel implies that Israel shares all of the responsibilities that go with keeping the sabbath.".[30] So in the canonical setting of Genesis 2:3, the seventh day is established as a blessing to be enjoyed by all people; a day that is, and has always been, "Holy to the Lord".

There is no mention of the sabbath in the patriarchal material - though perhaps there is a hint of a seven day week in the intervals between Noah sending out the birds (Genesis 8:10,12) and the seven year service of Jacob for Leah and Rachel described as a week (Genesis 29:27-28). The fact that the Patriarchal stories are in both a historical and canonical setting prior to the Sinai covenant, through which the Israelites were confirmed as Jahweh's special people, may explain this silence.

The gift of manna (Exodus 16:13-30) is a story of God providing for the needs of his wandering people. It is also a story of the people discovering, by experience, the importance of sabbath obedience and how Jahweh insisted that they rest from their work. God tells Moses what he is about to do (Exodus 16:4-5). When the manna comes the people are puzzled and Moses tells them part of the story, namely that they are to gather a day's supply. Some try to gather more, only

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[29] Bereishis Vol 1 p.84

[30] J.Siker-Giesler, op cit, p.12

to find it rots (verse 20). On the sixth day there is twice as much manna. Childs points out that this was not an "afterthought, but built into the essential structure of the gift from the start (v5)."[31] Verse 22 gives the impression that they gathered twice as much almost without thinking and then came to Moses to ask what to do. He now tells them the rest of the story; it is all about the sabbath. The seventh day "is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the lord" (v23). Thus God acts in accordance with his creation principles. On the sabbath day God does not work by providing manna and the people cannot work gathering it: his people are to hallow the sabbath by cessation of labour but provision will still be made for their need and on that day they will know special blessings.

The giving of the decalogue represents a high point in the history of God's dealings with his people. In its context it is presented as a complete, unified whole. This final form is not concerned with a history of thinking about the sabbath nor with the fact that the commandment may have been gradually evolved and refined over a long period of time. It is concerned with a direct command to keep the seventh day holy, which is achieved when the whole community refrains from work and rests. This, says the fourth commandment, is God's way of doing things - it is the policy he adopted at creation and it is the policy he adopted when he fed them in the wilderness. The first three commandments bear witness to the uniqueness of Jahweh. The last six regulate relationships within the community and would be an acceptable outline of law in any society. The weekly sabbath is unique but its justification is that Jahweh has commanded it and that it reflects his activity since the beginning of time.

The fourth commandment forms a bridge or link; it looks back to

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[31] B.S.Childs, Exodus p.290

the commandments about duty to God and forward to those concerned with duty to others. In this way it becomes a symbol of the whole of the decalogue - just as the decalogue stands at the heart of Torah so in some ways the sabbath commandment stands at the heart of the decalogue. This idea can perhaps help us to understand more clearly the important place it is given in the exilic and post-exilic period; the temple had been destroyed and the law is now symbolised by the sabbath. Hence the calamities that fell upon Israel, including the exile, are seen as the result of failure to keep sabbath (Nehemiah 13:17-18), and the sabbath is an ever present sign of the covenant (Ezekiel 20:12,20). But the sabbath is also a sign of the fickleness of God's people. They have to be persuaded and threatened and forced to observe the sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15-22). This is the picture in Ezekiel and Nehemiah where the prophets continually call upon the people to turn back to God and his way, to be faithful to the Sinai covenant as symbolised by the sabbath (e.g. Nehemiah 9:14, Ezekiel 20:16, 20-21). In their contextual setting the exilic and post-exilic writings add nothing new to the sabbath commandment but are trying to ensure that the people know the benefits that come from living in harmony with their creator.

THE SABBATH IN ST. MATTHEW'S GOSPEL.

When we looked at the use of the Decalogue in St. Matthew's Gospel we inevitably spent some time considering the Sabbath. Matthew is not concerned with either the original form of the fourth commandment, or with the way it evolved, but rather with how it is perceived in relation to the person of Jesus. Its divine institution and authority are not questioned but they are related to Matthew's christology - Jesus is "Lord of the sabbath" (12:8). We have also noted, with

Sanders[32], that the majority of the disputes Jesus had, with those who represented the various religious groupings of his day, fell within the parameters of contemporary debates about how the law should be applied; this would seem to be true of the sabbath controversies recorded in chapter 12 of the Gospel.

THE SABBATH IN CALVIN'S WORK.

In general Calvin makes no distinction between the Old and New Testaments and is, therefore, concerned with how the Sabbath commandment relates to the canon as a whole. He does, however, recognise a measure of discontinuity between the two Testaments regarding the sabbath and seeks to come to terms with the problem created by, "the external observance of a day which was abolished with the other types by the advent of Christ."[33] This leads him to say, "the mode of exposition must be somewhat different" and, "we must look deeper for our exposition".[34]

The exposition he gives contains three major elements. First, in the sabbath the people were given a type of spiritual rest that allowed God to work in them. Second, there should be a stated day set aside for the people to assemble together, hear the law, perform religious rites, give time to meditation and thus to be trained in piety. Third, all who live under authority should share the day of rest. Each of these elements raise questions as to whether or not they are an appropriate way for Christians to read the biblical material. Is the rest of the sabbath day intended to be "a type of spiritual rest that allowed God to work in them"? How important is the seventh day? How universal is the commandment?

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[32]E.P.Sanders - Jewish law from Jesus to Mishnah pp.94-5

[33]Calvin - Institutes of the christian religion p.460

[34]Calvin - op cit p.460

To support his contention, that a symbolic representation of spiritual rest held a primary place in the sabbath, Calvin refers to the fact that when the prophets wanted to condemn false religion they spoke in terms of the sabbath not being honoured (Ezekiel 22:8, 23:38 Amos 8:5). He particularly draws attention to Exodus 31:31-37 and passages in Ezekiel[35] where the sabbath is described as holy, as a sign between God and his people, as something that brings blessings when kept but disaster when profaned. Thus in the Old Testament the sabbath is not just a matter of obedience to God's law but it is seen as something positive that has a spiritual dimension, enabling the people to be God's people, both by resting in him and allowing him to work in them (Calvin refers his readers to Hebrews 3:13, 4:3,9)[36]. When he discusses the importance of the seventh day Calvin says, "there can be no doubt, that, on the the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ceremonial part of the commandment was abolished"[37]. He then quotes Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:16-17 to draw out the truth that Christianity is not concerned with giving only one day to God but with changing our whole lives. Although he advances several possible explanations for the choice of the seventh day as the sabbath - i.e perpetuity (a looking forward to that time when God shall be "all in all", 1 Corinthians 15:28) or the stimulus of imitating the Creator - he puts it in perspective when he says, "It is of little consequence which of these be adopted, provided we lose not sight of the principal thing delineated., the mystery of perpetual resting from our works."[38]. Again this resting from normal work is not a negative thing but provides opportunity for Christians to meet together, to

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[35]see especially Ezekiel 20:12-26

[36]Calvin op cit p.461

[37]Calvin op cit p.462

[38]Calvin op cit p.462

share in communion and public prayers as well as for private meditation upon God's word. A special day should not detract from the daily obligation that every Christian has with regard to prayer and worship, but is essential for the life of the church and the spiritual growth of the individual. Calvin is unfair in his criticism of the way the Old Testament community of faith observed the sabbath. He regards their cessation of labour, on this one day of each week, as merely a religious rite rather than a genuine desire to grow in the knowledge of God; he calls it, "this preposterous observance ofdays"[39]. This is not how the Israelites saw it - for them it was a day given to God which commemorated both creation and deliverance (Exodus 20:11, Deuteronomy 5:15). However, to avoid what he sees as the superstitious observance of the Jewish Holy day, and at the same time to commemorate the Resurrection, he says it is appropriate that, "another day was appointed for that purpose".[40] In this way Calvin is able to move, fairly comfortably, from the seventh day sabbath to the Christian Sunday. He honours the Old Testament principle of a weekly day of rest but also, like the New Testament community of faith, gives a special place to the day of resurrection.[41]

The universality of the rest that is commanded is something that we shall need to look at when we consider possible applications of this commandment in the modern world. What is clear, from any reading of the fourth commandment, is that in a Hebrew society all were to rest; the humanitarian nature of the rule embraces all levels of workers together with the animals. Calvin certainly sees it as a

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[39]Calvin op cit p.465

[40]Calvin op cit p.465

[41]For a full discussion of modern views on the merits of the seventh day or Sunday see W.M.Swartley - Slavery, Sabbath, war and women, chapter 2

Christian responsibility to ensure that dependants were not oppressed but allowed to share in sabbath rest.

Although Calvin's exposition of this commandment reflects attitudes and ideas that are appropriate for Christian behaviour, in the light of the canon, we do have to recognise that scripture does not specifically command this conduct - the fifth commandment only tells us what should not be done on the sabbath.

THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES AND MODERN PROBLEMS.

Throughout this consideration of the sabbath we have seen how the text, both as it evolved to its final form in the decalogue and as it stands in its canonical setting, presents us with a number of theological ideas. We have also seen how these concepts are handled in St. Matthew's gospel and Calvin's thought. We now attempt to draw these ideas together and briefly mention some of their implications for Christian living today.

First is the association of "holy" with the sabbath. The basic meaning of קדש is "set apart" and it is primarily seen as an attribute of God - God is Holy. People and things are called holy because of their relationship to him. Andreasen says, "The holy, however, invades human experience and attaches itself to places and time . . .".[42] The seventh day is called a "holy sabbath" (Exodus 16:22, 31:14-15, 35:2 Isaiah 58:13) and in the Decalogue God's people are commanded to keep it holy (cf. Jeremiah 17:22, 24, 27 Ezekiel 20:20, 44:24 Nehemiah 13:22)

There is not a great deal of detail about what Israel should do on the sabbath but it is generally assumed that it is kept holy by refraining from work (Nehemiah 13:15-22, Jeremiah 17:19-27) and conversely that Israel refrains from work to keep this day holy. This

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[42]N.E.A.Andreasen op cit p.204

cessation of work sets it apart from other days.

Closely linked with the holiness of the day is the idea that it is "to Jahweh" (לַיהוָה). G.Von Rad suggests that in the cult Israel was called upon to recognise the rights and claims of Jahweh, he says "no cultic celebration was solemnized for Israel, they were all for Jahweh."[43]. Our understanding of this is helped by Exodus 23:10-13 where the sabbath is linked with the sabbatical year. Leaving the earth fallow every seventh year was a declaration that it belonged to Jahweh (note also the humanitarian implications of verse 11b); similarly on one day in seven God's people stopped their normal activities and gave the day to him, a symbolic gesture of his lordship over their whole life. Just as God "blessed" and "hallowed" the seventh day by his own rest (Genesis 2:3, Exodus 20:11) so the people are blessed and sanctified when they keep the sabbath. The sabbath day was not intended to be a day of enforced rest, grudgingly acknowledged (בָּרַךְ when applied to man has the sense of "happiness"), but an expression of the living relationship the community of faith has to the creator. The holiness of the sabbath brings before the people of Israel their unique relationship to Jahweh. The cessation of normal activity makes this day different from all others; time is available for contemplation of the privileges and responsibilities of their special relationship and hence the sabbath becomes the sign of the covenant between God and his people (Exodus 31:13,16,17 Ezekiel 20:12,20).

This raises the issue of the relationship between the Christian church and Israel; this is a complex matter deserving of serious consideration in its own right so although we cannot fully explore it here we do need to make some brief comments. In chapter 3 we

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[43]G.Von Rad - Old Testament Theology Vol.1 p.242

suggested that the New Testament community of faith in some way stands in continuity with the Old Testament community of faith. A canonical reading of scripture makes it possible to suggest that Christians stand in a similar relationship to God as the covenant community of the Old Testament - i.e. Jesus introduced a new covenant, Hebrews 8, 12:24; through Jesus people are sanctified and saved, Matthew 1:21, Hebrews 10:10, 1 Peter 1:17-21; through Jesus Christians become a special and holy people, Romans 9:25-26, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, 1 Peter 2:9-10. If Christians share in the privileges they must also share in the responsibilities - Matthew presents Jesus as telling his followers to be perfect (Matthew 5:48). Despite this it does not seem that a strict observance of the Jewish sabbath was ever imposed upon gentile Christians (e.g Acts 15) but meeting together for worship and studying the scriptures were regarded as important parts of Christian conduct (Hebrews 10:25, 2 Timothy 3:16-17). This accords well with Calvin's perception that there should be a special day each week freed from the burdens of normal life to allow time for religious activity and meditation . Christians need to recognise the need for such a day - a holy day given to God - and when such a day is observed they, like the Old Testament community of faith, will be blessed and sanctified.

Secondly, the sabbath is a day of rest. We saw earlier how Robinson has tried to show that "rest from labour" is not a central issue in the Old Testament. Despite his efforts, however it seems clear that rest from normal work was an integral part of sabbath keeping and it is rest that contributes to the holiness of the day. Work is essential for survival and has been so throughout the history of mankind. Nevertheless this commandment says that on one day in every seven man is to rest. Rest highlights the fact that man is a

"spiritual being"; he is made in the image of God and created for more than an unending round of labour. He needs to affirm symbolically his dependence upon Him. Harrelson expresses this well when he says, "Every seventh day the community is to recognise that it is God who sees to the communities needs, that it is not able fully to care for itself. No matter how successfully the community might be able to till the soil or care for the flocks or regulate trade . . . . it must bear in mind that it is Jahweh who sees to the organisation of the community's life".[44]

R.De Vaux[45] suggests another line of thought, namely that "rest" specifically commemorates the entry into the promised land (cf. Hebrews 3-4). The people of Israel underwent trials and tribulations, both as captives in Egypt and also during the wilderness wanderings. The promised land represented rest after trial - a rest commemorated on the sabbath. Ceasing work reminded Israel of the deliverance Jahweh had provided, a fact that is referred to in the prologue to the decalogue as a whole.

This rest is to be enjoyed by everybody, including cattle and sojourners. The humanitarian aspect of the form of this commandment, as we have it in Deuteronomy, is often emphasised, and it must be admitted that the list of those who are to share in the rest is longer in that version. However the basic intent seems to be the same in both versions. The sabbath is not just a day of rest for the wealthy or the free Israelite but for all people. Budde, referring to the 7 days of creation as a late Priestly addition in Genesis and the link with creation in the fourth commandment, says that if we were to take this seriously then "the sabbath would bind not just Israel but

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[44]W.Harrelson - The ten commandments and human right p.82

[45]R.De Vaux op cit p.481

all humanity."[46] In a sense that is exactly what is happening. Jahweh is the creator of the world and everything in it. The injunction for people and animals to rest on his day points to his sovereignty over all creation.

Thirdly, the sabbath is a memorial of God's activity. We have already looked at the fact that Exodus gives creation as the reason for the sabbath; God completed creation in six days and rested on the seventh, he blessed and hallowed the seventh day, making it special, therefore his people are to remember it and keep it holy. In this way the sabbath is made a divine institution originating from the dawn of time. Deuteronomy links the sabbath with deliverance from Egypt rather than creation and we have noted how these are seen (by Childs and Siker-Gieseler) as complimentary ideas: by creating the sabbath as a day of rest God liberates all creation to share in that rest.[47] Meditating on God's work of creation and liberation transforms the sabbath from a sterile day of non-activity to a special day, set aside from normal activity, to consider the wonder of all that God has done. This again accords well with Calvin's advocacy of a special day for spiritual reflection.

Finally we need to give some indication of how these theological principles can be appropriated today. Modern, industrialised, Western society has a very different structure from the world of the Old Testament and something of the conflicts created by enforced rest through retirement or unemployment are worked through by Harrelson.[48] In broad terms, however, it would seem that the fourth commandment has direct relevance in encouraging the community of faith to set aside

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[46]K.Budde op cit p.3

[47]J.Siker-Gieseler op cit p.16

[48]W.Harrelson op cit, pp.85-89

one day in seven from normal activities so that they may have time to meet together, time to reflect upon all that God has done and time to grow spiritually. This needs constant emphasis in an age when time-off from work becomes busily filled with leisure activities, often leaving little time for God. In Britain today the uniqueness of Sunday is being gradually eroded by a multiplicity of activities, including trading, unlike modern Israel, where religious parties have had considerable success in ensuring cessation from everyday work on the sabbath.

More complex is how this commandment relates to the world outside the church - does it have implications for those who do not belong to the community of faith? Again, in general terms, the commandments are intended for God's people and as they are faithfully kept so they bear witness to the value of a God-centred life. Our study of the fourth commandment suggests (at least in its canonical context) that it is not just a covenant law but a creation principle relevant to all humanity. This is particularly true of the humanitarian concept that all should share in sabbath rest. In twentieth century England Sunday as a special day is being gradually eroded; whilst this enables some to choose from a wide variety of leisure activities it means that others are less able to rest with their families and spend time in "holy meditation". These may well be the most vulnerable members of society - those whom the fourth commandment insists should share in the sabbath. Currently some who do not wish to work on a Sunday are in danger of losing their jobs in the retail industry and certainly lose opportunities of promotion. The fourth commandment is designed to give everybody the opportunity of deepening their relationship to God, the creator and redeemer. This cannot be enforced by law but is a matter of personal choice. We should be concerned that the ability

to exercise this choice is being removed from many for commercial considerations (cf. Amos 8:5, Nehemiah 13:15-22) and so there is a case (on humanitarian grounds if not on religious grounds) for keeping before society the importance of a day when all can cease their normal activities. Such action would seem to be in the spirit of the fourth commandment.

Chapter 5

KILLING AND THE DECALOGUE

The sixth commandment makes the bald, and superficially straight-forward, statement, "You shall not kill"[1]. In fact this is far from straight-forward not least because the commandment, as it stands in the received text, makes no reference to the different sorts of killing possible within human activity. Therefore we shall need to examine whether or not this prohibition applies to all killing or just some killing.

It is further complicated by the violence of the Old Testament. Israel's history contains many acts of violence; these acts were often done in obedience to God and sometimes through his direct activity. The Egyptians were slaughtered at the Red Sea through Divine intervention (Exodus 14:21-29). To take possession of the Promised Land it was necessary to wage wars against those who already dwelt there and this was done with great violence (Joshua 6:21 etc.). Capital punishment was prescribed by the state, under divine guidance, for certain crimes (e.g. Exodus 21:12-17). In personal relationships killings happened - sometimes through deliberate, premeditated action, at other times through unpremeditated, spontaneous violence and also through pure accident - does the sixth commandment apply to all or just some of these instances?

For the Christian there is the further problem of equating the Jesus who declared that hateful thoughts were as serious as violent actions (Matthew 5:22) and who urged his followers to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39) with the Old Testament description of God as יהוה צבאות [2].

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1 the meaning of רצח will be discussed in this paper.

2 P.C.Craigie - The problem of war in the Old Testament p.36 says "Lord of hosts" is used over 100 times and means "God of armies".

These are areas that need serious consideration. In looking at them we shall seek to discover theological principles that shed light on modern war-making as well as issues such as abortion, euthanasia and even family-planning and thus seek to demonstrate that this commandment (along with the other nine) has a vital role in developing Christian attitudes to many aspects of contemporary life.

At the outset it is important to take note of the Israelite perspective of "life", as we have it in the scriptures, because this has an important bearing upon understanding the taking of that life, either through the action of an individual or a nation.

That life is the gift of God is clearly implied in the creation stories (especially Genesis 2:7) and the same theme constantly recurs throughout the Old Testament (e.g. Job 10:8, 31:15, 33:4, Psalm 119:73, Isaiah 44:2, Jeremiah 38:16). However, God is not only seen as the one who creates life but also as one who retains his control over it. For example, in the story of the Flood, God is portrayed as one who has the right to destroy his creation (Genesis 6:7); in 2 Samuel 14 we have the story of the woman of Tekoa pleading for the return of Absalom and speaking of the certainty of death with God's right to take away life (verse 14); Job and Jeremiah both point to God's control over life (Job 10:12, 12:10, Jeremiah 21:8). In this connection it is worth reflecting upon Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 3:10-14), where God's right to prolong the life of man is clearly stated, and the story of Naaman the leper, who brings his demand for a cure to the King of Israel, only for the king to declare that God alone has the right to kill or make alive (2 Kings 5:7).

This leads us to a brief consideration of the link between "life" and "blood". Leviticus 17:11 says, "for the life (נֶפֶשׁ) of the flesh is in the blood", obviously recognising the close connection between

life and blood. W.Eichrodt[3], amongst others, would give this a deeper significance by translating נֶפֶשׁ to mean "life-force"; hence, through the sacrificial system, objects are given a special power by the sprinkling of blood. A. Phillips[4] uses this idea in his explanation of murder. Somehow the murderer takes possession of something that really belongs to God, namely the "life-force" of the slain, and this "life-force" can only be rescued by the execution of the murderer or, if the murderer is unknown, through an appropriate sacrifice (Deuteronomy 21:1-4). This concept that the life is in the blood rather than the flesh explains the absolute prohibition on eating flesh with the blood (Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 17:10ff etc.) and why Jahweh is called the "seeker" after blood (Genesis 9:5, 42:22, Ezekiel 3:18 etc.) - the blood, which belongs to him, has been taken out of his control. It also helps explain a passage such as 2 Samuel 23:17, where David refuses to "drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives".

Giving blood a type of mystical life, apart from the flesh, would seem both unnecessarily complicated and contrary to the normal Hebrew emphasis on the connection between life and body. L.Morris demonstrates that "blood" is used in a "variety of metaphorical senses"[5] and suggests that נֶפֶשׁ is often used in a context where the implication is that of death rather than life (Leviticus 19:28, 2 Samuel 14:7, Jonah 1:14 etc)[6]. In the particular setting of Leviticus 17:11 he would offer the translation of "Life given up in death"[7].

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[3]W.Eichrodt - Theology of the Old Testament Vol.1, p.163 footnote 2

[4]A.Phillips - Ancient Israel's Criminal law pp.83-109

[5]L.Morris - The Apostolic preaching of the cross pp.110-113

[6]L.Morris op cit, p.111.

[7]Morris refers to A.Lods' (The prophets and the rise of Judaism p.294) explanation of this verse: "There is a ransom, a redemption, a death by proxy."

Thus we are led to concur with A.Stibbs when he says, "Blood shed stands, therefore, not for the release of life from the burden of the flesh, but for the bringing to an end life in the flesh. It is a witness to physical death, not an evidence of spiritual life".[8]

1. THE LINGUISTIC APPROACH.

The action prohibited is רצח and so the meaning of this particular word is central to any real understanding of the commandment. The fact that it is a comparatively rare word is emphasised by J.J.Stamm and M.E.Andrew who say, "The word רצח , which is is used in the Decalogue to express killing, is actually a somewhat rare verb when one considers its 46 occurrences in comparison with 165 for הרג and 201 for המת (hiphil of מות "to die")"[9]. It is never used of killing an animal nor of killing an enemy in battle and so it has long been suggested that this word indicates a special type of killing. Although there is no absolute consensus as to its precise meaning we shall see that the majority of scholars tend to interpret it as "murder" in some form or other.

As long ago as 1929 L.Kohler[10] felt that a precise definition of the word was no longer possible! Nevertheless in 1945 J.J.Stamm[11] undertook a detailed word study concluding that רצח has the particular meaning of an illegal killing that is harmful to the community and, therefore, this commandment is designed to protect the life of the Israelite from illegal violence. Others have modified this both to emphasise the Covenant setting of the Decalogue (A.Alt)

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[8]A.Stibbs - The meaning of the word blood in scripture p.12

[9]Stamm & Andrew - The Ten commandments in recent research p.98

[10]L.Kohler - "Der Dekalog" ThR 1 (1929) p.182. He concluded that it most likely simply forbade taking the law into one's own hands.

[11]J.J.Stamm - "Dreissig Jahre Dekalogforschung", ThR 27 (1961) pp.189-239, 281-305.

and to link נאף with blood vengeance (H.G.Reventlow). These considerations are fully worked into Phillips[12] understanding of the word and the commandment; for him נאף is essentially an offence within the Covenant relationship. He suggests that all those who share in the Covenant are linked together as one "family", the people of God, and therefore blood-vengeance as such is ruled out. The responsibility to execute the murderer is a community rather than family responsibility and the גאל is not an "avenger-of-blood" but "a-redeemer-of-blood"[13] (cf. Leviticus 25:25,48, Numbers 5:8, Ruth 3:13, Jeremiah 32:7ff). The blood, according to Phillips, is the property of God to whom it is released on the execution of the murderer and so the recovery of blood is not a matter for the relatives but for Jahweh who is the "seeker of blood" and it is on his behalf that the גאל does his work.

The legislation concerning Cities of Refuge in Numbers 35:9-34 (cf. Joshua 20 & 21:13,21,27,32,38 1 Chronicles 6:57,67) gives further insight into נאף , indeed it is in this legislation that most of its usages occur. There is a recognition that the sixth commandment can be broken by accident; a life may have been taken but the intention to kill need not necessarily have been there. The fact that נאף is used to describe the original act of killing, whether intentional or unintentional, as well as the action taken by the גאל (e.g. verse 21) has led to a modification of the precise definition offered by Stamm.

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[12]A.Phillips op cit, pp.83-109

[13]This view is supported by G.B.Gray in the ICC commentary on Numbers p470-471, "His mission was not vengeance, but equity. He was not an avenger, but a redeemer, a restorer, a balancer" (Clay Trumbull, Blood Covenant p.260).

H.G.Reventlow[14] observed that in most instances the word is used of a situation that would evoke the concept of "blood-vengeance", and the concomitant work of the גֹּאֵל, which leads him to suggest it is this particular form of killing that is understood. The meaning was only refined and modified by later usage. B.S.Childs[15] adds his support to this position and sees in Numbers 35 two layers of meaning. In verses 16, 17, 18, and 21 we have earlier מוֹת יוּמָת sayings whilst a newer definition of רֹצֵחַ is found in verse 20. Another layer is found in verses 24 and 25; in verse 25 the older meaning is preserved in that the slayer who slew unintentionally in called רֹצֵחַ, whereas in verse 24 he is referred to as הָרוֹצֵחַ whilst the congregation decide his fate.

In the Prophetic and Wisdom literature the word invariably has the meaning of "intentional and evil violence"[16] (Isaiah 1:21, Hosea 6:9, Job 24:14, Proverbs 22:13, Psalm 94:6).

We have no qualms in accepting this meaning in the Wisdom literature and the Psalms but are less certain that there are two layers of meaning in Numbers 35 where the emphasis is to provide a legal escape for those who kill unintentionally. There is no dispute that in each of the cases described death has resulted from the violent action of another: the debate concerns whether or not the killing was done with premeditated intent. The aim is to set out principles to enable the community to distinguish between various actions that led to another person's death on the basis of motive and thus, even though the wording is a little puzzling, has a coherence as

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14H.G.Reventlow - Gebot und predigt im Dekalog pp.71ff

15B.S.Childs - Exodus pp.419-421

16B.S.CHilds - op cit, p.421

it stands without the necessity of giving different levels of meaning to רצח .

This linguistic evidence suggests that originally רצח had an objective meaning and described a killing that required the action of the גאל (the fact of escape being offered through the cities of refuge for the "innocent killer" does not alter this meaning). Later (Childs suggests at least before the eighth century) the meaning could have been modified to mean acts of violence against another individual, motivated by personal hatred and malice. The commandment, as it stands, rejects such violence and also forbids a person to take the law into their own hands.

There seems little difficulty in accepting that the commandment prohibits the deliberate taking of another human life for motives of personal hatred, malice, gain or revenge, and also that a distinction was probably made between a deliberate act of this nature (murder) and the accidental taking of life (manslaughter). It is, however, important to note that not all[17] would be happy to limit the scope of the commandment in this way or to maintain within it the distinction between "murder" and "manslaughter". Its use in Numbers 35:30 presents something of a problem in maintaining this precise definition and distinction. There it is used to describe the official execution of the guilty which, although a violent act resulting in death, would not normally be referred to as murder but as the community exercising its responsibility.

Prohibitions against "killing" having the greatest similarity to the Decalogue can be found in Exodus 21:12, Leviticus 24:17 and in the "Blessing and curse ritual" of Deuteronomy 27:24. In each of these נכה is used rather than רצח . This may have no particular

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17e.g. M.Noth, Exodus p.165. A.D.H.Mayes, Deuteronomy p.170.

significance but it does illustrate that רצח is not the only word used for "murder".

A similar comment could be made about the story of Cain's murder of Abel in Genesis 4:8ff where הרג is used. S.H.Hooke suggests that this is an insertion and that, "What the Jahwist is concentrating on is that when the bond of brotherhood is broken, anger and violence break out, and death enters the world. The theme of the broken relationship with God is now developed in its disastrous and divisive consequences"[18]. If this is so then it suggests that הרג, like רצח, can be used of "illegal killing inimical to the community"[19]. Obviously this does not pre-empt efforts to give a specific and precise meaning to רצח, but makes it important to understand that other words can be used to express the same idea: we note that הרג is used in this way (e.g. Exodus 2:14, Jeremiah 4:31,), as are forms of מות (e.g. 1 Samuel 19:1, 2 Samuel 13:28), and נכה (e.g. 2 Samuel 12:9, 2 Kings 15:25). We sympathise, therefore, with Kohler's inability to give a precise definition of רצח for it does not seem possible to advocate a meaning that satisfies every use of the word in the Old Testament. However since it is not used for the killing of an enemy in battle, nor, generally, the legal execution of a law breaker but rather its normal use is "in the context of one Hebrew killing another Hebrew"[20] it is reasonable to propose that it means (or came to mean) a deliberate act of killing motivated by malice. Thus the linguistic evidence suggests that the apparent breadth of the sixth commandment's blanket prohibition should in fact be restricted to something like the modern equivalent of "murder".

18S.H.Hooke - "Genesis", Peake's commentary on The Bible (1962) p.183.
19Stamm's definition of רצח as quoted by B.S.Childs, Exodus p.420
20P.C.Craigie op cit p.58

THE CONTEXTUAL APPROACH

The above "linguistic approach" has not ignored the contexts in which רצח is found but our concern now is with how the "idea" of the sixth commandment functions within the received text of the Old Testament rather than with the precise meaning of words. K.Barth emphasises the importance of context when he says, "The Ten Commandments belong to the whole corpus of ordinances for the common life, law, and culture revealed to Moses and declared by him to the people. . . . . The fact of the matter is that the Ten Commandments are fairly exhaustively interpreted by their immediate context."[21] The "immediate context" he refers to is the "book of the covenant" (Exodus 20:22-23:33)[22], which, in the received text of Exodus, comes immediately after the Decalogue. Our concerns will take us beyond the "immediate context" to the wider context of the Hebrew Scriptures.

In the developing story of the received text the first use of רצח is in the Sinai covenant (for example neither Cain's murder of Abel nor Moses' murder of the Egyptian use the word). Following Barth's suggestion that the book of the Covenant gives the generalised statements of the Decalogue a "precise content"[23] it would seem difficult to use the sixth commandment as an argument against capital punishment since death is specified as the right and lawful response to a wide range of offences (21:12,14,15,16,17,29, 22:18,19,20). In many other places in the Old Testament it is accepted that the community (under God) has the right to take life for other types of anti-social behaviour as well as for personal violence

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[21]K.Barth - Church Dogmatics 2.2 p.684

[22]For a discussion of the critical problems surrounding the Book of the Covenant and its relationship to the Decalogue see B.S.Childs - Exodus pp.451-496

[23]K.Barth - op cit, p.684

against another individual (e.g Genesis 9:6, Exodus 35:2, Leviticus 20:1-5,24:21, Deuteronomy 13:5, 21:18-21, Joshua 1:18, Jeremiah 38:4, etc).

Supportive evidence for the view that the prohibition of רצח applies only to those who are bound together by the covenant relationship - namely free Israelites - can perhaps be found here. With regard to Exodus 21:20f. Phillips[24] makes the point that technically a master could not be executed for killing his slave because slaves, whether Israelite or other nationalities, would not have been present at Sinai and therefore not included in the covenant relationship. Thus instead of the expected מות יומת we get מכה נפש [25].

Childs[26] also draws attention to the way in which slaves are treated differently from free citizens. Causing the death of a slave through beating is treated differently from killing other people because the slave is the property of the master (Exodus 21:21). It is possible, however, that in the light of the general statement of Exodus 21:12, מכה נפש could mean the death penalty - verse 13 limits its applicability but in terms of the motive of the slayer rather than the status of the slain. Leviticus 24:17 makes a similarly authoritative statement followed by the declaration of verse 22 which would seem to rule out varying the law according to the status of the person. Thus the evidence for limiting this commandment to the Covenant community is not so overwhelming as to command universal support and must be treated with caution and involves some

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24A.Phillips op cit, p.88

25B.S.Childs - op cit p.471

26B.S.Childs op cit p.471, cites Jewish interpreters who believe the death penalty is intended, as well as the Talmud which specifies beheading for beating a slave to death.

consideration of what is meant by "the people of God"[27].

As suggested above the Book of the Covenant seeks to make a distinction between those crimes where there was a premeditated intention to kill and those slayings in which there was no premeditation. Commenting on the statement of Exodus 21:13 ("but God let him fall into his hand") Phillips suggests that, since it is God who provides the places of refuge, then it is as if the community is saying that the killing has been committed by Jahweh himself[28]. However, in view of other passages that make a similar distinction between deliberate, premeditated murder and accidental killing (Numbers 35:9-28. Deuteronomy 19:4-6) this would seem to be fairly difficult to maintain and it is much more likely that it should be read as affirming the belief that Jahweh is the giver and sustainer of life.

What becomes clear from the received text is that the prohibition of killing in the decalogue, set as it is in the context of the Sinai Covenant and the Book of the Covenant, is not a total prohibition of all killing but of "murder". Furthermore since cities of refuge are an integral part of community life there is also a recognition that not all acts that lead to the death of another can be treated in the same way - guilt or innocence is linked with motive. The community has to decide who has deliberately broken the covenant law and who has not (Numbers 35:24-25, Deuteronomy 19:12).

Extending the scope of our study from considering the use of נכה to the way in which the Old Testament seeks to protect life deepens our understanding of the sixth commandment. However one story, when read in its canonical context, would seem to lead naturally to

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27e.g. C.J.H.Wright -Living as the people of God

28A.Phillips op cit p.99

the conclusion that רצח is being used to make a particular impact and draw attention to a breach of the decalogue that has taken place. The story of "Naboth's Vineyard" (1 Kings 21) is a story of the abuse of power. Ahab wanted this vineyard to create a new vegetable garden close to his palace. Naboth refused to part with the his family heritage. In consequence the strong-minded and autocratic Jezebel took a hand (verses 5-7); she arranged for false witnesses to make a charge against Naboth and for him to be stoned to death (verses 8-14). After the deed was done she told her husband that the vineyard was now his and he could take possession of it (verses 15-16). At this point Elijah, the prophet of God appears on the scene and says, "have you killed (הרצחת) and also taken possession?". Others were more directly responsible for Naboth's death than Ahab - those who cast the stones, the false witnesses, Jezebel - but he is accused of the crime. Responsibility for breaking the sixth commandment is attributed to him despite his lack of direct involvement in the act of killing; his guilt lay in the fact that he had done nothing to protect the life of Naboth but allowed a series of events to unfold that meant the death of an innocent person. As king he could have intervened (see Jezebel's comment in verse 7) but instead he tried to profit from that death. Thus we are encouraged to reflect on the idea of culpability for allowing murder to happen as well as for actually committing murder.

A similar situation arises in the story or David's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2 - 12:15) - although רצח is not used. After the act of adultery Bathsheba was found to be pregnant and although David schemed to make it appear that Uriah (Bathsheba's husband) had in fact fathered the unborn child Uriah's devotion and loyalty made this impossible. David then arranged for him to be

killed in battle. After his death was reported Nathan, the prophet, gets David to accept his guilt and then uses the words (12 verse 9), "you have smitten (הִכִּיתָ) Uriah the Hittite with the sword . . . . . and have slain (הָרַגְתָּ) him with the sword of the Ammonites". Again others had struck the mortal blow but David is held responsible - the murder has resulted from his action, he has conspired to take the life of another. Childs suggests that this story goes "to the heart of the crime of murder".[29] Whatever the historical relationship between this story and the Decalogue, in a canonical reading of the text the story functions as a kind of commentary on the sixth commandment.

These two stories emphasise a very important point about the decalogue, namely the individual's responsibility to keep it and live by it. This has particular importance to our understanding of the prohibition of killing. Earlier we suggested that this prohibition is not intended to deprive "the state" of its right to use capital punishment when it is appropriate to the crime, nor does it forbid the pursuit of war which inevitably leads to the taking of human life - indeed in the context of the Old Testament both capital punishment (see for example Genesis 9:6) and killing in war (see for example Deuteronomy 20:17) are commanded by God. This commandment is about the respect and concern for the life of others that should be adopted by those individuals who are living in Covenant relationship to Jahweh. W.Harrelson puts the emphasis upon this personal responsibility when he reconstructs the sixth commandment to read, "Thou shalt not kill (or take the life of) thy neighbour"[30] and, of course, it's the basic concept behind Kohler's conclusion that רָצַח

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[29]B.S.Childs - Old Testament Theology in a Canonical context p.64

[30]W.Harrelson - The ten commandments and human rights pp.42 & 107fff.

most likely means "not taking the law into ones own hands"[31]. We shall return to this theme of personal responsibility when we consider some of the applications of "thou shalt not kill" to modern problems. If we are to use the decalogue as a theological resource for modern Christian living then it would seem essential to recognise that the commandments are about what God expects from his people.

KILLING AND ST MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

When we looked at the use of the Decalogue in St. Matthew's gospel (chapter 2) we discovered a number of theological principles which broadened our understanding of the commandments and their relevance to many aspects of daily living. We noted that the Ten Commandments are recognised as being from Jahweh but also that Matthew's christology emphasises that they need to be understood in the light of the person of Jesus Christ. It is the authoritative Christ who broadens the sixth commandment to include motives as well as action and urges that both the "spirit" and "letter" of the law should be kept. In Matthew 5:21-22 murder is prohibited but so too are the anger and hatred which so easily lead to murder. The general teaching of 5:38-48 would also seem to rule out violent action of any sort in that Jesus is portrayed as telling his followers to reflect God's perfect love in their dealings with others - they are not to resist or retaliate when others use force; they are also to love their enemies as well as friends and neighbours.

This seems to stand in stark contrast to the violence of some parts of the Old Testament - particularly with a passage such as Esther 9 where the Jews are depicted as destroying their enemies without any compassion (9:5) - and raises questions about how Christians should view not just murder, but violence of any sort, in

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[31]L.Kohler op cit p.182.

the light of the revelation of Jesus.

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus rejects violence as a way of advancing his kingdom. At the time of his betrayal we are told that one of the disciples (John tells us it was Peter, John 18:10) drew his sword to defend Jesus but is rebuked by his master because he needs no such protection - if violence were needed the Father could supply "legions of angels" (26:51-53).

In contrast to this we do find Jesus using a measure of violence to cleanse the temple of those who bought and sold (21:12-13). The text gives little clue as to the purpose behind this action other than the statement that God's house of prayer was being turned into a "den of robbers". Whether the action was taken as a protest against "the way in which worshippers from abroad were being cheated by excessive rates of exchange and by the exorbitant cost of animals necessary for sacrifice"[32], or against "the whole system of sacrificial worship which had developed into big business"[33] is a matter of conjecture. The importance, from our point of view, is that Jesus used violence and the conclusion can be drawn that this violence not only demonstrated Messianic authority but was somehow for the benefit of others.

There are a few other passages that use the language of violence. Although these are mainly in an eschatological context, and illustrative of spiritual punishment rather than actual physical violence, they are part of to the total picture to be drawn on this subject from the gospel. Jesus told a story about a person who rented a vineyard out to tenants who refused to fulfil their responsibilities; they maltreated and killed his messengers including

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32R.V.G.Tasker - The Gospel according to St. Matthew pp.199-200

33R.T.France - Matthew p.300

his son. Those who heard the story affirmed, as Jesus seems to expect, that the miscreants should be executed (21:33-41). In 22:1-14 the story is told of a king giving a dinner but a guest without a "wedding garment" in punished. Our attention is also drawn to the divisions that the coming of Jesus inevitably creates in society (10:34-38) because he came "not to bring peace but a sword".

When we seek to draw conclusions from this material then it is clear that murder, along with the attitudes of mind that lead to it should have no place in the lives of those who would follow Jesus (5:21-22); on the contrary they are to seek the well-being of all and to show love to all (5:38-48) and to avoid doing violence to others as Jesus himself did (26:51-53). However, reflection upon these passages in the light of the "cleansing of the temple" (21:12-13) and the language of violence in connection with God's judgment, might well lead to a modification of this blanket condemnation of violent action and open the way for the use of force, and even killing, in certain circumstances.

Earlier we suggested that the prime function of the Decalogue was to regulate individual conduct (although since individuals live in communities it also affects community life and action) and we would suggest that the Sermon on the Mount functions in the same way - it is about how individual Christians should behave, and the attitudes they should adopt, in their dealings with others. It does not seem entirely appropriate to transfer it from this realm into the realm of national and international affairs and then suggest that Matthew's gospel rules out force and the possible consequences of force - killing - in all circumstances. Viewing the Sermon on the Mount in this way makes it reasonable to suggest that Matthew is not making any comment on past wars or the use of force by authorities to maintain

the rule of law (other than asking Christians to reflect upon these things in the light of Christ's teaching). He puts before Christians the perfect standard (5:48) but might also be sympathetic to the use of force in the service of right causes on behalf of others.

KILLING AND THE WORK OF CALVIN.

As we have seen Calvin, like St. Matthew's gospel, accepts the Old Testament as it stands and applies the Decalogue to a wide range of issues. He spoke of the "elliptical" nature of the commandments; by this he means that there is a dimension to each of the commandments beyond that expressed in the words actually used and that it would be ridiculous to limit the "spirit of the law to the strict letter of the words".[34] He says, therefore, that the sixth commandment is against violence and injustice of every kind. We also saw that a specific application of this elliptical principle was found in his declaration of the negative and positive aspects of the commandments, he says, ". . . when evil is forbidden its opposite is enjoined"[35] and working this out with regard to the sixth commandment he says, "Accordingly we are required faithfully to do what in us lies to defend the life of our neighbour, to promote whatever tends to his tranquillity, to be vigilant in warding off harm, and, when danger comes, to assist in removing it."[36]

In chapter 3 we drew attention to Pharaoh's daughter saving the baby Moses (Exodus 2:1-10), Elisha and the Syrians (2 Kings 6:11-23), and David's treatment of Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9) as examples of kindness when, given the prevailing political situation and attitudes of the ancient Near East, killing might more naturally have been

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[34] J.Calvin - Institutes of the Christian religion p.437.

[35] J.Calvin op cit, p.438

[36] J.Calvin op cit, p.470

expected. Reflection upon incidents such as these, together with the duties to others inherent in the whole of the decalogue and a passage such as Leviticus 19:17-18 culminating, as it does, with the command to "love your neighbour", encourages us to support the idea that "you shall not kill" can be understood as also implicitly laying upon God's people an obligation to do good as well as to avoid hurt. In both their particular context, and the general context of the Hebrew scriptures, such incidents can be seen as putting the positive side to the negative prohibition of killing.

The real problem with extending the commandment to include seeking the well-being of others lies in war and the way in which the Israelites were, for example, commanded to wage war to possess the promised land with little or no consideration for the well-being of those who already dwelt there. We shall say something about this later; at this juncture we simply mention four lines of thought which have been used to shed light on the problem and could enable us to treat war as a "special case":-

(a) That Israel misunderstood God and the conquest narratives need correction in the light of the canon, especially the New Testament. In discussing this point of view Childs accepts that it must be taken seriously because it represents a reasonable reading of the material in its canonical context. He goes on to say, however, "Never once is it suggested that Israel misunderstood God's intention regarding the conquest . . . ", and then, "The effect of the canonical shaping of the conquest material is that the book of Joshua has been assigned a specific, but time-bound, role in God's economy. . . It was theologically rendered inoperative by being consigned wholly to the past."[37].

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[37]B.S.Childs - op cit p.78

R.S.Taylor[38] attempts to make this material more palatable by means of a rather strange suggestion; he discusses "God's deputising" the task of killing to angels (e.g. 2 Kings 19:35) and therefore the reasonableness of him also deputising that task to men. Perhaps more acceptable is the stance of G.Clark who says, "If the Old Testament is clear on anything it is clear that God positively commanded war."[39]; this position recognises the integrity of the text but makes it difficult to suggest Israel was mistaken about God's intentions.

(b) That the Decalogue is about regulating the life of the covenant community and that war is pursued to protect this community. Hence neighbour does mean "fellow-Hebrew" (as is suggested by Leviticus 19:18a) rather than the wider New Testament concept (see Luke 10:25-37): but we should note the references above to Pharaoh's daughter/Moses and Elisha/The Syrians, together with books such as Ruth and Jonah which encourage consideration of a wider meaning being given to "neighbour".

(c) That the decalogue is about individual relationships and since war, by its very nature, is a community act the individual's obligation to the community takes precedent over obligations to the individual. This is a dangerous idea which could, and has been, used to excuse terrible acts in the name of the state and in fact raises complex issues. We would seriously question whether it is ever possible to reject individual responsibility with regard to God's law in order to fulfil the wishes of the state.

(d) Since God who gave the commandments is the giver and sustainer of life and has the right to take life, when he commands that a war be

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[38]R.S.Taylor - Perfect love and war p.30

[39]G.Clark - "Is pacifism Christian", UEA 14, (1955) p.5

pursued and enemies killed he must be obeyed. It is certainly true that in the Old Testament the wars of conquest, and other battles are seen as "holy wars" in that they were undertaken at God's direction (Deuteronomy 7:1-3,Numbers 21:14, 1 Samuel 18:17)[40] and war is never seen to be in conflict with the Decalogue.

None of these suggestions offer a particularly tidy solution to the problem of waging violent war but to regard the sixth commandment as directed only to personal relationships and attitudes and thus suggest that war (and other state actions) are outside its scope helps avoid this apparent inconsistency and contradiction. As we saw it is possible to argue that this is the approach Jesus himself took to violence.

Calvin also believed that the commandments are about motives as well as actions. The sixth commandment prohibits not just murder but also wrath because, "in the law human life is instructed not merely in outward decency but in inward spiritual righteousness."[41] We have seen that St. Matthew's gospel teaches this but it is also an Old Testament viewpoint. Much of the earlier discussion about the cities of refuge has bearing upon this. These cities were established to ensure that only those who intended to commit murder were executed for that crime - the legislation is all about motive. Similarly, in the cases of Ahab's guilt regarding the death of Naboth, and David's guilt for the death of Uriah, motive is all important - they are condemned as murders because they had murder in their hearts rather than because they actually did the killing. Leviticus 19 can be read as a "commentary" on parts of the decalogue since it is concerned with holiness of life (verse 2) and contains specific reference to subjects

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[40]see Craigie op cit chapter 4.

[41]J.Calvin op cit, p.434

covered in a number of the commandments (parents and sabbath verse 3, idols verse 4, stealing verse 11, justice and slander verses 15-16). It does not actually mention murder but verses 17 and 18 forbid those things which lead to murder (hatred in the heart and vengeance) whilst urging reason and love. Hosea 4:2 links lack of faithfulness and kindness (attitudes of heart and mind) with the breaking of God's law, including murder. Isaiah sees the time when "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord" and in the eschatological picture he paints, there is no violence (Isaiah 11:6-9) - man being in harmony with God lives in love. The Old Testament, like the New, is concerned with right attitudes and motives because these lead to right living. Thus it is reasonable to accept the emphasis upon motive, found in the teaching of Calvin, and therefore his suggestion that the sixth commandment not only prohibits murder, and the anger that leads to murder, but also gives positive encouragement to those that seek to do good, rather than harm to other people. In the light of the evidence cited this would seem both an appropriate and a reasonable way to read the Old Testament.

KILLING - THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES AND MODERN PROBLEMS

We have tried to show that the sixth commandment cannot properly be used as an automatic prohibition of all killing because in the Old Testament the community, under the direction of God, is commanded to execute law breakers and pursue war. Some individual acts that lead to death would also seem to be exceptions to this rule depending upon the motivation behind the action. In the modern world there are a number of other activities, as well as the more obvious examples of murder and manslaughter, that involve the destruction of human life - euthanasia, suicide, and abortion. We now give some consideration to theological principles that will enable us to use this commandment as

an aid in developing a Christian ethic towards these complex issues.

In our discussion two principles have emerged that seem crucial to a right use of this commandment:-

First, life belongs to God. There is a wide consensus that this is fundamental to any proper understanding of the sixth commandment. Harrelson, for example says, "God is the author and giver of life, and no one dare act as though that person were God, taking the life of a fellow human being."[42] We must also be clear that to say "life belongs to God" is not the same as saying, "life is sacrosanct (inviolable)" because at God's direction life may be taken.

Second, that the commandments are about regulating the behaviour of one individual to another. As we have seen, there are those who limit the application of the law to the covenant community but, at this stage, we would wish to emphasise personal responsibility, regardless of whether it is intended to be limited to free Israelites or to a wider grouping. We would maintain that the commandments are about individual attitudes and responsibilities. In an imperfect world the state may find it necessary both to execute criminals and wage war for the well-being of its citizens and, in certain situations, the individual acting for the community is freed from responsibility to the law (see for example the action of the גֹּאֵל in Numbers 35:27). In the sixth commandment the individual is prohibited from "taking the law into their own hands"; as individuals they have no right to kill those who cause them inconvenience but rather, as Calvin suggests, they should respect the life of others and positively seek their good.

A full application of these principles to every possible situation that threatens human life is beyond the scope of this study. Nor are

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[42]W.Harrelson op cit p.110

we seeking (or claiming) to give definitive answers to any of these problems but rather to illustrate the way in which these principles can be used as a theological resource and aid, and some of the directions in which they lead us when applied to certain modern problems. We look briefly at a few contentious areas.

One such area is euthanasia and, to a certain extent, linked with it, suicide - in both instances the person decides that their own life should be ended. In suicide the death is caused by direct personal action and in euthanasia others are enlisted to help with obtaining that same end. The reasons are manifold: old age and/or illness, a feeling that useful life is over, a long term or even temporary feeling that life is not worth the effort. Christianity sees life in the flesh as only a small part of a person's existence and, in the context of New Testament teaching about eternal life, death is not something to be feared. St. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21) and in this same chapter he talks about the advantages of death and the responsibilities of life. This is very different from taking his own life or persuading others to kill him. In the light of the certain hope of spending eternity in God's presence, death, particularly for those in great physical or mental distress, may be an attractive proposition but the principle that, "life belongs to God", and the obligation to respect and protect another's life, rules out hastening one's own physical death or conspiring with others to bring it about. Speaking of suicide Barth says, "To deprive a man of his life is a matter for the one who gave it and not for the man himself. He who takes what does not belong to him, in this case only to throw it away, does not merely kill; he murders."[43] and of euthanasia he says, " . . .it can hardly be said of

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[43]K.Barth - Church Dogmatics III. 4. p.404

this form of deliberate killing that it can ever seem to be really commanded in any emergency, and therefore to be anything but murder."[44]

More complex is the other side of the problem - not the taking of life but the prolonging of life. Modern medicine has developed remarkable techniques and therapies that enable life to be prolonged. As a fairly generalised statement, in the light of biblical teaching about "God as creator", it does not seem unreasonable to hold that these skills are from God but that does not justify their unlimited and uncontrolled use.[45] The Christian must seek to discover the parameters within which these skills can be exercised. Is it right to prolong a life, through medication or surgery, when there is no real hope of "quality of life" being restored? Should a person be kept on life support equipment when if they do return to consciousness there will be serious brain damage that prevents them functioning as an independent person? These type of questions bring before us the complexity of balancing the concept of God's sovereignty over life and death with the use of the skills he has made available within his creation. They also highlight the fact that the distinction between euthanasia and allowing death to happen naturally is not always clear in the light of the ability to exercise some control over the length of life that is now available in our world.

Another contentious area to which these theological principles have direct relevance is that of abortion. This has to do with destroying human life in the form of a "live" foetus. As with euthanasia the reasons for the action are complex and varied - it may

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[44] op cit, p.427

[45] The same sort of argument could be used with regard to nuclear power - God gave man the ability to split the atom but that does not mean automatically that the use of nuclear weapons is thereby justified.

be that the life of the mother is seriously endangered if the pregnancy goes full term; it may be that the unborn child has a high statistical chance of being deformed or of inheriting some genetic illness; it may be that the mother is unmarried or the victim of rape; it may be that the parents already have too many children or for career reasons a confinement would be inconvenient. These, and all the other reasons for abortion, have their own particular problems and, if space allowed, would require individual examination of the issues raised.

The Bible does not directly refer to abortion even though it was practised in the ancient Near East[46] but the parallel practice of exposing unwanted infants to die would seem to be referred to in Ezekiel 16:4. This silence leads J.W.Rogerson to suggest that it was not commonly practised in the Old Testament period[47]. In general terms this practice would seem to impinge upon both our theological principles; a life is being destroyed by human agency, and the individual responsibility to protect life seems to be ignored by everybody concerned (from the consenting parents to the members of the medical team). This, however, is too simplistic an approach[48]. The few reasons we have given above fall into (at least) two categories - "personal convenience" and "medical worries". Again we must generalise but it would seem that to take a life for "personal

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[46]Middle Assyrian laws say, "If a woman has had a miscarriage by her own act, when they have presented her (and) convicted her, they shall impale her on stakes without burying her." Quoted by J.W.Rogerson in Abortion and the sanctity of human life p.80

[47]J.W.Rogerson - "Using the Bible in the debate about abortion" in op cit pp.77-91.

[48]J.W.Rogerson (op cit page 82) believes that the use of "thou shalt not kill" must be balanced by the slaughter of communities in the name of God. However in our theological principles we have made a distinction between obligations to "individuals" and obligations to "state".

convenience" is totally against all understanding of the sixth commandment and must be considered contrary to the behaviour God expects.

Can abortion be justified when there are medical worries and if so how do we come to terms with both the fact of an individual destroying a life that belongs to God, and the personal failure to keep God's law? It's important to note that "medical worries" fall into two groups, those concerned with the quality of life for the unborn child and those concerned with the survival of the mother. When considering the "quality of life" that the unborn child can be expected to enjoy we enter the realm of speculation and conflicting viewpoints which are often more subjective than theological. On the one hand there are those who say that physical suffering is not necessarily contrary to God's will, that it brings out good things from people, and if modern attitudes to abortion had been prevalent in 1770 we would have been deprived of the genius of Beethoven. On the other hand there are those who would speak in humanitarian terms about the suffering of children with the resultant strain endured by the the rest of the family which could be prevented by a simple, safe, well established medical practice, namely abortion. The Bible does expect people to show care for the weak and helpless (Psalms 72:4, 82:2-4, Ezekiel 34:4) and Rogerson says, "we must include the unborn among the weak and defenceless"[49]. It may well be right to consider the wider family and the effect on its time and resources that caring for an additional, unwell child would have. In such a debate, however, Christian people must never lose sight of the fact that life belongs to God. Harrelson says, "When abortions are available on request and there is no need even to give thought to the matter of a mysterious

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[49]J.W.Rogerson - op cit, p.90

gift of life, present as a result of the action of two persons, then the commandment not to kill is not functioning well in the society."[50].

Considering the option of abortion when the mother's life is threatened is, in some ways, easier - it would seem to be the common Christian problem of deciding the "lesser of two evils". Barth, although fairly forthright in his condemnation of abortion[51], is prepared to discuss this exception and finds it hard to understand why (as in Roman Catholic thinking) the life of the unborn child should always be given priority over the life of the mother. He makes the helpful point that the emphasis here is not so much upon abortion as on the preservation of life and this removes guilt with regard to the commandment against taking life, he says, ". . .these situations may always be known by the concrete fact that in them a choice must be made for the protection of life, one life being balanced against another, i.e., the life of the unborn child against the life or health of the mother, the sacrifice of either the one or the other being unavoidable."[52] Thus of all the reasons for abortion that we have considered the only one concerned with preserving a God given life is that which seeks to preserve the life of the mother at the cost of the unborn child. Never an easy decision and one that needs to be made in the full light of our individual obligation and responsibility to keep God's law.

Finally, we return once again to war. We have suggested that essentially the ten commandments are for the individual in their relationship to other individuals, so in that sense war could be said

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[50]W.Harrelson op cit p.120

[51]K.Barth - Church Dogmatics III.4 pp.415ff

[52]K.Barth - op cit, p.421

to lie outside the scope of the sixth commandment. Certainly Craigie[53] suggests that the Israelites of the Old Testament did not find the concept of violence in war in any way contrary to serving Jahweh. This, however, is a bit like "sweeping the dirt under the carpet" - it hides the problem rather than solves it. As we said earlier the real problem lies in harmonizing the revelation of God that we have in the New Testament, in the person of Jesus Christ, with the God of the Old Testament who allowed (and even encouraged) the violence of war. Calvin interprets the sixth commandment as placing an obligation upon God's people to avoid harming others but also positively to seek their good - waging war would seem to be out of harmony with this aim!

Craigie helps us approach this from a different direction when he says, "The starting point for the discussion is what might be called a 'fact of faith', namely that the form which the Kingdom of God assumed in Old Testament times was that of a *nation state*, the state of God's chosen people"[54]. In other words the wars of the Israelites were about establishing or protecting the "Kingdom of God"; those who tried to destroy the Hebrew nation were enemies of the Kingdom of God and thus could be said to have brought Divine judgement upon themselves. The New Testament is equally severe upon those who are not of The Kingdom; they will be judged and punished (Matthew 22: 11, 25:41,46, Romans 2:5-9, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, Revelation 20:15, 21:8). It is significant that when the chosen people are defeated in war it is seen as judgement for failing to honour their covenant status (Deuteronomy 28:15ff - especially verse 25,

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53P.C.Craigie - "Jahweh is a man of war" SJT, 22(1969),pp.183-188.

54P.C.Craigie - The problem of war in the Old Testament p.70

Ezra 9:6-9)[55]. Thus the wars of the Israelites in the Old Testament are illustrations of God working in history to establish his kingdom which was the visible "state" and this prepares the way for the "kingdom of God" in the hearts of men, (e.g. Jeremiah 31:31-34) which Christians would see as the messianic age. Old and New Testament alike see God, who is the author and giver of life, setting out his terms for "life"; in the Old Testament people are his instruments of judgement - both of those who oppose "his kingdom" and those who fail in their covenant responsibilities.

The New Testament sees God's kingdom as a kingdom dominated by "spiritual values", indeed Jesus said, "my kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). This makes it difficult to use the same justification for modern wars. Throughout Christian history there have been many attempts to establish criteria for a "just war". Personally I doubt that there is any such thing; when we unleash war we give opportunity for the worst side of human nature to be freely expressed. This has led many caring Christians to adopt the pacifist position and adhere strictly to "you shall not kill", but we would suggest this is not the only option. Once again we find ourselves trying to decide which is the "lesser of two evils".[56] In this situation the Christian should always be a peace-maker rather than a warmonger, and then if war is unavoidable seek to pursue it with as much concern for the preservation of life as is possible. Harrelson says, "Acts of warfare that arise when at least some of the parties involved have sought to avoid war, have sought to meet the legitimate grievances of the parties claiming to be aggrieved, and have exercised

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[55]P.C.Craigie - op cit, pp.75-82

[56]The last world war could be seen as a choice between the barbarity of war or the genocide of the Nazis.

restraint in the waging of war are human activities that are less blatantly a violation of the sixth commandment than if such efforts had not taken place."[57]

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[57]W.Harrelson op cit p.121.

Chapter 6

ADULTERY AND THE DECALOGUE.

The seventh commandment, like the sixth, presents us with a total and undefined prohibition, simply, "Thou shalt not commit adultery". E.Nielsen[1] suggests that this is in fact a shortened form of a longer commandment that would originally have read rather like Leviticus 20:10 which specifies adultery as an offence against another person's marriage. He further suggests that the reason it was abbreviated was so that it could be used to embrace a whole range of sexual wrongs. We shall examine its wider interpretation later but Nielsen's particular point could be argued the opposite way, namely that the prohibition of adultery needed more precise definition as the covenant community became more complex in its structure. Obviously the date we place upon the material in both the Decalogue and the Holiness code (Leviticus 17-26) have a bearing upon this and leave room for uncertainty but, as it stands, there is no uncertainty in the Decalogue - adultery is banned.

Christianity has traditionally interpreted this ban as prohibiting all sexual intercourse outside marriage , and for a long period in Christian thinking the object of human sexual activity was procreation[2]. Although some had a deeper understanding of the importance of human sexuality as an expression of love, unity and commitment[3] it was not until a resolution, permitting contraception,

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[1]E.Nielsen - The ten commandments in new perspective pp.105-108

[2]For a summary of Christian attitudes to human sexuality from the "fathers" to 20th Century theologians see Kosnik et al Human Sexuality pp.33-52

[3]e.g. Clement of Alexandria (Stromata 7,12; PG VIII); or Martin Le Maistre1432-81) said,"not every copulation of spouses not performed to generate offspring is an act opposed to conjugal chastity" (quoted in J. Noonan, Contraception p.307)

was passed by the Anglican Bishops at the Lambeth conference of 1930 (previously rejected in both 1908 and 1920) that a major Christian group made a separation between the procreative and unitive aspects of sexual activity. This change of emphasis has continued apace. Society today accepts co-habitation without marriage, there is an increasing tolerance of homosexual and lesbian relationships, and even adultery is not regarded with the seriousness it once was. Some modern theologians[4] see nothing intrinsically wrong in either fornication or homosexual and lesbian practices, provided they respect "personhood" - that is provided they contribute to a real relationship and do no harm to the people involved. It is out of respect for "personhood" that rape, sexual abuse of children, and bestiality are condemned.

As with the sabbath and murder we shall seek to discover the theological principles underlying the biblical attitude to adultery and then indicate how these principles can be a resource in developing a theology of human sexuality in our modern world. This understanding should then enable us to make value judgements on the traditional Christian interpretation (i.e. that human sexuality finds its correct expression only within marriage) and on whether or not "personhood" allows a wider use and expression of sex.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF ADULTERY IN SCRIPTURE.

Although it is rarely explicitly stated, most scholars[5] agree that originally adultery was viewed as an act that a man could commit only against another person's marriage, but a woman (whether married or betrothed) only against her own. By this definition a male

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[4]e.g. L.W.Countryman, Dirt, greed and sex pp.264ff.

[5]B.S.Childs, Exodus p.422, W.Harrelson; The ten commandments and human rights p.123; J.J.Stamm & M.E.Andrew, The Ten commandments in recent research p.100.

Israelite was permitted to have sexual intercourse with a prostitute or unmarried, unbetrothed girl without damaging his own marriage. On the other hand a woman was expected to exercise chastity at all times.

Adultery cannot be properly considered without reference to other areas of human sexuality and since, by definition, it is linked with marriage it is important to have some understanding of this institution in the Old Testament. The situation is not as clear, or precisely defined, as perhaps the monogamous, Western, Christian world would like. Monogamy is nowhere spelt out as the right and only possible form of marriage (though Genesis.2:24 coming as it does at the beginning of the canon sets a theological precedent that, historically, was not always the practice). Jacob married both Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29:15-30, 30:1-9); Esau had three wives (Genesis 26:34, 28:9) although this displeased his parents the reason would seem to be that he married girls of Hittite stock (Genesis 26:34-35) rather than any breach of rules about monogamy; the father of Samuel had two wives (1 Samuel 1:2) and Gideon had "many wives" (Judges 8:30). We also note that neither David (1 Samuel 30:5) nor Solomon (1 Kings 11:1), amongst many other of the Kings, were monogamous. Despite these examples R. De Vaux says, "It is clear, however that the most common form of marriage in Israel was monogamy. It is noteworthy that the books of Samuel and Kings, which cover the entire period of the monarchy, do not record a single case of bigamy among commoners (except that of Samuel's father at the beginning of the period)"[6]. This conclusion may well be true but must be treated with a measure of caution since the books of Samuel and Kings are not primarily concerned with recording the lives of commoners. We

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[6]R.De Vaux - Ancient Israel its life and institutions p.25

also need to bear in mind that economic factors would also have deterred commoners from entering into multiple marriages.

Several instances of female slaves being given to the husband, for the purpose of bearing children in place of the barren wife, are recorded (e.g. Genesis 16:2) and certainly concubinage was practiced both in the period of the patriarchs[7] (Genesis 25:6) and during the monarchy (2 Samuel 5:13).

Little is recorded in the Bible of marriage ceremonies or of a legal framework governing the taking of concubines or slaves for the purpose of raising children. The regulations of Deuteronomy 21:10-17 suggest that such a framework did exist and that society played a part in both regulating and recognising these relationships.

It is possible to trace an evolution in the concept of marriage within the Bible from the procreative to the relational and in which monogamy becomes the norm and the ideal. The creation stories in Genesis are perceived as coming from two different sources, the first, Genesis 1:1-2:4a, from P (6th Century B.C.) and the second, Genesis 2:4bff., from J (10th century B.C.) but in both humanity is seen as being created male and female (1:27, 2:22, 5:2). Slightly different, though complimentary, reasons are given for the creation of human sexuality - J sees it as a solution to human loneliness (2:18) and to find completeness as a family unit (2:24) whereas P lays emphasis upon the procreative activity (1:28). In both cases human sexuality is seen as a blessing and gift from God. It is also true that the creation stories present us with a unique and exclusive relationship, Adam and Eve lived in a monogamous relationship one to

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[7]The code of Hammurabi (c.1700 B.C.) allowed a husband to take a second wife if the first were barren. It also allowed the taking of concubines but they never achieved the same rights as a wife. (see De Vaux op cit p.24)

the other, so much so that De Vaux says, "The story of the creation of the first two human beings (Genesis 2:21-24) presents monogamous marriage as the will of God."[8]

In Deuteronomic legislation there are indications of a concern for the interests of women (21:15-17, 22:13-19, 24:5) and they are specifically included in covenant and cultic ceremonies (12:12,18 16:11,14 29:10,17 31:12). This is reflected in the Decalogue where Deuteronomy 5:21 alters Exodus 20:17; in the latter the wife is seen as part of the husband's house, but in the former she is given an independent status and separated from household possessions, suggesting a step towards recognising male and female equality and the idea of partnership within marriage.

In the prophetic writings the book of Hosea is a most powerful declaration that marriage should be a loving, caring, exclusive relationship between husband and wife rather than the wife being a possession whose function is simply to produce heirs. Marriage is seen as illustrating the covenant relationship between Jahweh and his people; they become like an adulterous wife when they reject his gifts and go after other gods. Despite this Jahweh still loves them and seeks to restore their unique and exclusive relationship. Hosea loved Gomer and sought to win her back to be his wife and companion just as God wanted to restore faithless Israel (2:14-16, 3:1 etc). A similar picture is drawn in Ezekiel 16 and Israel's unfaithfulness to God is likened to harlotry in Isaiah 1:21 and Jeremiah 3:6. This prophetic use of marriage to illustrate the covenant relationship suggests a high view of marriage and that, ideally, it should be exclusive and monogamous.

Similar conclusions may be drawn from the Wisdom literature. The

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[8]R.De Vaux op cit, p.24

Song of Songs speaks of a love and commitment that goes well beyond physical desire. Proverbs advocates married faithfulness (5:18) and gives the wife a partnership role that is far from passive, indeed the development and prosperity of both husband and family are seen as the direct result of her contribution (31:10-31).

Further evidence of the development of Hebrew marriage customs can be found in the way in which later legislation forbade former practices. A. Phillips[9] draws attention to Leviticus 18:18 which prohibits marriage to two sisters at the same time: earlier (Genesis 29:21f) Jacob married both Rachel and Leah but there is no hint that this was unacceptable.

In the New Testament period Jewish society would seem to be monogamous. Levirite marriage is alluded to (Matthew 22:24-26) but there is no suggestion that it is other than a monogamous society. St. Paul continues the high view of marriage that is expressed by the prophets when he likens the relationship between Jesus and the church to that of the relationship between husband and wife (Eph. 5:21-28) and does not seem to envisage anything other than monogamy in 1 Corinthians 7. We infer from 1 Tim. 3:2 that the early church insisted on monogamy amongst its leaders[10] but that this was not a universal practice in the pagan communities being penetrated by the Gospel. Nor must we assume that multiple marriages were outlawed in the Hebrew community since Herod the Great (king of the Jews 40-4 B.C.) is reported to have had nine wives at one time[11].

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[9]A.Phillips - Ancient Israel's criminal law p.126.

[10]Tertullian (ad uxor i.7)sees this as a prohibition of second marriages not an injunction about monogamy whereas E.F.Scott (The Pastoral Epistles p.31) takes it to mean simply, "A bishop must show an example of strict morality".

[11]Josephus - Antiquities of the Jews xvii. 1.3)

Thus although we do not have a carefully delineated theology of marriage in the scriptures, it is possible to detect the emergence of a theological ideal which was often unrealised. Kosnik says, "the Old Testament represents not only a plurality of attitudes towards sexuality but also a distinct development, particularly with regard to the dignity of the person."[12] This understanding of personhood, together with an understanding of the advantages of monogamy, meant that in marriage women were regarded less and less as property[13] and more and more as partners. This ideal has never been easy to work out in practical terms, but Christianity must always seek to bear witness to the equality of status between men and women (Galatians 3:28) and the complimentary nature of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:4).

As we said earlier, the definition of adultery links it to marriage. Multiple marriages were not regarded as adulterous but a legitimate expression of human sexuality. Equally sexual relationships with female slaves and concubines are accepted provided they take place within the established patterns of the day. However, just as we see a deepening of the understanding of marriage so we see that the parameters governing the sexual behaviour of the covenant community became more tightly drawn and more carefully defined. Countryman says, "One dominant theme in biblical treatments of sexual morality is that of purity."[14] and he uses this to trace the development of sexual ethics within the Old Testament and contrasts it

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[12] A.Kosnik et al, op cit, p.16.

[13] It is unlikely that a wife was ever regarded by the Israelites as "property" in the sense of being bought. De Vaux (op cit, pp. 26-29) discusses the meaning of כסף and contrasts this sum of money with the purchasing of female slaves (cf. Ex.21:7-11) who could be resold. A.Phillips (op cit p.117) points out that by marriage the wife became an extension of the husband (Genesis. 2:24)

[14] L.W.Countryman op cit p.11

with his perception of how the New Testament places the emphasis upon respect for the sexual property of others rather than upon purity codes. He suggests that because the sexual prohibitions of the Old Testament are tied to a particular purity system they cannot be seen as objective moral rules valid for all time, nor can they be imposed on any other society as God's unchanging will. Thus the New Testament does not justify sexual rules by appeal to purity laws but instead emphasises the grace of God. His criteria of judgement on the validity of sexual practices is not direct Biblical statements but whether or not any sexual act is idolatrous, a denial of equality, or an offence against property[15]. We shall need to return to this viewpoint when we consider the Christian attitude to human sexuality in the modern world; its significance at this juncture is that whilst it takes seriously the legislation of the Old Testament, in its perceived historical and social context, it does not believe that it can be directly applied to another situation in another time. For Countryman the development of closely associated concepts, such as personhood and human rights, seem to be of more lasting importance than any specific Old Testament prohibition or denunciation.

The decalogue does not define what is meant by adultery but Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22 specifically define it as intercourse with the wife of another man and it is clear that a betrothed girl is regarded as married in the eyes of the law (Deuteronomy 22:23). We note, as we did above with marriage, that the Deuteronomic legislation refines and in some ways supersedes Exodus. Phillips[16] suggests that a woman only became subject to Israel's criminal law through the Deuteronomic reforms; prior to that the male

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[15]L.W.Countryman, op cit pp.243-244

[16]A.Phillips op cit p.110

lover was subject to the full rigour of the law but the wife's fate depended upon the husband who could either divorce or forgive her (Hosea 2:3 and Jer. 3:8 are cited as instances where divorce rather than execution was the wife's punishment[17]). Sexual intercourse with the wife (or the betrothed) of another member of the covenant community was regarded as adultery. A sexual relationship with an unmarried or unbetrothed girl was regarded as an injury to the father of the girl rather than adultery so the seducer was obliged to pay the bride price, whether or not the father agreed to their subsequent marriage (Exodus 22:16-17). Hence the father was financially in exactly the same position as when a virgin daughter contracted a marriage. Deuteronomy would seem to refine this legislation by fixing the "fine" at 50 shekels of silver, compelling marriage and taking away the right of divorce (Deuteronomy 22:28-29). J.Morgenstern[18], however argues that the difference between Exodus and Deuteronomy, in this case, is the matter of force. In Exodus 22:16-17 the girl consents so is equally responsible; although the man has an obligation to marry the girl the right of divorce at a future date is not taken away. Deuteronomy 22:28-29, however, uses the language of violence therefore the law compels the man to fulfil his obligations through a permanent union with no right of divorce.

As with murder there are indications that in Deuteronomy "intention" was a factor in determining whether or not adultery had been committed. If an act of sexual intercourse takes place in the city the woman cannot use the defence of rape because it is assumed that any cries of protest would be heard and she would be rescued from

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[17]M.Noth - Leviticus p.150 suggests that Leviticus 20:10 originally had in view only the execution of the man.

[18]J.Morgenstern, "The book of the Covenant part 2" HUCA,7, pp.118f

her attacker; no cries are taken as indication of consent. In country districts rape is a valid defence in that cries of protest could have gone unheard (Deuteronomy 22:23-27).

Leviticus 19:20-23 are of great interest. The immediate area of concern is when a man has intercourse with an unredeemed slave who is betrothed to another. Clearly there is acceptance that an offence has been committed because there is to be "punishment" (בִּקֹּרֶת) and a guilt offering has to be made. The בִּקֹּרֶת could well be some form of compensation to the man betrothed to the girl[19] but the "guilt offering" and subsequent forgiveness of sins are related to God. Phillips says, "it is clear that sexual intercourse with a slave could not be termed 'adultery', since she was the property of her master, and not his wife."[20]. This reflects his belief that in pre-exilic times the mandatory death penalty "was the distinctive principle of Israel's law of adultery"[21]. H.McKeating[22] does not dispute that adultery was a "sacral crime" punishable by death but points out that there is not one instance of the crime being treated this way in the whole of Biblical literature and that there may well have been a distinction between "religious theory" and "practical law". If McKeating is correct then this passage could be seen as an example of "practical law" rather than a limitation in defining adultery - It would be difficult for society to exact the death penalty for an offence involving a slave (cf. Exodus 21:20-21) but the gravity of the offence is recognised both in terms of the harm done to a fellow member of the covenant community and by the need to seek

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[19]e.g. M.Noth, op cit p.143

[20]A.Phillips op cit p.114

[21]A.Phillips - "Another look at adultery" JSOT 20, (1981) p.4

[22]H.McKeating, "A response to Dr.Phillips" JSOT 20, (1981) p.26

forgiveness from God.

There are various ways of tracing the development of the idea of adultery through the period of time covered by the biblical writers. We have already noted how Countryman[23] relates the development of the concept of adultery to the social and theological development from purity laws to property laws to personhood. An alternative method is to consider the relationship of the Old Testament understanding of adultery to the attitude of the surrounding nations in the ancient world[24], and we do need to recognise that some of the Old Testament legislation (and also New Testament attitudes) are a reaction to sexual practices in pagan religions. Our particular concern, however, is whether or not we can discern trends and patterns that show exactly how the prohibition of the seventh commandment came to be interpreted. Neither the Decalogue nor the Book of the Covenant, or for that matter Deuteronomy, are concerned with working out a total sexual ethic but with relating the life of the community, and the individual, to God. Indeed Phillips says that the concern of the criminal law was not sexual morality but rather to guarantee the paternity of any children - thus he suggests that the proof sought in Deuteronomy 23:13-21 was not of virginity but of menstruation prior to marriage[25]. Deuteronomy does include references to sexual crimes in the "curse liturgy" (27:20-23), deals with the situation when a husband falsely accuses his wife of misconduct (22:13-21), imposes the death penalty on both parties involved in adulterous union and sees such events as evil (22:22), deals with seduction (22:23-29) and then

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[23]L.W.Countryman op cit

[24]There are those who believe that the Old Testament law is distinctive (i.e. M.Greenberg, S.Paul, A.Phillips) and those who believe that in developed in much the same way as other Near Eastern laws (B.Jackson, H.McKeating) - see A.Phillips op cit.

[25]A.Phillips op cit pgs.6-7 & Ancient Israel's criminal law pp.115-116

appears to extend the crime of adultery to include the former practice (whether acceptable to society or not) of a son inheriting and using his father's wives and concubines (22:30 cf. Genesis 35:22, 49:4, 2 Samuel 12:8, 1 Kings 2:22 etc.). Phillips argues[26] that the priestly legislators took over this Deuteronomic expansion and extended the crime of adultery to include all unnatural sexual unions. It is recognised that customary family law forbade casual sexual relationships with those living under the patriarchal family roof and that Leviticus 18:6f is a priestly codification of this customary law. In a careful analysis of Leviticus 20:10-21 Phillips[27] traces the way in which the concept of adultery developed within the priestly legislation. The key to his interpretation is the type of punishment laid down: in the exilic period the death penalty was replaced by reliance upon the direct intervention of God to inflict punishment, and this in turn was replaced by excommunication in the post-exilic period.

The earliest stage, therefore is represented by verses 10-16 and excludes sexual relationships not only with the "neighbours wife"(10) but also with his father's wife (11), his daughter-in-law (12), homosexuality (13), marriage to both a mother and daughter (14)[28] and bestiality (15-16). The prohibition of Deuteronomy 22:30 is repeated but expanded to include these other offences some of which may not have been perceived as wrong in an earlier age (cf. Leviticus 20:12 with Genesis 38).

Reliance upon God to punish is found in 20:17 and 20:19-21.

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[26]A.Phillips - op cit p.123.

[27]A.Phillips, op cit pp.125-129

[28]Phillips suggests that the penalty of burning is a later interpolation and therefore that this section may have been interpolated- op cit p.125

However since this is expressed in different ways some re-adjusting of the text is necessary. Verse 17 mentions not only marriage but also sexual lust and includes punishment both from God ("he shall bear his iniquity") and excommunication ("they shall be cut off in the sight of the children of their people"). Originally this may have been intended to prohibit marriage with a paternal half-sister (cf. Genesis 20:12, 2 Samuel 13:13). The prohibition of marriage with a maternal half-sister, the reference to lust and the excommunication formula is seen as a later addition, as is 20:19 (which seems to be a conflation of Leviticus 18:12-13)[29]. 20:21 is of interest in that it appears to prohibit the ancient custom of Levirite marriage (cf. Deuteronomy 25:5f).

The final post-exilic stage, when the punishment was to be excommunication, is the prohibition of marriage with a maternal half sister (20:17) and intercourse during the menstrual period (20:18). Leviticus 18:6f gives a complete list of all relatives with whom marriage and sexual relationships are prohibited. It would also seem to represent a further refining of the definitions in that the prohibitions of 20:14 are extended to include another generation (18:17) and 18:18 forbids simultaneous marriage with sisters (cf. Genesis 29:21f).

The Prophetic writings and Wisdom literature also suggest limitations on male sexual freedom. We have already noted that marriage is regarded as illustrative of the Covenant relationship and that Israel's unfaithfulness is equated with adultery, thus suggesting that faithfulness and exclusivity within marriage are what God expects. This is re-enforced by the attitude taken to prostitution. Deuteronomy and Leviticus, whilst not actually condemning prostitution

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[29]A.Phillips op cit pp.126-127

in all circumstances certainly regard it as a less than ideal practice (see Leviticus 19:29, 21:7,9,14 Deuteronomy 22:21, 23:17-18). In Proverbs the women described in 2:16-19, 5:2-14; 6:23-7:27; 9:13-18 may not be professional prostitutes but the description of them suggests that they adopted very similar attitudes and were not concerned with lasting relationships outside their own marriages but with the pleasures of the moment. Their way leads to death, and De Vaux says, "this death is generally synonymous with moral perdition"[30]. In the older part of Proverbs prostitution is seen as an evil which has a destructive effect upon society (Proverbs 29:3, 31:3) and young men are exhorted to avoid this way of life. J.L.Mckenzie says, "It is remarkable that the entire Old Testament never manages a clear and unambiguous condemnation of prostitution"[31], but we find this a difficult position to accept in view of the abhorrence that seems to permeate so many of the passages that refer to this practice. Countryman, however, takes a somewhat neutral stand on the moral question and sees the evil of prostitution not so much in the payment for sexual favours but rather in "the removal of sexual intercourse from the framework of property and hierarchy which normally contained it and ensured that it was placed at the service of the family."[32] We may wish to disagree with the precise details of Phillip's analysis of the development of the law of adultery and with some of the suggestions he makes about exactly how and when the text was edited (as does McKeating[33]) but what seems undeniable is that within the Old Testament period the legitimate

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[30]R.De Vaux op cit, p.36

[31]J.L.McKenzie - A theology of the Old Testament p.207.

[32]L.W.Countryman op cit,p.164.

[33]H.McKeating op cit, pp.25-26.

boundaries of sexual relationships were refined and re-defined until "In the post-exilic period the crime of adultery was re-interpreted to include any of the offences specified in Leviticus 18:6ff."[34] rather than just being an offence by a man against another person's marriage or a woman against her own.

ADULTERY IN THE CANONICAL CONTEXT.

At this juncture it is important to draw attention to the different emphasis that the structure of the canon places upon marriage and adultery from that found in an historical survey. As we have indicated the scene is set in the creation stories. Genesis 2:24 suggests that the Old Testament has an ideal of marriage: marriage customs may have developed irregularly in the history of Israel but we are encouraged to read the text, and test customary practises, by this ideal. In the light of this exclusive monogamy, adultery is always abhorred. Abimelech reacts with anger, horror and amazement that he had been placed in a situation in which he nearly, and unwittingly, committed adultery with Sarah (Genesis 20:9-10); Joseph is represented as resisting the advances of Potiphar's wife on the basis of not wishing to sin against God (Genesis 39:9); David, the king, is sentenced to death for adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:10-11). The importance of married faithfulness is stressed when Israelite failure to keep the covenant with Jahweh is likened to adultery (Jeremiah 3:6ff, Ezekiel 16:30ff, The book of Hosea, etc.). Childs, commenting on Malachi 2:15 says, "The prophet interprets marriage as an inviolable covenant between a man and his wife to which God has served as witness. Again the emphasis falls on the divine imperative for a holy people, which is jeopardized by the breaking of the

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[34]A.Phillips op cit, p.128.

marriage vow."[35]

A further cause for reflection is the unhappiness of Hannah caused, partly at least by the tauntings of Peninna her co-wife, in the multiple marriage situation of 1 Samuel. Similarly, the plight of Hagar; a slave woman given to Abraham by his childless wife, only later to become the victim of her jealousy and be driven out from the family. Incidents such as these, in their canonical context, draw an inevitable contrast with the ideal of Genesis 2:24 and what actually happened in the lives of God's people.

ADULTERY IN ST. MATTHEW'S GOSPEL.

As we said earlier St.Matthew's Gospel gives us the viewpoint of at least one part of the early christian church to the place and importance it attributed to the life and teaching of Jesus. It also illustrates how that church perceived the traditions and sacred writings of the Jews. We have drawn attention to J.D.M.Derrett's view that Jewish moral teaching at the time of Christ had extended the scope of the seventh commandment to include all sexual activity outside marriage[36], and S.T.Lachs' citation of various Rabbinic texts to show that lustful thoughts were included[37]. We have also noted the suggestion made by P.Sigal that when Jesus describes a man who remarries as an adulterer he is "elevating women to a new level in sexual matters and forbidding men their former power of abuse".[38]

Countryman[39] makes some valuable contributions to this debate. When he discusses Matthew 19:9 - he links πορνεια to Deuteronomy

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[35]B.S.Childs - Old Testament theology in a canonical context p.81

[36]J.D.M.Derrett - Law in the New Testament pp.370ff

[37]S.T.Lachs - A Rabbinic commentary on the New Testament, Matthew,k Mark and Luke pp.96-97.

[38]P.Sigal - The halakhah of Jesus of Nazareth according to the gospel of Matthew p.94.

[39]L.W.Countryman op cit pp.173-178.

22:13-21 (where a bride who is unable to show proof of her virginity is accused of "harlotry" and the marriage can be terminated) and then suggests that Jesus totally redefines adultery because, "He not only forbade the man to divorce his wife, but also gave her a permanent and indissoluble claim on him as her sexual property."[40] This theme of sexual property is also suggested when he looks at Matthew 5:27-28 where adultery is clearly linked with intention as well as deed. Countryman suggests that these verses could be interpreted as saying that "all sexual desire is implicitly adulterous"[41] but he also notes that βλεπω is used in the LXX translation of the tenth commandment's prohibition of coveting, thus suggesting that Jesus now defines adultery as the desire, realised or not, to deprive another person of their sexual property.

In the divorce debate of Matthew 19:3f Jesus is portrayed as emphasising the equality of men and women by taking the argument back to creation and the unity of husband and wife that is an integral part of marriage there (Matthew19:4 cf Genesis 1:27 & 2:24). There is some evidence of the equal status, at least in the family, that Matthew attributed to women in the genealogy of Jesus in chapter 1. Descent was normally traced through the male line and this is predominantly so here, but every so often a woman is introduced Tamar (v3), Rahab and Ruth (v5), and the wife of Uriah (v6). Each of these non-Israelites could have been accused of sexual impropriety - Tamar was accused of harlotry (Genesis 38:24), if the Rahab is that of Joshua 2:1 then she is described as a harlot, Ruth would seem to have taken the initiative in establishing her relationship with Boaz (Countryman[42] suggests that

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[40]L.W.Countryman op cit p.175

[41]L.W.Countryman op cit p.177

[42]L.W.Countryman op cit p.91

"uncovered his feet" (Ruth 3:7) is a euphemism for a blatant sexual advance), the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba) had an adulterous relationship with David (2 Samuel 11). These are not included to condone immorality but, ". . . all four were in fact vindicated by God's subsequent blessing. They form an impressive precedent for Jesus' birth of an unmarried mother from an obscure background."[43] Mary, like these other women, could be accused of adultery. Whilst betrothed to Joseph she become pregnant; Joseph knew that he was not the father and therefore was minded to divorce her. He was persuaded to do otherwise by divine intervention (1:20-21) and Matthew makes it clear that such a charge would be unfounded because Mary was chosen by God (1:22-23). Matthew, then, has an uncompromising attitude to adultery and accepts a very broad definition that defines it not only in terms of remarriage after divorce, but also in terms of lustful thoughts. There are indications that sexual equality within marriage is seen as an ideal that the spiritually mature should strive to attain (Matthew 19:4-6 cf 19:11[44]), and care is taken to pre-empt any charge that Jesus himself was the result of an adulterous union.

ADULTERY AND THE WORK OF CALVIN

Calvin, unlike Matthew, had before him the Canon of both the Old and New Testaments and therefore is able to formulate his understanding of adultery from this advantageous position. When we analysed his exposition of the Ten Commandments we identified three major principles (i the elliptical nature of the commandments, ii the negative and positive aspects of the commandments, iii that the commandments are concerned with motives as well as actions) these in

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[43] R.T.France - Matthew p.74

[44] It seems to make greater sense of the meaning to apply 19:11 to Jesus saying about the ideal of marriage rather than to the disciples suggestion that celibacy is the better option.

turn should result in a threefold response (i a recognition of the lawgiver, ii a recognition of human unworthiness, iii obedience). When speaking of the seventh commandment he says, "The substance of the commandment therefore is, that we must not defile ourselves with any impurity or libidinous excess. To this corresponds the affirmative, that we must regulate every part of our conduct chastely and continently."[45] Thus Calvin sees this commandment as having relevance not only to the sanctity of marriage and the rights of both husband and wife to expect sexual fidelity, but also to the whole realm of human sexuality. It affects all human relationships and places God's people under obligation to avoid putting temptations into the path of others by word, or dress or action. Later we shall need to relate this to current sexual practice but of more immediate concern is whether or not this is a valid reading of scripture and it is to this that we turn our attention.

We have seen how Matthew places the emphasis upon the thought that leads to action rather than just the deed itself (5:27-28). This is an effective way of achieving biblical standards of behaviour because it doesn't make right behaviour a matter of observing rules but instead sees it as coming from a life lived in total harmony with God; actions are not an end in themselves but they express a relationship to the creator. In Matthew 15:1-20 we find Jesus clashing with the Jewish authorities over their purity laws and he indicated that real purity comes from a pure heart rather than ritual washings (vv. 17-20). Calvin applies this idea to adultery - adultery springs from wrong thinking; wrong thinking defiles; Christians must not defile themselves by an abuse of human sexuality which is as much about thought as deed. He says, "let not a man flatter himself, that

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[45]J.Calvin - Institutes of the Christian religion Vol. 1, p.472

because he abstains from the outward act he cannot be accused of unchastity. His mind may in the meantime be inwardly inflamed with lust."[46] Calvin, like St. Paul, says the answer to fornication and lust is marriage (1 Corinthians 7) which is an institution sanctified and blessed by God, indeed Calvin says, " . . any mode of cohabitation different from marriage is cursed in his sight."[47] Thus, by his emphasis on the importance of right thinking and marriage, Calvin's concept of adultery falls well within the framework of New Testament teaching, and his suggestion that "adultery" is an umbrella term[48] for all sexual sins would seem contiguous with the Matthean idea of "adultery of the mind".

Calvin took a totally canonical viewpoint, making no distinction between the Old and New Testaments. However, since the decalogue was given in a particular cultural and historical setting, it's worth examining whether Calvin's teaching is compatible with the Old Testament concept of adultery. Scripture perceives the ten commandments as being God's word and they are therefore given a unique authority. There is little doubt that they were a major influence in developing both the ethics and religion of the covenant community; they were to be literally in their minds and before their eyes at all times (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, though it is possible that verses 6-9 refer to the Shema of verses 4-5). Many biblical passages exhibit interest in the same areas of concern as the Decalogue; whether it be the prophetic denunciation of idolatry (e.g Isaiah 44:6-20), or concern over the way parents are treated (Micah 7:6), or abhorrence of false-witnesses (Proverbs 12:17). Even accepting the historical

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[46] J.Calvin, op cit p.474

[47] J.Calvin, op cit p.472

[48] J.Calvin, op cit p.438

setting of the Sinai covenant that is given to the decalogue by the canon, it is impossible to say that every passage touching on one of the ten commandments is directly related to them. However in view of the importance that the canon does attach to the Sinai revelation it seems reasonable to suggest that we are being invited to read the Old Testament in the light of Sinai, and to see it as a formative influence when conduct is being regulated and moral decisions are being made.

When we considered Calvin's attitude to the ten commandments we made specific reference to his treatment of adultery and we sought to demonstrate that the Old Testament had similar concerns and interests. We have seen this again in the expansion of the crime of adultery in Leviticus 18 & 20: it is important to note the inclusion here not only of a whole range of prohibited liaisons between men and women but also the prohibitions of bestiality (18:23, 20:15-16) and homosexuality (18:22, 20:13). Similarly we have looked at the way in which both the Prophetic and Wisdom literature condemn prostitution as something far from ideal and a practice to be avoided by those who are concerned with purity of life. We saw too the juxtaposition of the stories of David's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2ff) and Amnon's rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13) and suggested that David's inability to act effectively in the latter case was due, partly at least, to his own actions in the former - he had forfeited his moral authority through his own immoral actions. We can also cite Genesis 19 and Judges 19[49] where the reader is left to reflect upon the

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[49]L.W.Countryman (op cit pp.30-31) thinks it "improbable" that the main point of either story is a condemnation of homosexuality but of a rejection of traditional concepts of hospitality. G.J.Wenham ("The Old Testament attitude to homosexuality" ET 102, (1991) p.361), however, sees homosexual rape as central to both incidents.

disastrous results of sexual wrong-doing. Consideration of these passages encourage us to accept Calvin's treatment of adultery as a valid reading of scripture that reflects the concerns of the Old Testament - the covenant people were to avoid all practices which defiled and were to conduct themselves "continently and chastely". "Thou shalt not commit adultery" sums up right sexual behaviour.

ADULTERY - THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES AND MODERN PROBLEMS

We seek now to draw out some of the theological ideas that lie behind the biblical teaching on adultery and then suggest some ways in which these ideas become a valuable resource in developing a Christian sexual ethic in our modern world.

a. Adultery is offensive to God.

In our discussion so far we have been concerned with the way in which the community of faith saw adultery. It was an offence against the legitimacy of the family, it marred the ceremonial purity of the nation, it damaged ideals of sexual property. These were all appropriate ways of understanding the offence in particular social situations but we must be careful to ensure that these particularised applications do not obscure the fundamental and objective idea, namely adultery is an offence against God. This is basic to the Decalogue. The commandments are God's commandments, they are a summary of the behaviour Jahweh expects from his covenant people. They are not open to negotiation but are authoritative declarations from the Saviour-God (Exodus 20:2). We find the same emphasis in both Leviticus 18 and 20 where the people are reminded of who it is that gives them commandment and regulates their sexual behaviour (18:1-5, 20:6-8). In a number of narrative passages attention is drawn to this fact that adultery is essentially an offence against God. In Genesis 39:7-18 we have the account of how Potiphar's wife

attempted to seduce Joseph. He rejects her advances because it would be an abuse of his master's trust (v's 8b-9a) but also because he saw such an action as a sin against God (v.9b). Similarly in 2 Samuel 12 we have Nathan's rebuke of King David. He declares that David has "despised the word of the Lord", and done, "evil in his sight" (v.9). In this case the offence was twofold being both a rejection of the sixth and seventh commandments - he had conspired to have Uriah killed and committed adultery with Bathsheba. David recognised that the crime against humanity was great but even more serious was the offence against God (cf v's 5-6 with v.13) and although his repentance was accepted he had to bear the consequences of his action (v.14). The New Testament has a similar outlook; adultery is an offence against God that seriously affects the individual's relationship to him. When Matthew talks about adultery of the mind, stemming from the lustful use of the eyes, a link is immediately made with the discipline needed to avoid being "thrown into hell" (5:29-30). Paul expresses the same concept when he includes adultery amongst those things which debar people from the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9, Galatians 5:19-21).

This does not detract from the impact that adultery has on the individual, the family or society. It means, however, that the community of faith, today just as much as in biblical times, has a responsibility to regulate its sexual conduct according to God's rules rather than simply in terms of what society allows, accepts or approves. Adultery is sin.

b. Personhood.

In our survey of how the concept of adultery developed in the biblical period we drew attention to the increasing account taken of the sexual equality of women with men. The pattern seems to be that adultery

gradually came to be defined as any sexual activity outside legitimate marriage, which had the effect of applying the same rules to men as to women and thus male sexual freedom was restricted rather than greater freedom being extended to women. In biblical literature a wife (also a betrothed, and a concubine) was expected to behave chastely and live in an exclusive sexual relationship with her husband. Gradually the concept evolved that a husband had the same responsibilities to his wife.

The creation narratives are key to any understanding of this. Humanity was created "male and female" (Genesis 1:27) and in marriage there is a unique bond between husband and wife (Genesis 2:24). It is a theme that is taken up in Ephesians 5:21-33, where mutual responsibility and inter-relationship are emphasised, and also in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 where sexual equality is clearly advocated. Human sexual relationships are meant to respect the sexual partner's humanity - men are not to use and abuse women (nor for that matter are women to use and abuse men). Human sexuality expresses the deepest of human relationships; the Bible sees it as complete commitment rather than a casual relationship.

We must be careful, however, how this important theological principle is applied, it cannot be used as an excuse to over-rule God's objective commandments. It is on this level that we would take issue with Countryman who says that in the light of a failure to respect another person's humanity "the technical act of adultery by sexual intercourse with a third person is a relatively trivial matter."[50], or that it is a "perversion of the Gospel" to deny people the right to pursue, in a peaceful way that does not harm others,

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[50]L.W.Countryman op cit p.254

freedom through Christ (Galatians 5:1). The relevance of this to our present study would seem to be that Christians choose to live within the parameters set by God's law and that gives them the freedom to develop into whole people. Instead of all our energy being consumed by a continual challenge of God's boundaries we are free to develop the ideal of personhood both with regard to self and others. P.Tournier, writing as a Christian psychiatrist, states, ". .it was St.Thomas Aquinas who said, 'grace does not suppress nature', Grace gives us the victory over our nature; it restores the flow of life which sets us free."[53] or a bit later on, ". . however difficult and incomplete the search for God's guidance, it is nevertheless that which creates the person, that which is the source from which new life and liberty spring."[54] "Personhood" cannot be used as an excuse to indulge self, however socially acceptable that indulgence might be. Such self indulgence will eventually lead to a denial of humanity, both in self and in others.

Any consideration of adultery must give due recognition to the rights of others with regard to sexual property and sexual equality but must always operate within the framework of what God permits.

c. Sexuality finds its right expression within marriage

We suggested earlier that in the Old Testament sexual relationships were permissible only within a stable framework that was recognised and regulated by society (whether monogamy, polygamy, concubinage, or female slaves). Casual relationships (i.e. prostitution) were frowned upon and if a man seduced a virgin he was expected to marry her (Exodus 22:16) thus giving her the protection of customary family law. We have also drawn attention to St.Paul's recognition of this

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[53]P.Tournier - The Meaning of persons p.220

[54]P.Tournier, op cit p.227

through his teaching in 1 Corinthians 7 where marriage is advocated as the answer to lust. However the state was structured (i.e whether the theocratic organisation of the Old Testament community, or the Roman law that dominates the New Testament) marriage was something that had a social standing and recognition. The same is true today where marriage is a function of the state - it is the legal form through which the state regulates human sexuality. In England, at least, the church operates within the marriage laws of the state.

It is possible to raise a number of philosophical and theological questions about any definition of marriage. Does sexual intercourse constitute a marriage (1 Corinthians 6:16 cf. Genesis 2:24)? If a man and a woman live together without going through a marriage ceremony are they husband and wife - if so at what stage in their relationship do they become "married"? Can homosexual and Lesbian relationships be regarded as marriage? Countryman[55] suggests that the church should be able to bless all such unions when time has verified their validity but the difficulty with such a position is the establishment of objective criteria that enable this judgement to be made. In modern Britain, as in the Old and New Testaments, marriage entails the taking on of a set of responsibilities and commitments. These responsibilities and commitments have changed as society has changed, but they are are still publicly and commonly recognised as giving the partners in the marriage certain sexual rights and responsibilities. We have seen how Leviticus 18 and 20 defined limits for right relationships (cf. prohibited degrees of marriage today) and it is within this type of legal framework - a framework established by law and a framework of responsibility and commitment - that human sexuality finds its right expression. This is the official

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[55]L.W.Countryman op cit p.263.

position of the Church of England; part 1. of a four part motion passed by General Synod in 1987 said, "That sexual intercourse is an act of total commitment which belongs properly within a permanent married relationship".

We move now from these general theological principles to see how they affect our approach to a christian understanding of the right use of human sexuality in the world of today. At first sight there would seem to be little room for manoeuvre (particularly in view of 3. above) but in fact the issue is complex. In the modern world there has been a real revolution in sexual attitudes. Contraception and abortion have removed the threat of unwanted births and sexual intercourse is no longer (if it ever was) primarily concerned with reproduction but with companionship and enjoyment. Society today is comparitively fluid and unstructured; comtemporary attitudes to human sexuality can, in some ways, be seen as a simply a reflection of this continually changing climate. No stigma is attached to couples living together without marriage. Television, radio and literature have brought sexual activity before people's minds with a new openness. Public attitudes to homosexual and lesbian orientations are changing. We are aware of rape, child sex-abuse, and paedophile activity as never before. It is in this changing moral climate that Christian sexual ethics have to be applied.

Old Testament law was given to, and intended for, the covenant community which was meant to respond to God in faith. New Testament Christianity is not so much a cultural or national identification as a response in and through faith to the person of Jesus Christ. It is through this "faith response" that the individual seeks to frame their life according to biblical teaching and commands - faith is

demonstrated by works (Matthew 7:16, James 2:18). Thus we would maintain that the primary application of the commandments today is to the community of faith (though we recognise that as the community of faith upholds the standards of God it sets before the world the ideal standard). The Christian does not live in an exclusive, self-contained, God-centred community but, like the New Testament church, in an environment that is in certain ways hostile to spiritual values. Britain is a "Christianized" rather than a Christian culture. Through its christian heritage it has a framework of law that reflects biblical standards but these laws are upheld (when and if they are) not from loyalty to God but because of their self-evident truth. So although our concern is essentially with the meaning of the commandments for Christians we also need to develop some understanding of their relevance to a society that takes little direct account of God. These are not necessarily diverse in that both the community of faith and society as a whole would reject, for example, rape, child sex abuse, bestiality and necromancy. Large segments of society also find homophilia[56] repulsive and pornography offensive. The greatest area of disagreement is that of heterosexual relationships outside marriage, whether prior to marriage or after a marriage has ceased through divorce or the death of one of the partners. It would be legitimate to include all these areas, controversial or not, under the general heading of adultery. Leviticus 18 and 20 suggest that this is possible by linking a whole group of sexual sins together. So too does Calvin when he says, "the Lord sets forth, by way of example, whatever is foulest and most iniquitous in each species of transgression".[57] In modern thinking adultery may not be the most

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[56]We use this term to mean both homosexual and lesbian sexual activity

[57]J.Calvin op cit, p.438

repulsive of sexual sins but on the basis that it is a breach of trust and commitment, and because of the destructive effect it has upon family life and the structure of society a case can be made for agreeing with Calvin and therefore to see it as an "umbrella" for all the other sexual wrongs.

A full treatment of all these issues is beyond the scope of this study so although we do not wish to minimise the importance of other areas of concern we shall concentrate on sexual relationships outside marriage to illustrate how the prohibition of adultery, and the theological principles that arise from it, can be used as a resource in coming to terms with these sexual problems today.

How then do they apply to the church - the community of faith? The simple answer is to say that since adultery is offensive to God, since we are to respect the rights and feelings of others and since sexual relationships find their right expression only within marriage then, amongst Christians, sexual intercourse is prohibited other than within marriage, the equality of men and women in marriage is to be upheld, both partners are under obligation to observe sexual faithfulness which means exclusivity. However, such an approach would not receive approval from all quarters. Countryman for example says, "the gospel allows no rule against the following, in and of themselves: masturbation, nonvaginal heterosexual intercourse, bestiality, polygamy, homosexual acts, or erotic art and literature."[58] Later he says, "Some nonmarital liaisons may in fact prove to be preparatory to marriage in the stricter sense. Others may serve to meet legitimate needs in the absence of genuine alternatives. Still others may be abusive and exploitative. Only the last are to be

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[58]L.W.Countryman op cit p.243

condemned."[59]. This means that if we are to advocate something approaching "the simple answer" then we need further justification that this reading and application of scripture is justified.

To support the principle that human sexuality finds its right expression only within marriage we offer the following :-

i) The Old Testament expectation that sexual actions would take place within marriage and the use of πορνεια in the New Testament (Acts 15:20,29. 21:25 1 Corinthians 5:1ff, 6:9 Galatians 5:19, Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 3:5, Hebrews 13:4 Revelation 2:14). The exact meaning of this word is complex but since it cannot be taken to apply only to prohibited degrees of marriage it is reasonable to accept that it is used to condemn sexual activity outside marriage (Kosnik says, "Although its original meaning was limited the term broadened gradually and came to be identified with extramarital relations, adultery, sodomy, unlawful marriage and even sexual intercourse in general without further precision."[60]). Paul says shun πορνεια because it is a sin and pollutes the body which is the temple of the Holy Ghost (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

ii) Marriage is a function by which the state regulates sexual relationships between men and women. Christians are under obligation to be good citizens (Romans 13:1-4, 1 Peter 2:13-17) and should therefore conform to human institutions - subject, of course, to the rider that those institutions do not deny biblical truths.

iii) Condemnation of promiscuity and casual sexual relationships is something that has broad agreement in all branches of Christianity (though perhaps Countryman gives partial approval even to these[61]).

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[59] L.W.Countryman, op cit p.264

[60]Kosnik et al, op cit pp.23-24

[61]L.W.Countryman op cit pp.263-4

Since sexual intercourse should be an expression of love and commitment "personhood" arguments suggest that participants should be willing to extend to their partner the security and recognition that society offers through the marriage contract; if there is unwillingness to give or accept this legal status then the church (and society) are entitled to question the love and commitment and suggest instead that in the relationship one or both of the partners are being used.

Barth, whilst warning against the belief that a marriage ceremony makes a marriage, speaks of the union of a man and a woman in this way, "The transition of two persons from love to marriage, and therefore to the founding of a new sociological unit in the human society around them does in fact demand public advertisement and recognition, and a definite form."[62]

An important issue is how far other factors, such as changing social conditions and attitudes, can over-rule biblical principles? Countryman[63], for example, sees Old Testament sexual prohibitions in terms of purity law rather than as moral principles in their own right. There can be no question that a measure of discontinuity exists between the two testaments, at least on the matter of purity laws. The purpose of Peter's vision in Acts 10:9-16,28 is set forth as teaching that regulations about clean and unclean animals are no longer relevant and the early church apparently confirmed this at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:28-29). Countryman is undoubtedly right when he says that "we are not free to impose our codes on others"[64]. However, it would seem wrong to connect all sexual legislation with purity codes or, for that matter, with legitimisation of the family or

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[62]K.Barth - Church Dogmatics III, 4 p.226

[63]L.W.Countryman op cit, pp.39

[64]L.W.Countryman op cit, pp.243-244

with property law. The Decalogue, either in the context of the Sinai covenant or or as a later codification of moral law, lifts adultery above changing social patterns and puts it into the realm of a moral principle that has an abiding relevance (and, if we accept Calvin's "umbrella" heading and the implications of Leviticus 18 & 20, it does the same for a number of other sexual activities). The New Testament accepts it in this way; hence Jesus condemned not just the action but also the thought that led to the action (Matthew 5:27-28) and it is condemned elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g. Romans 2:22, Galatians 5:19). On this basis we find the use of "personhood arguments" to justify adultery (or for that matter fornication, homophilia, or other sexual "deviations") unconvincing. The right place for personhood arguments would seem to be in developing proper relationships - the mutual responsibility, respect, loyalty and trust that should exist within marriage.

We believe it is valid for the christian community to set this ideal before those who claim membership, and that sexual activity outside marriage is contrary to God's will. This however, raises the complex issue of how the community of faith deals with sexual relationships outside marriage. Church discipline is beyond the scope of this study, but we would suggest that although the community of faith is under obligation to proclaim the ideal, part of proclaiming that ideal is to show love and concern for those who are unable to live by this standard[65]. The aim of church discipline should be to bring about repentance and a change of life (1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Timothy 1:20). Indeed the community of faith must never give the impression that Christianity is only, or even primarily, about morality because first and foremost it is about faith

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[65]This applies to all types of sin not just sexual sins.

in the person of Jesus Christ; real faith transforms and brings forth fruit to the glory of God (Matthew 7:15-20). This seems particularly applicable when we look outside the Christian community and seek to apply our doctrine of adultery to the non-Christian world; a world in which co-habiting outside marriage, pornography, homophilia, and the rejection of fidelity within marriage are all common occurrences. It would seem proper to proclaim the ideal that adultery is offensive to God, that development of personhood is important, and that sexual relationships find their right expression within marriage. Equally, however, it is important that these are not proclaimed in such a way that they become barriers preventing people embarking on the journey of faith. The community of faith should be a group of people where all can come - as they are, with whatever sexual orientation and whatever personality defects - to discover for themselves something of God's love and something of the healing power of his way of life. This is the message of Hosea; just as a human being can forgive adultery so God wants his adulterous people to return to him. The bishops of the Church of England encourage the same positive thinking when they say, "Christian teaching about marriage offers something much better than what it is commonly taken to be, namely a regulation which simply condemns those who break it. It offers two things: first, guidance, based on God's revelation in scripture and Christian experience, as to the way of life within which full physical expression of our sexuality can best contribute to our own maturity and sanctification and that of others; and secondly, a direction in which other sexual relationships can and should move, if they are to serve more effectually the true fulfilment of those concerned."[66]

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[66]"Issues in human sexuality" p.20

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