

PART 6: Essays

Chapter 6.01 Do-Gooding, Citizenship, Working, and Crusading

This part of the book offers essays to help normal people feel better about invoking God and Jesus in their lives. I am not a pastor and am not comfortable giving advice. I have broken every Commandment except "Do not murder", and most of my life was misspent, so I have no license to advise. Worse yet, my sins and my life are boring. I am not a romantic heroic sinner bad boy. I did not have a dramatic conversion experience. So focus on any realistic content that I get across and then judge for yourself.

Four Arenas of Advice. Modern people need advice in four arenas.

(1) Personal feelings: accepting God, morality, Jesus, and other major religious teachers and moral teachers into your life.

(2) Personal action: what to do as an individual person on the basis of the feelings in number one. Except for people in prison, sick, or living in bad places, usually you can act. You can act toward other people, small groups of people, animals, and the environment. In acting, you feel personally involved. You interact with the people or animals that you help. You forge relations with people and animals that are part of your relation with God.

(3) How to act on Jesus' moral teachings on a larger scale, usually through institutions, such as through a Church, charities, or being a good citizen in a democracy. You can do this privately or through the government (see Point Four below). This arena is relevant even if you live under a government that is not a democracy as long as you can act through some institutions such as the Church or Red Cross, or if you take part in popular causes such as to promote Gay rights or to oppose abortion. Sometimes the most efficient use of time, energy, and money is through institutions rather than through local personal action. The disadvantages are that we lose the feelings of personal involvement and responsibility, and we lose the sense of personal relations. When we lose the sense of personal human relations sometimes we can lose a sense of a relation with God.

(4) Using the state (government) to carry out our moral and religious ends. This is a dangerous method but people usually resort to it, as when they use the state to promote Gay rights or to oppose abortion. Sometimes we have to act through the state to promote common decency and order, or to oppose a large moral wrong that can only be righted through the state such as slavery. In a democracy, we naturally, yet wrongly, feel that any serious concern of a large group of people is the business of the state and that we should pursue major projects through the state. We have to draw the line between morally motivated action that is best done through the state or otherwise. We have to be careful not use the state as the instrument of any one morality or religion, and we have to be careful not to abuse the state.

Each arena requires several books. My main concern in this part of the book is arenas one and two although I comment on arenas three and four in later chapters. This chapter covers a couple of problems that get in the way of personal action, and then looks at various kinds of personal action.

Gaga and Manipulation.

This section describes the first problem. Some people see religion as an “Oh, Wow” experience. They see the beauty and interconnectedness of the world, and feel God behind it all. I feel this myself. Many people that have this feeling do not also move from this feeling to the moral duties that come with it and to their role as a citizen in a modern state. Some people cannot, and I have no urge to push them. But some have to think what their feelings mean to them as a member of the Kingdom of God instead of just reveling. Religion means more than just gazing even if it does not mean we have a personal obligation to right all wrongs and to save the world.

Sometimes it is better that people who go gaga over religion do little else in the name of their religion. Some of the most annoying conversations I have had were with people who gave me this basic spiel: “God is great. God made the world and everything in it. God made you. It is all good and beautiful. You can participate in the world. God loves you. All you have to do is believe in Jesus and you will be saved. Can’t you feel the love? You’re one of us now. Uh, and by the way, because you now feel this intense love and beauty, you have to do a few things. You have to vote the way I tell you, get mad at the people I tell you to get mad at, and support the people I tell you to support. You have to get angry or feel love the way I tell you to get angry and feel love.” Many people in many belief systems, including academic atheism, have their own versions. They seduce with beauty, awe, moral fervor, or the need to belong. This tactic is a version of using morality as a tool to control other people.

When we feel the beauty of the world and the joy of a relation with God, we have to be careful to evaluate the moral implications and we have to be dead sure before we think that our feelings give us license to manipulate other people.

The Bad Side of Salvation and Justification.

This section describes the second problem. The ideas of salvation and justification have plagued Christianity almost since the beginning. Rather than think about getting saved, or being justified in order to be saved, we should just be a good citizen of the Kingdom of God. Justification and salvation then take care of themselves. If we try to get saved directly, too often we stop being a good citizen in the Kingdom of God. Especially if we seek justification through grace or through certification from our church, we stop being a good citizen in the Kingdom. It is hard to let go and just be a good citizen in the Kingdom of God but that is what we have to do and it is all we have to do.

To Jesus, the most important thing was membership in the Kingdom of God, and Jesus did not think of the Kingdom of God in terms of salvation and justification. He just did not think like that. As far as I can tell, he did not use the terms “salvation” or “justification”, and certainly he did not use the term “justification” as Christianity does. He was not interested in the battle between faith and works; he assumed both. Being a member of the Kingdom is like realizing one day that you should be a good neighbor, being friendly, patching up feuds, doing small favors, accepting overtures, and protecting

against bad guys. It is not like joining a club with a secret code, handshake, and initiation ritual. You do what you can as best you can. You can be Sam the Gardener or Aragorn the King, whatever suits you and whatever you have to do. There is no special way to know you are a neighbor (saved) or to know everybody accepts you as a neighbor in good standing (justified). You just are. The more you worry, the less you are able to just do. Just do it and don't worry about it.

Seeking salvation directly instead of just becoming a member of the Kingdom of God is like trying to be an official member, with a certificate, of a pickup baseball team instead of just playing baseball; or like trying to be an official member, with a certificate, of a regular dinner party among friends instead of just eating dinner with everybody; or like trying to be declared an official ecological good guy instead of just picking up trash, recycling, cutting down on waste, and helping animals. Becoming a member of the Kingdom of God is even easier than baseball or the dinner party because you do not have to join or be invited, you just do it. If you seek salvation directly, you get confused and you waste time that you could have spent enjoying baseball, dinner, or nature. Membership in the Kingdom of God is best attained by not pursuing it directly, like Nirvana or being cool. Seeking membership directly in the Kingdom of God is like trying to grab water instead of just drinking it. Seeking membership directly through Justification and Salvation almost guarantees that you will not get it and that you will cause problems for yourself and others.

Just to get over improperly using the term "salvation", for now, call membership in the Kingdom of God "salvation". Whether you seek salvation (membership) directly or indirectly, you still have to work hard at doing the job well. You cannot seek salvation without doing the job well of being a member in the Kingdom of God. For example, if you want to make music, you have to practice, really understand the music, and have a musical "vision". If you want to be a good boyfriend, you have to know what the girl is really like in herself, really care about the girl as she is, use your imagination, watch a few romantic comedies, and do things together. The same is true of a good girlfriend. If you want to be a good monk, you pray and meditate. If you want to be a good dinner guest, you bring a salad or a six-pack of good beer, whatever is in your best ability.

If you go after most big goals directly, including salvation, then usually you do not do all the hard work that lies behind real achievement but instead you look for signs of status. The signs are deceptions that prevent you from actually doing the job. If you seek to become a writer instead of trying to write well then you put on a tweed coat or you put on a leather jacket. Do not seek to be a "writer" directly. Instead, have something to write about, have a good story to tell, work to say it as best you can, and then write it. Whether or not you are a writer is less important than writing well. Don't try to be a musician, instead just make the best music you can. All the same is true of salvation.

Justification is one sign of salvation. Justification is the spooky unreal certificate that you seek for joining a pickup baseball game. It does not make sense. It might feel great to get an award for being an actor but the best reward is satisfaction in your body of work, your intent, and your efforts over many years. Many good actors never got the statues they deserve but their work is no less great, and students of film will be studying them as long as actors who did get statues. There is no way to ratify that you are a good parent or a good child.

If we seek justification instead of membership in the Kingdom of God, then too often we carry out another kind of selfishness, often in disguise of public service. In seeking something for ourselves we might do good work along the way but that is always secondary to seeking justification for ourselves. We want the red badge of courage more than we want to be a good soldier. If instead we do not worry about the certificate then we are more likely to do the good work that would earn us a certificate.

Activism, “Do-Gooding”, and Justification.

Because I lived through the rise of PC on the Left and political-religious fundamentalism on the Right, I see the bad effects of the quest for justification mostly in misguided political zealotry focused on single causes such as abortion and “big government”. Briefly: people from the Western Christian heritage do not act spontaneously to help but instead crusade so as to feel justified and feel good about themselves. Sometimes they do good along the way but too often they do more harm than good. The fault does not usually lie with the causes. Many causes are good. Rather than abandon all causes to avoid the harms of self-serving justification, we need to calm down, examine our situations and our motives, and then act vigorously to help without regard to our justification.

Christianity and Islam are activist religions. Christians and Muslims tend to want other people to believe as they do, and tend to intervene to make other people live as Christians and Muslims want. Jesus wants us to build a better world. That task implies actively doing good and sometimes getting into people’s lives. Misunderstood, the task excuses abuse. Christianity and Islam are easily prone to the problems of salvation, justification, success, signs, and heroic crusading. Sometimes active “do-gooding” can be the right thing but it can also cause a lot of harm. We need to be clear about doing good and the pitfall of imposing on other people. We need to do good without also doing harm. Nearly all political activists, academic atheists, a-religious community activists, supposed small-government conservatives, advocates of family values, and advocates of get-rid-of-religion-but-keep-morality also interfere in the lives of other people in the name of doing good. They have inherited the culture and the mindset even if they have lost the overt theology.

Even misguided crusading might not be so bad if people really did good along the way. We could put up with zealotry if it did more good than harm, especially if it did little harm. But people act without considering the full results of their actions. They act without considering if their acts bring more good than harm, without thinking if their energy might be better used elsewhere, and without realizing they really seek their own feelings of justification and salvation more than the goals of their crusade. They use apparent good to secretly control other people. The need for justification is more important to them than actually doing good, and too often the need for justification leads them to do great harm in the name of small good.

The problem is not confined to the West and to Christianity but shows up among other people in other religions and other political systems. Anytime a strict ideology demands action to achieve unreasonable goals, you get this kind of craziness, as you do with Muslim extremist terrorism. Jesus came to get us out of traps like this but history turned his message upside down so that now his message serves to reinforce the traps.

Terrible traps happen on a lesser scale than grand social crusading. Many people who are depressed, TV addicts, shopaholics, substance abusers, or caught into keeping up with the Joneses, are plagued by the duty to succeed for justification. They feel they can never succeed enough. Their lives can never be justified. Those of them who finally realize they cannot justify themselves have to face failure. Too often, failure crushes them. I have seen many people give up doing a lot of good on a small scale because they could not do good on a big scale. I do not excuse them and I do not blame society either. I merely point out the sadness of this trap. If we did not frame success in terms of justification, and justification in terms of success, if we allowed that it was enough to merely do good without saving the world, appreciate God's handiwork in nature, or God's handiwork in the human arts, then people might be able to contribute in small but real ways and might be able to feel worthwhile.

"The first casualty of war is truth". The worst casualty of self-serving zealotry is good causes. We need social justice, need political action to achieve it, and need personal action to achieve it. When people use a grand sounding zealotry to make themselves feel justified, they pervert good causes, discredit good causes, and keep decent people out of good causes. They channel good people into bad causes and keep them out of good causes. Bad motives turn good causes bad. Saving the environment, finding good health care, alleviating poverty, making sure that people have decent families with appropriate role models, promoting honest business, finding a way to make capitalism work, seeking sustainable development all over the world, and even giving modestly to a decent charity, all become bad jokes. We are all the worse for it.

These causes often serve self-centered justifying zealotry: People on the Left save the environment while people on the Right save unborn babies. People on the Left work to win unrealistic health care while people on the Right work to stop realistic health care by raising the fear of made-up socialism. Academic feminists work to give women what they say women need without bothering to find out what real working women want. Conservatives tell women what they want without bothering to find out what real working women need. Black leaders mislead their people by catching White people in small crimes of political incorrectness while the Black leaders commit greater crimes of not working hard to make needed basic changes in Black culture and in the society as a whole. Instead of working to make sure every Black child earns a genuine and respected school certificate, Black leaders catch Whites misusing Black slang. White people move their children out of public schools into Christian academies instead of forcing all schools to give Black, White, Yellow, Red, and Brown kids the education that they all need and that would truly serve God and country. Whites and Blacks in general go along with it all because, in the short run, it feels better, and in the long run you don't have to do anything real – drinking wine to forget you drink whisky. Conservatives want government out of business but want to use government to regulate our sex lives, marital lives, drug, and gambling. Liberals want government out of our private lives but want government to regulate business. This all is a misuse of our talents. This is what the New Testament tells us not to do.

Go Crazy.

In attacking self-centered zealotry, I do not undermine all determined action. I do not want people only to bake cookies and smile. Vigorous action can be great as long as it does more good than harm and we do it for the right reasons. I want people to think about what they do and why. Then, if you still feel like going crazy, do it. Do not always add pluses and minuses. Sometimes just do. Sometimes we only get

anything done if we go crazy. There would have been no American Revolution without a lot of semi-crazies. But back off if the project feels wrong. Then assess and try again. Do not give up on social justice just because one cause goes wrong or gets hijacked by self-serving zealots. Do not allow good causes to be the greatest casualty of self-serving zealotry. On a more personal level, if you want to write, if you want to be a writer without being a "writer", even if you have no particular story in mind right now but know you will, then go ahead. If you want to be a photographer even if you don't have any particular shot in mind right now, and you can't imagine doing anything else, then go ahead. If you want to be a physicist without worrying about the practical value of a grand theory of everything, then go ahead. If you want to figure out the business cycle, then go ahead. If you want to win the Super Bowl five times, then go ahead. If you want to bake some brownies for neighbor kids, then go ahead and don't worry about your motivation, if it is enough doing good, or what other people think. The point is not to stop being human or stop being possessed but to stop being possessed by the demons of salvation and justification, and to stop causing harm as a result.

Jesus' World and Our World.

Part of doing harm while trying to do good comes because our world is not like Jesus' world. Jesus' world had a lot of poor people that needed help just to get by. In Jesus' world, compared to our world, people of various statuses saw each other more often and more clearly. Poor people saw rich people and vice versa. When they interacted, their status always played a part. People knew status differences and paid attention to them. These days, we might see people but not recognize that they are poor and we have no idea of their needs. We might see wealthy people but not know they are wealthy and so not know they are able to give. In America, we pretend that the janitor has the same status as the executive. In Jesus' world, both the poor and the rich were more obvious. Jesus' world was more like the modern Third World than like a typical American town. In Jesus' world, the government did not arrange as much order as today. The state hardly regulated commercial life except when the rulers did it for their own benefit. The streets, water, and air in towns were all filthy, and people got seriously sick often. Thieves hit regularly. Bullies ruled street corners. Bandits ruled the roads. People did not need computer aided graphics to visualize a wounded man in the road. In those situations, Jesus' advice made sense.

Jesus' advice was originally about person-to-person situations. Jesus clearly wanted people to see other people as people and to interact with other people. Jesus rarely taught about institutional life and rarely gave institutional rules. After the Church became a regular institution, it had to make rules about institutional life and it had to manage meetings between members of different status so that they did not bother each other. After Christians took over whole governments, Christians had to make rules about whole states and whole classes of people. People who are Christians now have to run whole governments even if they do not administer as Christians but as citizens. Followers of Jesus had to frame rules so that people could do good through institutions as well as through direct personal conduct. Rather than give directly to a poor person, widow, orphan, or sick person, rather than go visit somebody in jail, Christians could give to the Church, which would arrange something on their behalf. Today, we have the same choice to act directly with people or to act indirectly through institutions such as Red Cross, Volunteers of America, WWF, Goodwill, or St. Vincent de Paul. We can try to do good on a personal level or we can try to do good by forging good institutions such as state health care or a free market. Most modern people would rather work through institutions. I see nothing wrong with that as long as modern

people really do more good than harm and as long as they know they are missing out on personal relations.

In modern developed nations, institutions such as economic development, the market, science, and the political process have done the work of Christianity. People in general are now at a level of wealth, security, and independence that people of Jesus' time only dreamed about. Except for the minority of the chronically under employed and unemployed, these institutions have freed the large majority of people so they do not need help of the kind Jesus had in mind. Even people that seem as if they have trouble such as an overextended mortgage really do not have trouble by the standards of human life over the last few thousand years, especially if they have a steady job with benefits. Many people in modern life make their own trouble by over reaching their means.

It makes no sense to help most people in modern developed nations in ways that Jesus had in mind. People do not need that kind of help as often and they usually resent that kind of help even when they do need it. It makes no sense to look out for people waylaid by bandits in a modern American working class neighborhood where most residents have steady jobs with benefits and have clean safe houses. Trying to help people in those neighborhoods that way is more likely to cause trouble even when some few people could use help. Recall comparative competition from Darwinism. People that are not in bad trouble, but might be in a little trouble, want to appear as if they are no in trouble at all. People that aspire to middle class life have to appear as if they have already made it and as if they do not have any trouble even if they do have a little trouble. They do not want anybody to know they cannot make the house payment or the heating bill this month, and they resent it if a do-gooder finds out and tries to help. They do not want somebody else buying their kids school clothes. They will not go to thrift stores. The same attitudes prevail even in rural areas where some Americans are obviously poor even by world standards and yet cannot gracefully accept help.

Modern day do-gooders know this. They know that they cannot do good mostly in the personal ways Jesus had in mind. So they look for other ways to do good. There is nothing wrong with accepting the truth and doing good on the basis of a changed reality if we accept that reality fully.

Of course, some people always need help, and there are always ways to do good. We have to make sure we really do more good than harm. We have to not offend people and we have to do them real good. We have to make being useful our first priority, not doing good. We do more good when we try to be useful than when we try to do good. That sounds paradoxical but it is not, as we will see later in this part of the book.

Doing Good, Receiving Good, and Normal Life.

For everybody who does good, somebody has to receive good. We cannot all be do-gooders all the time. Jesus expected most people to receive good most of the time rather than to give good. Receiving good is a valid thing to do. You should not be ashamed to receive good. You should not think that only do-gooders have a role to play. To be ashamed to receive good is to be ashamed of God's normal action through people. Sometimes it is better to receive than to give.

What happens in most of Jesus' stories after somebody helps somebody else? The people who got the helps "pay it forward" when they can but mostly they carry on with a better normal life. The restoration of

normal life, on a better level, is what doing good aims for. Normal life does not mean being always on the lookout for doing good in advance. It does not mean hunting down the bandits even before the traveler is assaulted and needs help from the Good Samaritan. It means being willing to do good when the need arises. Normal life has a lot of cares already. People leading normal lives have their hands full already. If you lead a normal life and the need to do good arises only seldom, do not worry about it too much.

Working for Jesus.

In Jesus' world, there were few doctors, no hospitals, most of the lawyers worked for rich people, the policemen were soldiers, all the soldiers worked for the rulers rather than for the people, and teachers taught only students who could pay. These days, people can do a lot of good through their work. Not only obvious professional people such as doctors do good through their work but so do honest civil servants, people who work on the roads, people who install and maintain cable, and a lot of others. When everything depends on everything else, and when most jobs contribute to the general welfare as in modern capitalism, then just working a normal job truly helps everybody. I think most people who do honest work in their normal lives can be happy with how they contribute to society and help others. This is a basic teaching from John the Baptist again. Of course, many good working people are not satisfied with only contributing through their jobs this way and they look for doing more such as through volunteer work or church work. I commend them. This is good as long as they really do more good than harm.

I don't know if doing good through your work is enough. If you cannot see other ways to do good, and you really put yourself into your work, then maybe it is enough. If you can see other ways but you use your job as an excuse, then it is not enough no matter how well you do your job. In the end, you have to work that out with God.

The more difficult case for me is people who start their lives thinking they can use their profession to do good but who wind up serving themselves and doing little good. This is what caused me to live on the edges of academia. I saw too many people who called themselves Leftist radicals in the 1970s go on to be professors and to teach unrealistic ideas from the safety of tenure. I saw too many religious Conservatives with hearts of stone, who believed far more in some imaginary version of capitalism than in Jesus or in the real existence of poor people, and who use imaginary capitalism as a tool to oppress the poor and to increase the rich. Too many professors think they will do good through research but go on to worry more about how to keep the big grants coming than about the content of their work. Too many lawyers start off thinking they can help women find freedom but end up fleecing husbands in divorce cases. Too many doctors and dentists end up living in mansions wondering how to protect their investments and scheming to stop public health care. Too many business people tell themselves that capitalism is good as a system, so they really follow Jesus by working to be rich. Pumping the political process is part of that game and part of "serving" Jesus that deluded way. They massage their feelings by giving the right amount to charity. I think these people are largely lost.

Following Jesus, serving God, and serving your fellow creatures through your particular service work is good. I hope people keep doing it. A lot of people do a lot of good through their everyday work – not just obvious service people such as police officers and teachers or obvious creative people such as musicians but many people who do their work honestly such as bakers, clerks, and librarians: standard Christians, non-standard followers of Jesus, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and all people of all religions. This idea

again comes from John the Baptist and from Jesus because of John. These people do not think of themselves as citizens in the Kingdom of God but they are; it is likely better if they don't realize that they are but just keep on doing what good they can through their work and personally. This does not necessarily make their ordinary everyday mundane lives holy but it helps.

You have to stick to it. If you find yourself worrying more about your investment portfolio than about how to help a sick person then you have failed. You are using your profession not to follow Jesus but to fool him. God knows it too.

A lot of good-hearted Joes and Janes start out by trying to be a good police person, social worker, or teacher; aiming to do good and to make a modest living at the same time. They willingly take a low salary so they can work in a service profession. But then they get lost in the system and end up just maintaining. This is a common theme on TV, and I have seen enough of it in academia. They stop doing much real good through their jobs. By the time they get home from work every day, Jane and Joe do not have the extra energy it takes to volunteer or to serve their church (mosque, temple, etc.). I have more sympathy for these people than for deluded highly paid professional people such as doctors and lawyers and for politicians. These people are not lost in the same sense as the professors who fool themselves but these people are not found and they are not happy either. If they were ordinary people who did not think of their jobs as a public service, like plumbers or computer techs, then we could expect more of them on top of their jobs such as volunteer work. When their calling does lapse into just a job, then they should expect more of themselves. It seems a "double whammy" that a (1) dedicated person's underpaying job becomes just a job rather than a calling, and then (2) we expect the dedicated person to do something more such as volunteer work. But such is life for people who want to good along the lines of Jesus' teachings. Maybe their experience in public service can make them better judges of how to do good outside the job. Maybe they can reform the system. I do not know what to make of their situation but I do not want to make the lives of these people any harder and I do not think God would want that either.

Governing for Jesus.

I am not concerned here with civil servants; as long as they are honest, they are like the police people and social workers of the section above. I am concerned here with politicians and with people who use the political process, and in particular the people who use the political process ostensibly to do good. I am concerned here with political activists, and with people who "vote a cause". I used to give politicians the benefit of the doubt until the rise of Leftist and ethnic politics in the 1970s followed by Conservatives in the 1980s. Many politicians did, and still do, sacrifice for the public good. Many did, and still do, try to find out what really is in the public interest. Many really do think they serve God when they also have a public office. Many sacrifice income and privacy by serving. But many politicians, especially Conservatives, are hypocrites who serve special interests, and who use ideology and God only as a cover. They really do not think out the best public interest. Political action committees make sure that modern politicians live as well in office as in business. Politicians have to search themselves. In the end, God will let them know but I doubt he will be pleased with most of them. I cannot be explicit about particular people and causes or I would get sued.

In a modern state, a citizen is one of the governors of the state. A good citizen does good for his-her community and nation by knowing the issues and by voting with care. A good citizen does good by selective activism and by selectively not being active. If you do not know the issues and are not prepared, then don't vote, and don't speak, email, or twitter. I do not know how to separate doing good as a good citizen from doing good in the ways that Jesus wanted of us. I do not know if doing good as a good citizen is enough. I do not know if doing good as a citizen mixed with the readiness to do extra good on a personal or community level is enough - but I hope so. Working a job that serves the public, being a good citizen, and doing good on a personal level seems a lot.

Certainly doing good only as a citizen can be a way to avoid the extra effort that Jesus calls for. It can be a way not to meet people face to face and a way to feel comfortable by merely voting. Most people merely vote their self-interest, vote out of ignorance, and follow some bizarre political fantasy that they heard on talk radio or saw on cable TV. That is not enough and God will not forgive them.

Particular Policies.

The proof is in the pudding, and we know a tree by its fruits. It is easy to give platitudes or easy to encourage personal warm do-gooding. In contrast, some people have to take on hard issues such as poverty. We need to see specific links between faith, morals, the state, and particular issues such as welfare and immigration. We need to see what to do given that we take Jesus' seriously. This is what it means to be both a member of the Kingdom of God and a good citizen in a modern democracy. After making up your mind about Jesus, then you also have to know enough economics and politics to make up your mind about issues, or you have to accept your ignorance and be willing to let some issues alone. These political-cultural issues divide believers in God more than issues of theology. I touch on particular topics later in the book. I have written about the topics in other places. You can find out by searching my name on the Internet where I give my particular policy suggestions. Hopefully that will be enough to show that I have thought through the practical results. I do not expect all readers to agree with me. Where they disagree, I expect them to be able to give good reasons.

Chapter 6.02 Human Nature and Some Sacraments

This chapter and the next two chapters, three in all, focus on questions for individual believers. This chapter urges us to accept real human nature and to follow Jesus on that basis. It is not all sweetness and light. Part Four described the role of the Eucharist, Crucifixion, and Resurrection in the development of the early Church. This chapter describes what they mean to me.

Accept the Truth.

People lose faith because of the gap between ideal and real. They seem to feel the gap between ideal and real more with Jesus than with other cases. The best antidote is to face up to what people really are, to face that ideals just do not work, and then to seek what we might really do about it. Accept the implications of Part Five that we are mixed beings. We have ideals but we can't live up to them. Often our best work comes not from striving for ideals but from striving for family, community, friends, and country. Mold religious and political institutions to take advantage of strengths while allowing for weaknesses. Don't expect too much but expect as much as we can.

We are evolved animals. We are evolved social animals. We are about half carnivores, so we will kill to eat, and we know how to kill. Sometimes we show signs of intelligence but usually only in moderation. Do not confuse talking with intelligence. Just because people talk does not mean we are all philosophers and saints. We are about as altruistic as other social killers such as dogs or killer whales. We are self-interested. We live in a short-to-medium time frame. Self-interest wins out over general interest most of the time and even beats our own long-term better interest most of the time. Our competition is comparative. We dwell on overt signs of success and promise such as wealth, youthful appearance, fame, talent, job, rank, and power. People do not want to do evil. But they will not take the chances and make the effort to create a good society. We can expect people to be heroic and good intermittently but not consistently. Most of the time people do not understand socio-political-economic problems or have genuine solutions but they blather on anyway.

We cannot turn people into good Christians through harangue or severe laws. Christian revivals work for a while but mostly they create a mob of self-righteous people who will impose their unrealistic vision on everybody else. Even in the United States, Christian revivals have more in common with China of the elder Mao or with strident fundamentalist Islam than with Jesus' mission.

We cannot use reason alone or ideals alone to overcome the desire for worldly success. We can use force but only at great cost. The best way to get people to act well is to keep them out of situations in which they act badly and to create institutions that channel self-interest to serve the greater good, as in ideal capitalism. Even this tactic will not create angels out of pack hunters but it is probably good enough. The sooner we accept this situation the better we will be able to work for it.

Part of being evolved social animals is having pretty good capacities to get along such as to talk out problems, share, not kill each other right away, and to feel morality. This gets us much farther than an

observer from space might have guessed about social carnivores descended from apes. We can use these capacities in planning institutions even if we cannot rely on these capacities alone.

Children, new converts to good religions, and idealists everywhere, think other people will become good if only we are good to them first and sustain being good to them long enough. There are some valid evolutionary reasons to take this approach, into which I cannot go. It even works sometimes. When it does work, it is like a miracle. It does not work often enough to base a society on. We can still use a smile as our first approach but we have to accept that we need a backup plan.

Part of the problem with letting go of the ideal is that the backup plans all seem so mundane, sordid, dreary, and animalistic. They are not the first level of falling away from the ideal but the third or fourth level of falling away. We need police, armies, laws, courts, jails, punishment, schools, teachers, socialization, evaluations, meetings, votes, power blocs, procedures, and all the rest of it. We have to endure ex-politicians on the Sunday talk shows. We have to endure all those things that good Taoists despise. The institutions themselves go wrong about as much as they go right, and we end up with another layer of disappointment.

Most of us now live in towns and cities where most people do not know each other but have to interact anyway. Think about walking through a shopping mall. The huge majority of people are not assholes, at least then and there. People get along. People even help each other with small problems. People look out for old people and children. I worked with monkeys, wolves, raccoons, and gerbils. If I put a big group of unrelated animals in a tight spot like a shopping mall, the floors would run red with blood. People are a lot better than the animal average. This is enough to build on but it is not the end in itself.

Divine Intervention.

If we could expect God to intervene on our behalf regularly then it would be easy to follow Jesus. God almost never interferes in this world. I think God has interfered in my life but not in any way that would impress other people. Probably there are a few cases of real divine intervention in the many cases where people feel like God lent a hand but I find no pattern in it. People that seem really worthy do not get any obvious help, and people that seem only faintly worthy seem to get a lot of help. Except perhaps for the early Hebrews, I am almost certain that God does not intervene to help whole nations, even in cases of clear worthiness such as World War II or with the fight against terrorism. So I offer no advice on when to ask God or on how to make yourself more likely to receive.

For about a year, my wife and I worked in a Muslim fishing village in Southern Thailand. I asked some of the men what they said when they prayed, in particular what they wished for. They do have stock prayers, and some people said they prayed for help with particular problems. Nobody admitted to asking for a winning lottery ticket but I suspect they did. I was pleased to learn that a common prayer was for guidance. They did not ask for guidance about buying a particular used car but for guidance in bigger things such as how to help their children go to school, keep children off drugs, deal with socio-economic problems in the village, or deal with a central government that treated them poorly. They did not want God to banish their problems, because they knew that some problems cannot be solved forever and that life on this Earth includes problems. They wanted God to give them advice on what to do now to make things better if not ideal, and how to provide a future. That seems reasonable to me.

I think I have gotten help from God. The help I got from God is guidance too. God did not guide me in finding a lucrative and secure career because I never had that. God did not help me find the right dentist, a good mechanic, or a decent reasonably priced house. I haven't won the lottery yet. God guided me toward experiences that helped me understand how the world works, how people work, how the world might be better, and how the world might not get better. Sometimes God steered me toward people that I needed at the time. When I did not understand, I found the right person or book to help. God steered me toward the right books to read to understand Jesus and to prepare for writing this book. When I needed to be alone to work things out, God let me be away from obligations. When I needed friends, sometimes a person popped up, although not often enough. God helped me stay away from traps including traps of employment, career, society, intellect, and spirit. I do not think God ever sent a bad person or a bad situation as a challenge; those came up on their own. I have met a few bad people but I have not died yet from bad people or bad situations. God never "provided" in the sense of making sure I had wealth; my jobs have been crappy but enough to live, support my mind, and enjoy life. I don't know how big a role God gave in finding get-by jobs. He gave me sense enough to take the opportunities to get by when they came up. God gave me the sense to know when I was done avoiding traps and so could get on with life. God never tested me in the sense that the Tanakh (Old Testament) says he did with Abraham, Isaac, and Job. None of this help sounds like much but it has made all the difference in my life. I say a bit more on what God did for me in the next chapter.

What God Wants for Us.

We want God to give us family, health, wealth, long life, joy, freedom from oppression, and the other benefits of a good human life. We want God to deliver us from evil that befalls us, our families, or our nation. Yet most people do not live a prosperous life. Many people are truly poor. A lot of bad things happen to good people, and God does not intervene. God does not give us what we think we need. So his view of the situation has to be different than ours.

God is not interested in whether or not you get wealthy, powerful, stereotypically happy, or even if you are healthy. Prostate cancer does not mean much to God. God is not interested in whether or not you have a large and healthy family. God is interested in your development as a human. He wants you to be a better person. "Better" does not mean "saintly". He might want you to be wiser, braver, fiercer, calmer, more creative, more stubborn, or more helpful. God is not a version of the 1960s human potential movement or a sci-fi movie in which we evolve into radiant angels. God does not expect us to live up to our full capabilities, only to try hard and to get better. God does not think we can be fully happy if we somehow do live up to our full abilities. God does not expect us to find bliss on this world, just opportunities.

When you ask for help from God, he might not give you help directly with the problem you have in mind. He will not cure your headaches or find a way to pay the mortgage on your stupidly big house. That is what doctors, prudence, and regret are for. He is more likely to use the problem to help you become a better person. What you think of as a problem, such as a lawsuit or a treatable illness, God might think of as a situation to use to let you find a way to get better. You have to be open to what God has in mind, and willing to give up what you have in mind. I don't know what God has in mind about problems that totally overwhelm us.

Why Bother With God.

God does not care if we succeed in normal ways but instead wants us to succeed morally or as small-time heroes. God rarely intervenes in this world. We cannot expect God to bail us out. It is not possible to make a world in the image of religious ideals. Trying to do so makes the world worse, as with the Taliban, Al Qaeda, Christian fundamentalists, or PC fundamentalists. Ordinary people cannot live fully according to religious ideals or their families will be at a comparative disadvantage to other families. People distort religious ideals so as to sanctify their competitive way of life. Sometimes we can find a compromise between religious ideals and the needs of ordinary life but that leaves us in uncertainty. God and religion do not seem to do a lot for us. So why bother? A lot of the time, I get discouraged too.

This is where Christian apologists try to prove the existence of a good God, prove that this good God is the God of the Bible and is Jesus, and prove you can have the blessing of a good God while you live your ordinary ambitious life and go to church. I can do none of that, and I don't want to. If you get the message of Jesus, you get it, and I cannot explain it further. If you do not get Jesus' message, I cannot lead you to it through arguments here. This part of the book is not about that. It is about letting believers feel good about believing despite the problems, and it is about how to behave well.

Even though believing in God, having a relation with God, and trying to follow Jesus puts us at a comparative disadvantage often, it also gives a lot of satisfaction. Getting occasional advice and guidance from God is enormously worthwhile even if it does not add to our bank account or get us elected mayor of Casterbridge. If you act on the basis of belief to make a better world, you feel very good. If you cannot act very much, but only believe that God still loves you and will take account of your situation, that is good enough. If you are in prison, sick, or afraid, then belief in God is a lot of help. The satisfaction we get from believing in God is probably the result of evolved capacities to believe and to keep hoping as long as we are alive no matter what - but so what? Many things that we evolved to believe turn out to be real enough. I do not have to claim to be absolutely correct on all points, and I am sure I am wrong about some things. I only claim to be correct enough to make normal belief reasonable, and it is. I will find out for sure when I die.

Last Supper.

This section and the next three are not my theological speculation about sacraments but my imaginings about some common Christian issues and experience. I do not want to be a theologian. These sections help you to see Jesus in the modern world and they help inoculate you against rigid dogma. I had these ideas first as a child, long before any New Age and long before I began reading for this book.

The Last Supper (Eucharist) consists of drinking wine and eating bread, and the interpretations that go along with the practice. The standard interpretation in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches is: the bread is the literal body of Jesus, the wine is his literal blood, and we have to literally chew and gulp if we want eternal life. We really eat a real body and really drink real blood. We cannot get eternal life if we do not chew and gulp. If we believe, and do not commit heinous sins, then the simple act of chewing on them almost guarantees eternal life. It is Christian magic. It seems like Christian black magic. The Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches use passages from the New Testament to support

their interpretation. Some Protestants disagree with the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Churches, and give their interpretations of the passages to support their own ideas. In effect, some Protestants say the practice is not a literal eating of meat and blood but uses meat and blood as a metaphor. It is not always clear what they are a metaphor of. I agree with the Protestants somewhat but I do not go into details of what various groups of Protestants believe so as to support my version.

Not all early followers of Jesus interpreted the practice as standard Christianity does now. Something like the standard Roman Catholic and Orthodox interpretation only won out after several decades. The victory was part of one subgroup taking control of the whole Church. Passages in the New Testament that describe the activity of ritual eating and drinking do accurately report some of Jesus' words; but the passages also attribute the ideas and words of the winning faction to Jesus as a way for that subgroup of early followers to assert itself. The act of eating bread and drinking wine, and the standard literal interpretation, became part of a secret ritual for advanced followers that brought them to innermost membership in the Church (along with Baptism).

Some other people who wished to follow Jesus could not accept this meaning of the practice. Some followers of Jesus left the early Church when they reached the stage where they learned of this idea and secret ritual. I do not know of other interpretations of ritual eating and drinking from the early Church because alternatives were suppressed and forgotten. There is not much point in guessing because I am too likely to project my own ideas backwards. The winning faction distorted Jesus' words so as to create a magical ceremony that would separate believers from non-believers and thus make their faction-Church a strong in-group.

Here is my interpretation. My family when I grew up never said a blessing at meals so I never say one. But I always love when other families say a blessing, and I love when people come to dinner and say one at our table. In Jesus' world, bread and wine together meant a complete meal and thus meant satisfaction. That is why the Kingdom of God is like a banquet. To me, the bread and the body of Jesus mean the solid and fairly unchanging things of this world, such as hills, trees, animals, good ideas, rigorous logic, and good institutions. The wine and blood of Jesus mean the liquid, flowing, changing, adapting things of this world, including water, life, blood, rain, fog, wind, free imagination, and not clinging. The solid and liquid together represent all the world. Eating the bread and wine, or eating any meal, means being in the world, depending on the world, and interacting with the world. It does not mean something romantically stupid such as "say 'Yes' to Life". Jesus used bread and wine because of their role in his culture. People can use rice, fish, vegetables, and water if they wish, or can use pizza and beer, or hot dogs and cola, if those get across the idea. Jesus made every simple meal a ceremony. Jesus put into simple ceremonies an invitation to think about his teachings and his life, and an invitation to his banquet. Jesus did not disdain the official rituals that gave indirect reliance on God but he wished to supplement those rituals with direct reliance on God and on what God gives us. He set up as reminders simple rituals such as a common meal. Jesus augmented finding God in grand places such as the Temple in Jerusalem with finding God in the simple food, drink, acts, and relations of everyday life. Jesus did not mean to do away with ceremony or man-made institutions but wished to make us think about the higher level even in ordinary life. He did not mean to establish a secret rite with a bizarre interpretation. If any Taoists read this, they can think that Jesus teaches Taoism with every bite and swallow. It is sad and ironic that the early Church turned Jesus' words into a secret ritual, to mean almost the opposite of what I think they originally meant.

Crucifixion, and Failure.

To me, the Crucifixion shows that God is one of us and that God knows what we go through, including sometimes failure. I do not speculate on how much God can or cannot be one of us, and can or cannot know what we go through; I only say he can do it enough. The Crucifixion does not mean Jesus sacrificed himself for us, that he was a sacrificial lamb, a scapegoat, took Adam and Eve's sin upon himself, took our sins upon himself, or offered himself to the Devil in our place. I do not even know what most of those interpretations mean. If Jesus was God offering himself for us, it was through the work of Jesus' life, not in his death. The Crucifixion meant that, if God were human, he could get chewed up by empire, politics, formal justice, injustice, expediency, betrayal, and being abandoned, like any of us. He could feel pain. He does not only see through our eyes when we look at a sunset or a healthy child but also when we see the scowling official and when we read "malignant stage four no hope". We do not have to explain a lot to God or explain like a poet because God already gets it. When you are actually in pain, I am not sure how much comfort this argument can be but I hope it is some comfort.

Failure and Evil.

The Crucifixion shows that failure is real and that failure can be evil. We can fail externally, as for example when a business we have worked on all our lives goes bankrupt or an idea we had been working on for years does not pan out. We can fail internally as when we lose will, lose faith, or descend into despair or addiction. We can have failure of the body and of the spirit. Failure of the spirit hurts worse. Apologists for capitalism like to say real failure has to be a part of real success. Where there is no genuine risk there can be no genuine success. That is true not just of capitalism but also of life in general. It was true long before capitalism arose.

Yet usually only people say this who succeed. We do not ask the opinion of people who fail in spirit. Failure breaks people. Broken people do not talk unless they are great blues artists. Failure can be a lesson too hard for the people who fail in spirit. People who fail in spirit are too broken to learn many lessons.

I do not know if failure is necessary to appreciate success. I do not know if failure and success are mutually related as some people think that good and evil are mutually dependent. If so, it seems as if some failure is too hard to learn the lesson, so hard that it breaks us and makes us unable to learn any lesson. Maybe the Crucifixion was a sign that God knows this too.

Too many bad people fare well. Too many good people, with real talent, and a big heart, fail. Too often bad people succeed on the backs of good people. There really are "mute inglorious Miltons" - people with talent but who never find a way to develop it or never get the chance to show it. People fail not just because they shoot themselves in the foot but also because bad stuff happens and bad people take advantage of good people. People fail because sometimes crap comes so fast that nobody could adapt. We cannot blame every failure on the victims. Not every failure is a useful lesson that produces more good out the other side. If it were, there would be no idea of evil. To get sick, to see your children sick, or to get old and poor, is painful in a way that is rivaled only by cancer or war.

Some early failure does give you an appreciation for later success and it does give you more sympathy for other people. People who have not been poor or sick really cannot understand people who are. Some early moderate failure is really a prelude to success. Not all failure is like that. You have to be able to recover for early pain to be a benefit and for you to appreciate the pain of other people. Sometimes the pain goes on far longer than needed to open eyes or teach lessons. Hard pain early in life or long pain teaches bad lessons. Sometimes early failure is so hard, or goes on for so long, that the pain cannot be erased and you lose your ability to give sympathy, build a bridge, or even get up in the morning. Even when people are partly responsible for their own failure of this kind, we cannot blame them entirely.

Usually you get little help when you fall into in the hole of failure and usually you have to try to climb out on your own. Hopefully God helps you.

Not all people climb out of failure. People cannot climb out of failure on a ladder of platitudes. Some people deep in the hole can climb out only if other people see that the failure and pain are real. When Jesus said we need help, he was not just being a good teacher. Other good people cannot pull all the failed people out of the pit but at least successful people can give people in pain the recognition that the pain is real. We can do this without promoting the culture of victimization that is so common now in the United States. The abuses of help are no excuse to deny help.

Hopefully the idea that God knows what you are going through helps. Yet even when people understand the message of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, that might still not be enough to soothe the hurt of failure or to give hope in this life. We cannot blame people for that either. They do not reject God; they just do not have enough heart left to admit God. I do not know what to say other than Jesus understands because he went through some of that too, and God understands because Jesus understands. That is not enough but it is about all I can say.

The Resurrection.

When I wanted to get my ideas about Jesus straight, I read about Jesus, and I reread the New Testament. I was surprised how afraid I was not to believe in the real physical Resurrection. I had not thought of it for years. I had never worried much about it. I did not think I would care much if Jesus was resurrected or not, but I did. I do not like believing in miracles, and yet I felt I had to believe in this one. I had to think, worry, and pray a lot before I understood and then accepted that it did not matter. What matters is following Jesus' message. If we do that, then whether or not Jesus was really physically resurrected is not important. God could turn the world to green cheese if that would make people better. But a green cheese world would not do it and neither will raising Jesus from the dead if we do not understand and follow his message. Once I saw the primacy of the message and the irrelevance of miracle, I could see meanings in the idea of the Resurrection that do not depend on Jesus being actually raised from the dead. We will get to those shortly.

One reason the Resurrection got to me so much is the persistence of belief from my childhood. The Resurrection was drilled into me as a child. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Resurrection is more important than Christmas in the West. To deny it is to deny something fundamental in my childhood.

Another reason the Resurrection got to me was the stories of it from the New Testament. Some of them can be dismissed as glorified rumors or glorified wish fulfillment but some of them seem as if they come from sincere simple people who had little to gain by pushing ideas of Jesus' Resurrection. The first people who saw Jesus were neither stupid people prone to hysteria, nor con artists. They were hard-headed peasants, urban workers, and small merchants. Talking about Jesus' Resurrection was not liable to get you big bucks from a cheering mega-church audience but liable to get you laughed at, beat up, or stoned, cost you a job, or cost you trade. Early witnesses had little to gain and a fair amount to lose. They had no theology to explain the Resurrection, they had not theology to defend, and they had no elaborate institution to perpetuate by clinging to the idea that Jesus was still alive somehow – that all came later. I still have no good explanation for all the stories.

I can point out some contradictions. Jesus appears as a pure spirit, as a spirit that should not be touched by mere mortals, as a spirit-like body, as a normal body hungry to eat fish, and as a normal body who vanishes at mealtime. I doubt he was all these at once and I doubt all the variations are compatible. The versions of Jesus reveal later elaboration by early Church "idea men" (or women) for ideological needs. But the contradictions are not complete proof against some of the simple stories. One reason the Resurrection got to me was the need for magic in the lives of ordinary people, including me. If I knew for sure that somebody had come back from the dead, I would much more likely pay attention to what that person said and to what he-she required of me. I would feel much more comfortable about going along with that person, even if going along meant a departure from ordinary life. This is the reason that other religions attribute miracles to their leaders, including rising from the dead. It is hard to let go of that source of certainty.

Another reason is that denying the Resurrection felt like a betrayal, whether Jesus really rose from the dead or not. Jesus gave up a lot for us. God wanted us to pay attention to Jesus. Maybe God raised Jesus from the dead so that we would pay attention to him. Denying the Resurrection was not like asserting our God-given senses over magic but like refusing to get God's message and refusing to go along with God to make the world a better place. It was like denying God. It is not a big thing to believe in one resurrection from among the many billions of people that have lived and died. Why not let go of common sense in this case if letting go means siding with God and feeling better? Why cling to common sense if a breach in this case feels so bad and if a breach in this case does not erode common sense in general?

In the end, I put the questions aside. The Resurrection came to mean endurance and hope, even a "New Hope". When we give up something, we really do get something better back. We can endure the sickness and death of a loved one. Some abused kids really recover. Some victims of ideology wake up. Democracy did really arise in this nasty world. Freedom of religion arose too. Sometimes capitalism escapes the rich and really does become the kind of free enterprise that serves the people. Sometimes free enterprise gets along with nature. Medicine finds cures. Slums develop. Poor people learn skills and find jobs. Politicians accept the real problems of capitalism and actually do something for all the people. Political prisoners go free. The immigrant learns the value of his-her new home and learns the true burden of neighborliness, citizenship, and freedom. The Hubble telescope got rescued and served science beautifully for twenty more years. Science keeps going deeper and deeper. Darwin and Einstein come along. Rock and roll evolved.

The Resurrection means that, no matter how bad things get, they will get better. No matter how bad things get, God will make them better. If these plans fail, we can always make new plans about something else. Even if we die, or our plans die, new people will be around to carry on, and somebody else will make a new plan. If I do not publish this great idea, somebody else will. If we do not defeat this tyrant now, somebody else will defeat him-her later. By working hard, we personally might prevail after all. But we also need to see beyond ourselves and our present circumstances to other people in other circumstances. All of these are Jesus' Resurrection. There is no better Resurrection, not even if Jesus really floated out of his tomb. We resurrect Jesus every time we do his work, every time we hope, every time we endure, and every time a good thing rises out of the ashes.

I do not know if this hope is borne out by facts. I do not know if this is the kind of hope that leads people to work harder and so to make things work out and so to justify the hope. I do not know if this hope is a self-fulfilling prophecy. I hope so. But I do not care about the mechanisms right now. Hope is not always stupid and irrational. Jesus' Resurrection says that some hope is good and useful.

I know the capacity to hope evolved as part of natural selection. I know too often hope is not met. Sometimes failure breaks people and that some people lose hope. We want hope to apply to us and our family, and not to other people who make plans, get well, become famous, or find freedom. Sometimes tyranny goes on for a long time and ruins lives. Nazism or Communism might have succeeded and might have corrupted the Earth forever. Unbridled pseudo-capitalism still might destroy the world that took God eleven billion years to make. Some pseudo-religious fundamentalism of the Right or Left might yet do the same. Still we need to struggle and hope.

If God wanted us to interpret the Resurrection in terms of hope then it seems he would have made sure the Resurrection was true and would have made sure everybody could easily verify it. Even if the Resurrection is true, the stories in the New Testament do not do the job of verification and publicity. It seems Jesus should have appeared to more people, not just to followers, and it seems that non-followers should have written clear consistent accounts of his return. If God wanted us to see the Resurrection as the basis for hope then not to really resurrect Jesus and not to make it clear seems like lying. It is odd to use an imaginary event, or a lie, or a half-ass job, as the basis for real hope. We do not want to base hope on a lie. If so, then maybe the Resurrection really is true just so that God will not be a liar. Maybe we have to believe in the Resurrection because God would not lie to us or allow Jesus' followers to lie to us. This reasoning can make sense but I do not want to make anything of it. It is a step backwards. I do not like thinking that God used us, or used Jesus' followers, or that God lied to us, so as to get us to believe Jesus' message and to act on hope; but I would rather face up to that possibility than to believe in a miracle just to achieve consistency and theological splendor. I can still have hope and follow Jesus' message even if I do not fully know God's character, if I do not think Jesus was really raised from the dead, and I think God might have used the human desire for miracles.

Jesus as God.

See the section on Jesus as Son of God in the last chapter in Part One. Because, as a child, I read the Old Testament (Tanakh) before the New Testament, it was not as hard to let go of the idea that Jesus has to be God as it was to let go of the idea that he was resurrected; but it was surprisingly hard. Letting go of the idea that Jesus has to be God also felt like a betrayal of God, Jesus, and the Church. It helped

to know that, when early Christians talked of Jesus as Son of God, Jesus was not the only son of a god. It helped to know how the early Church changed Jesus the Prophet into a son of God, then to The Son of God, and then into God. It helped to know that God would judge me more according to what I did to carry out Jesus' ideals than by whether or not I had a correct orthodox belief in Jesus as God or as Only Begotten Son of God. It helped to know the biological problems in the idea of Jesus having a mother as his only human parent while having God as a father. But I still had trouble.

If you have been raised in the belief that Jesus is God and you cannot let go of that belief, then probably you should not force yourself to try. That belief in itself is not as important as what you do about it. If you act on that belief by following the teaching of Jesus then you are respecting Jesus as God.

If you believe that Jesus is God then you will necessarily be at odds with Jews and Muslims. If you believe there is only one God, Jesus is him, and God did not manifest himself in any other historical persons such as Karl Marx or John Lennon, then you will be at odds with some Buddhists, Hindus, and Taoists. I advise not to push or to push back. Be able to state your belief clearly. Do not try to force your belief on other people. Do not undermine their belief. Do not argue with them if they try to undermine yours. Argue for fun if you want. Point out how you act on the basis of your belief to follow the teachings of Jesus, and ask other people what they do on the basis of their belief to build a better world. If they give you a positive account, respect their sincerity and admire their achievements.

Maybe the root of the problem about Jesus as God is that we have no good theory of prophets. We feel that people like Moses, Lao Tze, Chuang Tze, Siddartha the Buddha, and Mohammad were both human and more than human, and they somehow expressed the will of God to us; but we have no explanation for what they were or how they could know the will of God (the Truth) better than anybody else. Depending on our faith, we want to feel that our particular religious leaders were more "that way" than anybody else's religious leaders. We want to feel that our prophet was most special. I certainly feel that Jesus' teachings were "the best" and that somehow he was smarter, wiser, and nobler than other prophets. It is hard for me to be objective. I do not know of any theology or philosophy that can make sense of this. Until we have one, probably people will continue to cling to their particular prophets, and some people will continue to see their particular prophets as divine.

People seem to need a connection with God through a person that is somehow both human and God. Hindus, Buddhists, and Taoists can understand how Christians cling to the idea of Jesus as God by looking toward avatars of Vishnu or Siva, toward the transformation of the Buddha into God, the transformation of a male bodhisattva into the divine mother Kwan Yim (Jaaw Mae Guan Im), or the transformation of Lao Tze into the Son of Heaven. Jews might gain insight into the Christian attitude by thinking of the status not of Moses but of David. Although Jews revere Moses as a greater prophet than David, it seems that Jews have a special love for David. They appreciate his joie de vivre, creativity, skill in fighting, and skill as a ruler; and they take his attributes as the ideal for Jews. They envy his close relation to God when he still did have a close relation to God. They understand the pain of his separation from God. David was quite talented, but he was also a rebel, conniver, murderer, seducer, wanton, guerilla, usurper, and might have killed his own king. He traded on the love of Jonathan, the son of King Saul, to put Saul in a horrible position. David had a man killed to get that man's wife. While he was King, David ordered men murdered in cold blood. He then killed his own assassin to keep it quiet. He might have written a few psalms but he certainly did not write even a small fraction of the psalms attributed to

him. The Tanakh rationalizes many of David's sins toward the family of Saul and rationalizes David's sins in general. For a Jew to admit all this of David is about what it would take for a simple Christian to admit that Jesus might be only a prophet. Maybe the most we can ask of people raised to believe in Jesus as God is that they also act on Jesus' ideas to build a better world and that they do not condemn us out of hand. Jews should feel free to stress that Jesus is not God but a prophet, and I hope they also ask how to implement his teachings.

Kingdom of God as a Banquet.

Jesus often spoke of the Kingdom of God as a big banquet or party to which everybody was invited. People that came were happy. People that did not realize the importance of the party did not come, and were sorry about it afterwards. It is easy to misunderstand this image. The question eventually comes down to the joy of following Jesus' message. To enter the Kingdom is to feel a kind of joy.

On the negative side, the Church tended to see the people that did not get the idea of the banquet as the people who did not understand the importance of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, and did not understand the significance of the Church. They were people who would not join the Church. So, for standard Christianity, to be left out of the party was to be cast into Hell for not joining the Church. I doubt Jesus was this severe about people who did not come to the party. He seems to have looked at them more as idiots who could have no idea of what they were missing, and were to be cut off forever from the Kingdom of God and from a good relation with God. In philosophical Christianity, Hell is just exclusion from God.

There are several positive interpretations of the Banquet, none of which, I think, Jesus had in mind. For the standard Christian Church, joining the banquet was joining the Church, and the joy of being at the banquet is the joy of belonging to the Church. Many standard believers now identify the Kingdom of God with heaven, so that going to the banquet for them is going to heaven to be with Jesus. At the level of crass pop culture, Jesus is inviting everybody to the kind of joy that is promoted by televangelists, spiritualists, drug dealers, leftover hippies, condo developers, and upper middle class gourmet trippers. Better versions think of the joy that comes from being a good citizen, good parent, or good neighbor, or from having a group of good friends to have dinner parties with; the banquet is made up of those kinds of people. Yet, in the Bible, those are just the kinds of people who excluded themselves. In more sophisticated versions of the party, people reach ecstasy by "saying 'Yes' to life", or by discovering the deep irony of postmodern Life. Mystics think everybody is a part of the banquet whether he-she knows it or not: It's all alright. Mystics also think every breath can be full of joy. People in other religions might think of the joy that comes from enlightenment in Hinduism or Buddhism or that comes from finding and following the Tao.

The problem with the joy of following Jesus is that it does not hold up for very long by worldly standards. Real life contradicts the promise of joy. The banquet seems to be serving TV dinners. The party eventually ends. We wake up the next morning with a hangover. Most people feel the joy for a little while but then the real world intrudes to remind us. People that seek Jesus to get ecstatic joy might find it for a while but then their girlfriend or boyfriend dumps them and they dump Jesus. When that happens, some people turn to philosophical substitutes such as the joy of being a good person, of taking responsibility, or

of saying “Yes” to Life. These joys are not unique to Jesus, they are not very satisfying for most real people, and they do not hold up very well in the long run either.

This problem is a version of what happens to people when they submit to God. Submission does bring joy but it does not solve the problems of living and it also brings its own worldly hardships.

Jesus had something in mind, so I will speculate on what. I do not know what to say to people that are in a bad situation from which there is no way out, so I say what I can to normal people in normal situations. The trick is not to look for ecstatic joy but to look for a deeper more persistent enjoyment, and to look for other people that can feel the same thing. The banquet is serving neither TV dinners nor gourmet food but instead is serving fresh fruit and vegetables, nuts, and fresh caught fish. My version comes off like any average middle class person saying “make the most of life while you can” while he-she enjoys an imported beer; but it is more than that. I don’t know how to get across the more without sounding like one of the shallow philosophical versions.

Jesus would not deny real world intrusions nor would he ask people to be joyous in the face of car accidents, cancer, and war. He would not expect you to live constantly in the kind of joy you get when your child wins the Nobel Prize.

Jesus accepted the Tanakh idea that creation is good. Creation is mostly good even after natural selection evolved beings that can do both good things and bad, and that have a moral sense – even after the Fall. Jesus would disagree with Augustine and Calvin. Jesus saw that God is bigger than evil, bigger than any theory, law, ideology, or theology, and bigger even than Jesus himself. God is bigger than any present nation of the world. The world is already as the world is. We might as well enjoy it while we can. Not to enjoy it is an insult to God. Enjoy it the way that suits you as long as your joy does not hurt other people. A big part of the joy of the world is the joy of other people. Accept that also to the extent you can. It is especially fun to be at a party where other people “get it”, even if what we all “get” is being at the party where other people get it. But it is not necessary that all the people at the party get it. A lot of people never fully understand what kind of party they are at but they contribute to the overall party just the same. Jesus was inviting us to this party. It is like having a job that you actually like and that contributes to the world as well. It is like being a citizen of a free country that works and that contributes to the world too. These ideas are simple but people usually forget them and get caught up seeking a different joy. Jesus forcefully reminded us, and he forcefully reminded us of how bad we feel when we pass up his party.

We cannot expect to feel a “party high” all the time, not even from Jesus’ party, not even in the limited version described here. It comes and it goes. Be thankful when it comes.

Chapter 6.03 Relation to God: Submission and Prayer

I know what Christians mean by “a personal relation with Jesus” or “accept Jesus as my personal savior” but it still seems odd to me. It seems off the mark, as if they get half the idea but not the whole idea, and they blow up the half they do get to make up for the half they don’t get. So this chapter is not about accepting Jesus as your personal savior. It is about having a relation with God if you can.

Submission.

If you believe in God, then what do you do? Believing in God leads people to want to acknowledge God and their belief in God, at least to themselves. To acknowledge God is to accept that God is bigger and smarter than you, and implies you should follow his guidance. To accept all this amounts to submitting to God. Not to think in terms of submitting is contradictory and is to fool yourself. Many people acknowledge God and yet cannot submit to him. Submitting is a hard step. Many people cannot take this step, especially people who think it demeans their independence, intelligence, or integrity, or who think submitting makes them like servants. It is hard to value political-personal freedom as do Americans and to submit to religious authority too. When people think of submitting, they fear they have to follow all the rules of an established church, even rules that they do not agree with or cannot follow, such as not using birth control.

People want to think of their relation with God as like that between an adult child and a respected elder parent. They do not like to think the relation is like that between an adult to minor child, boss to employee, slave to master, or even professor to student. God sent us out on our own and he expects us to make our own decisions, even if we are wrong sometimes. God expects adults, not simple-minded minor children. People expect the kind of relation with God that goes with the expectation by God for us that we are adults.

This idea of the relation with God as between two adults owes a lot to modern middle class ideals under successful self-government and successful capitalism. We are citizens under God, not subjects under God. We get our ideas of our relation with God from the world we live in. Even so, I think this idea of a relation with God is largely correct. Just because we get our ideas about God from our other social and natural relations does not mean the ideas are wrong. The problem is that this idea of a relation with God can mislead us about our own abilities, nurture pride, block a deeper relation, and prevent us from seeking help that we need. So I want to place this modern idea of a relation with God as a relation between two adults in the context of the bigger relation that I call “submitting”.

Jesus spoke of God as “Father”, and he used the familiar-respectful term “Abba”, like “Dad”, when talking to God or about God. (Jesus was not overly-familiar and did not use terms that trivialize God, such as “daddy”). Submitting to God is like accepting that your parents can help even adult children in a tight spot. Sometimes even adult children need help with the mortgage, hospital bills, or legal fees. Even if parents cannot help with money, and even if they cannot bail you out entirely, parents can help in other ways. They can make sure you do not get lost. If you are lost, they can help you find your way back. They can give advice based on their greater experience. Eventually, submitting to God leads you

to feel you are in touch with something much bigger even than cosmic parents. When you do submit to God, the submission will not frighten or demean you, and you can accept the idea of submitting without fear.

I do not think God condemns to hell people that want to follow Jesus but do not know how to submit or cannot submit. I do not know what God does with people like that but I am pretty sure they do okay.

To submit to God is a hardship but it does have rewards, so it is worth the effort if you can do it. For both the hard part and the rewards, see below.

Other religions require submission. "Islam" means "submission". A "Muslim" means a person who submits to God, the same God as for Jews and Christians. Even non-theistic Buddhists go to the Buddha, Dharma, monks, and the fellowship of other Buddhists for refuge and guidance. Hindus have to recognize something greater than themselves even if they also think they are identical to that greater being eventually. The idea of "karma" entails the idea of submission. Taoists seek the Tao because it is greater than themselves and they want to go along with it. New Age people with animal spirit companions submit to that idea. Many ideologies, including Marxism, Political Correctness, feminism, Gay Liberation, and "the free market solves everything" require submission. Secular groups, even academia, require submission, often to a greater extent than God does. I would much rather submit to God than to any secular organization or ideology.

Standard Christians call submission "finding God", "accepting God", "coming to God", and "making a relation with God". Those terms are fine as long as we know that we do not have to accept the standard Christian idea of the Trinity when we submit to God and we do not have to accept the teachings of any particular established church. At the same time, keep in mind that standard Christians are not all half-crazy because they "find God". As in other religions, they might be on to something too.

Submitting to God is not like Abraham willing to sacrifice Isaac. If God asked that of me, I would say "no". It is not like agreeing to have sex with somebody to get them to quit annoying you. It is not like the movie "The Good Girl". It is not like "ratting out" your best friend to save your own skin. It is not like kissing the ass of a bully or of your boss. It is not like selling your soul to your job. If you ever read "The Story of 'O'", it is not like that. Submitting to God is much less demeaning than other submitting we often do, and submitting to God can go a long way toward helping us not to do the other worse kinds of submitting. Usually people recognize God and submit to God when they realize they are not self-sufficient, when they are in pain, need help, are sick, or when somebody they love is sick. That is fine. I see no reason why that should disincline God to accept you. It is too bad we have to wait to be in pain to submit but people are like that. I hope the relation continues beyond the immediate need.

I was a combination. I had strong allergies and asthma as a child, so all along I recognized my insufficiency. I also probably have a predisposition to feel the presence of imaginary spirits, and that trait supported my childhood belief in God. The childhood belief never went away. On the other hand, I am arrogant about my intellect, as a youth I quickly adopted Western diffidence to religion, and I tried to convince myself that God was not important. Seeing the hypocrisy of many standard Christians kept me from submitting. Living with Buddhists and Muslims did not incline me one way or the other although it

did help me to see that traditional religious people can be okay despite some hypocrisy. I faced hard events during which I called on God and God seemed to answer. Just after my wife, Nitaya, and I were married, she was diagnosed with cervical cancer. With surgery, she survived. I learned you cannot make bargains. A year or so after, I had to accept that I could not tolerate academia yet academia was the only job option open to me. At the time, academia was a mental trap for me, and I needed a way out of the trap but had none. I told God I would accept any guidance he would give me on that problem and on any aspect of my life. The combination of cancer and academia led me to submit. After that, I faced other hard events but they led more to confirmation than to new submission; I do not recount them here.

I do not know what my submission implies for other people being able to submit. I intensely dislike authority that does not live up to its own standards and I will not submit to it. I grew up among the least submissive people in the world: Western Americans (not Reagan-ite imitations), Oregonians, working class Americans, and Cretan Greeks. Many among us would rather die than submit to any person. Western Americans might be spiritual but are not religious, take pride in being non-religious, and sometimes are hostile toward organized religion. Submission is not part of their spirituality unless it is submission in some New Age sense or to a martial arts teacher. I learned typical academic diffidence, and typical rock-and-roll diffidence, toward any religion. Religion was for un-cool idiots. Even so, when I understood what I really believed and that I had to be consistent with myself, the next steps followed naturally. My case is not "If I can do it anybody can do it" because I do have a childhood history of religious feeling and I do have a tendency toward religious experience. Nor was I ever staunchly anti-religious and so had a "flip over" kind of conversion. But I am not the most likely candidate, and a lot of people like me cannot submit to God. So, if I can do it then you probably can do it too.

Accept First.

I don't know how to advise people who are thinking about believing but are not sure. I don't want to argue with atheists. Never do what is not in your heart. Never believe because you think it is the right thing to do or you think religion is socially useful. Believe only because you think the religion is true. You cannot believe so as to save your soul if you do not independently think what you believe is true. You cannot believe because you think it is good for society. You cannot believe because it would make your parents happy or your partner happy. Never make a contradiction in yourself. Never replace one contradiction with another. Better to live with the true contradiction that is in you than to replace it with a contradiction you get from theology, hipness, politics, the culture wars, or somewhere else. Honest atheism is better than dishonest belief. God is much more likely to forgive an honest mistake than to forgive dishonest self-serving orthodoxy.

People that do not believe sometimes have trouble stepping over the line because they intuitively know that belief implies submission, and they intuitively understand submission - maybe better than people who have always believed and who never consciously had to submit. Non-believers hesitate, not for the intellectual reasons that atheists raise, but, because, in their gut, they do not want to submit. Think of it this way: Believing in God is like accepting that we live under the rule of law when we live in democracy. We give up the right to be the final authority on some matters. Some laws we do not like, such as against marijuana, but we obey them anyway because they are part of the package. Most people who live in democracies don't want to accept all the laws; they don't want to submit to the idea of a democracy even though they gain the benefits of living in a democracy. The problem with not submitting to God when you

really do think there is a God is that you divide yourself and make yourself sick. Not believing when you really do believe is worse than having to give up a few egotistic things. It is much worse than submission.

Don't worry about submission right away. Think about accepting first without thinking about submission. Read books by people like you, by people like you but not exactly like you, by atheists, and by tortured Christians who no longer believe in orthodoxy and so search the gospels for every little detail that might guide them. Read books by sincere people who have to come to faith as adults. Don't dive into books by zealots and Bible bumping conservatives. Think about what is right and wrong. Think about what might change if you did believe in God. Does God want you to do anything wrong? If you understand the lessons of Jesus and accept those, then you will worry less about believing or not believing; then belief will either come naturally or it will not. Submission might come after that or it might not.

Warning: Hardship and Growth.

The relation that grows out of submitting to God is bigger than the help you get for any particular crisis and a lot bigger than any bargaining. You get more than you bargain for, both easy and hard. The growth that comes through submitting is one of the best ways to have a relation with God, the only way I discuss in this book.

The Hard Part.

Contrary to the great expectations pushed by popular evangelists, some people who submit find their lives get harder. This topic is odd because it smacks of divine intervention, testing, and initiation rites; it is not like that. So it is worth clarifying the hardship that comes from submitting, first by dismissing what seems to be hardship but is not. Hardships often come with rewards, so this subsection mixes in description of some rewards along with the hardships. The next subsection deals more directly with the rewards.

Submitting to any religious authority often causes people to act "more moral"; greater moral behavior usually annoys somebody; and the somebody can make your life harder - but that is not an important hardship that submitting leads to. Submission to an institution causes you to follow the ideas of the institution, and other people outside the institution get annoyed at you for that. Even rebel rockers conform and submit when they adopt the rebel code, and people make fun of rockers for that. People make fun of believers in God. That is not an important hardship that submitting to God can lead to.

The biggest hardships come because you might need to make internal changes and do some reordering. In submitting, you have to decide and you have to commit. After submitting, you have to keep on making decisions. Some people have never made critical decisions or commitments before in their lives. Submitting to God forces you to understand decisions and commitment in general. (Which does not mean Jesus is the god of commitment and responsibility.) You realize that a big part of being human is to decide and commit sometimes. I think submitting is like becoming a parent of your own identity. You have to take other people seriously as people, not just as means to your ends. You have to take all creation seriously. You can still be normal and have fun but you cannot be mindlessly selfish.

Unlike as with having children, your life can become simpler. You might give up some friends or situations. It is not a question of giving up bad influences; you just lose interest in some things while gaining interest in others. You want to give up things that you once used for diversion. You don't have to get "wasted" anymore just because you are bored, have nothing to do, and can find no better satisfaction. You can get wasted when you really want to. You do not need people just for distraction. It gets harder to look at porn because you see actors in it as people. You see that some people are bad for you, even if they are fun, as Sandra Bullock finally did in the movie "28 Days". You might change direction in your career. Other people give up on you even when you still share much in common.

I don't think you can submit to God just as a way to cure a problem such as alcohol although I might be wrong. Maybe wanting to cure alcoholism can lead you to submit, and then submission might help. But there are alcoholics who sincerely believe in God and who submit to his authority but still can't stop drinking. I think God will help you with a problem if you ask, and you do not even have to submit to get the help. That happened to me. God does seem to help some alcoholics stop drinking. Don't blame yourself or God if you submit to God and then can't stop drinking. It is not a case of "I just don't believe hard enough". Sometimes things turn out that way. Some problems are really hard. I don't know why. After submitting, you are honest with yourself and you see other people more clearly. The honesty leads to greater clarity and consistency. The honesty with yourself leads you to be more honest with others. You cannot exploit people much anymore. I do not think a normal person can be completely honest or consistent so you do not get weird about it, just somewhat simpler.

Honesty can be painful, not just a little painful, but really painful. Sometimes it makes your stomach hurt and makes you gasp. You do not quest for perfection but you do see a lot of faults in yourself and you want to correct what faults you can. It is hard enough to do something about the faults that you can do something about, and harder to bear the ones that cannot be corrected, especially the ones that hurt other people. It does not make you crazy; you learn to live with it.

The honesty did not lead me to be too much more forgiving. Probably that is a flaw in me. I still see idiots, liars, users, and selfish people as they are. They are not saints in beggar's clothing, saints who do not know it yet, or instruments of God sent to strengthen my faith. They are just obnoxious. I still dislike people that I used to dislike. I still don't know how to make them behave any better. Probably other people become more forgiving and kinder than me.

The honesty and clarity do not lead you to know exactly what to do all the time. Submitting does not make you able to get out of every situation on top, or even to be able to get out. It does help with many situations.

God gives some rare people projects after they submit. The projects are like the tasks in "Joan of Arcadia" or "The Blues Brothers". They do not require you to be a busybody, and they almost never require you to build an ark. You do not hear voices that give you assignments. You just see things to do that you did not see before. You also give up projects that waste your time and annoy the world, such as fighting to get religious scenes off public land or fighting to get religious scenes on public land – see "Charlie Wilson's War". You are not called upon to solve every problem that ever was and to save the world single-handed. It becomes harder to ignore situations such as hungry children or a disaster. Giving to charity does not seem cheesy. You might start recycling. You might volunteer. You might

actually talk to people that are stupid or ignorant or not chic. In one of my self-given projects, I had to find out if social science could really help with the problems of the world – I found out it can help, but not as much as social scientists think, and probably not enough in time; and I found out I was not able to help hardly at all. Another self-given project was to write this book for anybody who might benefit. You do not always succeed well. Sometimes you fail. That is alright.

Despite the projects, you do not necessarily gain a purpose in life or see the core meaning in life. You just know you have work to do. You stop worrying as much about the grand meaning and purpose of life.

You gain a greater feeling of integrity and some more confidence but you do not necessarily gain a stronger notion of yourself. You gain better perspective on yourself, and that makes you both more confident and less like a braggart. If you are really smart, talented, athletic, or good in business, then you see that you are not special, and that even you can make only a modest contribution. If such modesty helps you see, then you do gain a stronger notion of yourself through that. Some people only realize they have an eternal soul when they submit to God but submitting had the opposite effect on me. It made me realize I am created and finite, and that I am eternal only if God wants me to be. You are what you are, and you have to make do with that.

You worry that you are causing hardship for the people that you love and even just for the people around you. That understanding might be the biggest hardship. You try not to cause people trouble if you can help it.

The Rewards.

I do not know if being a parent is as satisfying as all the horrible annoying post-1980 parenthood movies paint it but submitting to God is satisfying. That makes up for some of the hardship.

Honesty is painful but it is also useful and satisfying. Consistency is easier than self-delusion, rationalizing, and covering up contradiction. You come to accept that you cannot have your cake and eat it too. You get to know better what you want and you do not feel bad about going after it as long as it is ethical. If you want to stay home from work, you do not have to make yourself sick first and then miraculously recover after the phone call; you just stay home from work. If you want a drink for fun, you drink; but you also stop when drinking is no longer for pleasure. After you realize that stealing from work is not revenge against “the man”, you give up stealing; but you also don’t miss the booty. Laughing is more fun, laughing at anything.

You clearly realize that it is not all about you, that you are not the most important thing in the world, and you should shut up and be useful. The insight is not stultifying but moderately liberating. You realize the importance of working together. People who still think they are important seem funny, sad, and hurtful. The fact that people in general cannot work together well seems sad. You understand better the balance of competition and cooperation. Advocates of both unbridled capitalism and do-gooder socialism seem selfish and stupid. Understanding your limitations does not preclude you from asserting yourself or being a leader if you have to. It only means that you assert yourself for a reason other than to promote yourself.

You do feel that God is watching over you but not that God is watching out for you. I never felt particularly protected. You still are subject to accidents, disease, the bad actions of bad people, and poverty. You have some greater ability to deal with those problems but they do not become non-problems shrunk into nothingness by a sea of blissful godliness.

You get guidance. God gives you insight, advice, and sometimes he gives you the means to finish projects. God teaches you, although I am not always sure how, and I am not able to explain. You learn more from what happens in life, both good and bad. You see more, so you learn even from what does not directly affect you.

In some ways, the best thing is that you have somebody to talk to when you pray, for which see below on prayer.

Even though you are energized to follow Jesus and to try as hard as you can to be useful, the burden of saving the world is lifted from your shoulders, for which see below.

When you find other people that understand, you also have other people to talk to; but that happens not as often as I would like. It is hard for me to make friends, and it has not gotten any easier. Finding people who understand, even if they don't see it just like you do, is like finding somebody who "gets" the music you like or the drama you like. Formal religion tends to blind people so they do not seem to understand submission. Many Christians that talk about "giving yourself to God" or "having a personal relation with Jesus" have no idea what I am talking about. Belonging to a liberal church does not always help. Sometimes spiritual but non-religious people have better insight. Some religious people get caught up in the idea of a mission from God, and that is just creepy. Real submission is more like the "Blues Brothers" or "The Unforgiven" than like a movie about Jesus or like Jedi fighting Sith. After submitting, other religions become clearer. Zen, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism make more sense. Determining which religion is most correct seems less urgent. I appreciate more the sister religions to Christianity: Judaism and Islam. I appreciate philosophers, poets, and some mystics more although I still see a lot of that as self-indulgent and misguided. I can understand their struggle to make sense of life-as-a-whole. I understand mystic experience such as "we are all one" and "I am God too" but I do not think it is correct or that we can live our daily lives that way.

God and Me Again.

After I told God that I needed help with academia, I think I got help, but it was not fun and it was not easy. I never did well in academia. I dislike authority too much. I think professors should be priests of the truth, and they are not. I was always too much the Oregon hick. When I tried to be a professor, I did not get tenure. Yet my wife and I stayed around academia and we kept trying to help with issues of ecology and economic development. We also stayed poor. In the long run, failing at academia has been good because I did not turn into a nice excusable version of someone that I do not like, and my intellect remained alive outside academia as it never would have inside academia. The choices I had to make helped me understand my situation better and helped me be more decisive in general. Rather than take my intellectual, existential, and daily order from academia, I had to create them for myself. Having to do that was a great blessing. It was also painful, sometimes very much, usually more for my wife than for

me. It is hard to grow old poor anywhere but maybe especially hard in America if you are formally well educated but have few marketable skills.

God did not deliberately made it hard for me to get a job in academia so I would grow spiritually and become more aware of world issues. My own personality caused my lack of material success. If God lent a direct hand, maybe it was in these two ways. First, some activities are highly worthwhile in themselves but require a strong commitment of time and mental power to the exclusion of other activities, for example working on the environment, development, pop culture, theoretical analysis such as formal biology or anthropology, doing martial arts, doing some spiritual practices such as Zen and meditation, having children and a family, or having a big group of entertaining friends. It would have been easy for me to pursue one or more of these, even outside of academia, and get lost. To get lost in them might have been wonderful if it did not also stop me from working toward other insights that are more important, such as in this book. In the right place, such activities are blessings but in the wrong place they are traps. Until I "got my head on straight", for me, they were traps. I kept out of traps, and God helped me to keep myself from traps, until I did think straight. Second, God helped keep me from totally self-destructing until I could figure things out. He helped keep me from isolation, despair, drugs, and debilitating illness. I had some medical problems, and God helped me heal before I died from them. How much you wish to see the hand of God depends on your preconceptions.

Clever Divine Planning.

I think what happens is something like this: God has already set up the world so we can learn a lot from it and so most of us can get by if we are not too ambitious. God did not set up the world so we can be assured of finding happiness here, but only so we can probably find ways to be useful and to continually grow. When we submit to God, we become more aware of the ways in which we can learn from the world and can be useful. We use what was already here without expecting it to bring us bliss. We realize we will make mistakes, mistakes will hurt us and other people, and we can only learn some lessons of life from mistakes. That hurts. Even so: "Seek and you will find; knock and the door will open for you". When we go through all this, we feel as though God is carefully guiding us personally in a tailor-made personal training program even though it is really only a generic program for anybody who submits. If God adjusts the program for me personally sometimes, that is great, but likely not necessary, and I am not sure how I would know. Even if the program is generic, it is good enough for we humans, and we can still feel that God watches over the process with satisfaction. Eventually you stop feeling the need to have God baby you through the business and you feel confident about using the world to get something good out of it and to give back too. The process can take years or decades, so be patient.

An atheist can argue that the feeling of personal growth might be real but it has little to do with God. The projects come from our own sense of morality and from the real needs of the world. If God does not obviously intervene to protect us, and we do most of the work on our own, then the idea of God (dharma-karma or Tao) adds little, and the illusion of God (dharma-karma or Tao) only opens the door to confusion. I cannot logically overcome this argument. I know all that the atheist says but his-her argument still does not feel right. I know I evolved to feel God is a part of the story whether he is or not but I still feel that way. To leave God out of the story would make me feel self-contradictory. The feeling of a relation with God is not like the feeling when I pursue an intellectual project or when I wonder about the morality of bank bailouts.

God's Plan.

I have met many people who think God has a plan for the world, the United States, and for them in particular. Especially people feel this way after they have "found God". They like to point out the many ways in which God has guided their lives such as by helping them buy the right car, get the right occupation, and find the right spouse. This is a comforting feeling. Most of us would like a divine parent. I have felt this way many times when something good came along unexpectedly or something unlikely worked out. When you and your spouse really get along, it is easy to feel that God brought you together. I can make up reasons why people evolved to feel as if God micromanages their lives but those reasons are not very relevant to whether this feeling is true. I wish it were true but I doubt very much that it is. God set up the world so we can make some good use of it, enjoy it, help out, and make ourselves better. It is unlikely God set up the world so you can feel right about becoming a dental assistant or about your petunia bed. I recall an old couple who found a puppy, didn't want it, asked me to find a home for it, and then changed their minds because they felt God had sent the puppy to them. They were alcoholics, and would not have taken good care of the puppy, so luckily the puppy had a good home somewhere else before they saw the hand of God wagging the puppy's tail. I can't guess what the puppy thought about God's plan.

Mostly we feel this feeling because it gives us energy to go ahead and do what needs to be done. If the feeling works that way, and does little harm otherwise, then I see no reason to fight against it. It is like fighting human nature again. Talking about it can be charming, and it does make you wonder. On the other hand, if you pick your friends only among the people who think God has a plan for you, them, your country, and the world, and who share with you the details of how God helped you pick the right vacation spot, then you should reconsider. If you pick your friends only among people who want to crusade violently for God's plan, then you should stop.

Not Getting Rich.

In the Tanakh (Old Testament), God gave to some people worldly success, material wealth, big families, love, and power. I doubt God ever really did that. I think the people who had their scribes write the Bible made sure their scribes said that God gave their ancestors those gifts and God gave them those gifts. This idea is a powerful recruiting tool, and is used by most religions. Whether God ever really did that in the past is not relevant now because God does not do that now. I don't know if the coming of John the Baptist and of Jesus changed God's ideas about worldly success for followers but I am certain God does not give worldly success to his followers now. God does not reward you with worldly success if you love him enough, and only if you love him enough. If you have done well, I doubt God led you to make a good real estate deal, buy gold, buy stock in Apple, buy the winning lottery ticket, or get born in the ruling family of a country that sits on a puddle of petroleum. I doubt God will do anything like that for you in the future. I am certain success is a not sign that God loves you in particular, your church, or your political party. I wish God did give worldly rewards to his followers and that he would single me out for a big gain; it has not happened yet. If it does happen, I doubt I will see the hand of God, but I will be thankful.

If thinking that God gives worldly success helps you to do good, does not make you arrogant, does not lead you to harm nature or society, and does not lead you to look down on others, then thinking this way

is probably natural, not bad, and does some good. It is good to be thankful to God for benefits, realize the large role that luck played even if you have genuine skill, and realize how deserving other people are. Yet thinking that God gave you what you have, especially that he gave it to you because you are such a sincere deserving believer, inevitably leads to serious errors. Think carefully when you find yourself thinking this way.

Some Christian televangelists refer to the Old Testament, say God wants to make his believers rich, and say they can get God to make you rich if you only give the televangelists a donation as proof of your belief and as seed money. They provide testimonials. All this is wrong. If there is a hell, then these televangelists likely will go there. You should stop thinking like this. If you have some spare money, donate to a food bank.

Prayer.

Prayer can help with submission if you do not think of it as stereotypical prayer. As a child, I prayed in my own way, and I never thought of how other people pray. I never took the standardized prayers at Church to be the best prayers or the only way to pray. As a young man, when I began to meet traditional Christians, I was disappointed to learn that many of them prayed primarily with standardized prayers and could not pray any other way. I never pray in standardized prayers. I think that odd. I have read prayer books, and I think many of the ideas in the prayers are great, but I could not memorize the prayers just to make sure I got the ideas. The only standardized prayer that I know is the "Lord's Prayer" or "Our Father".

Think of prayer as conversation. You do not have to ask for anything. You can talk about what a nice day it is. You can complain that your bunion hurts without really expecting God to do anything about it. You can ask for advice without always asking for a solution. You can ramble on, and very likely will. You can pray to clear your mind and order your mind. Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. Begin "Hello, God, it's me here" if you want. It does not matter. Just begin and ramble about anything at first. You do not have to pray only for other people or only to end world hunger. You can ask for advice about what car to buy, although I doubt you will get much of an answer to that question.

A good way to start is by venting a problem. If you are angry at your boss, at a fellow employee, your brother, your spouse, your children, or the President, then just blow up and vent to God. God probably won't do anything about it, but you can vent anyway. After you calm down, you can think about other things. Feel very free to ask about sick relatives and friends, or with help with an illness or a problem.

You do not have to be on your knees, especially if your knees hurt. You can sit down, lie down, or stand up. You do not have to stick out your hands like antennas. There is no special time. You do not have to do it at the same time every day. You do not have to do it before you go to sleep. You can do it at work for five minutes when nobody knows what you are doing. You can do it instead of watching a spot of mindless TV. You can do it during a long run of commercials. There is no minimum or maximum time. Three minutes to begin is a lot. You might not want to do it for more than twenty minutes until you get really comfortable doing it.

Anybody who has ever meditated will see that prayer is a lot like meditation, and I do not think there is anything wrong with that. I have no desire to distinguish them or to say that one is always better than the other. I am pretty sure you can do both because I have, although not at the same time. I think they help each other. You need something that will clear your mind, get you to think straight, and help put you in perspective. I think prayer is better than meditation for that, and I think meditation can actually divert you from that goal; but I do not push the issue.

Prayer can be like meditation too in another way, especially if you use prayer to vent, and for this you need a warning. Your mind will empty out during prayer, and you might have some unusual thoughts. Strangely enough for being connected to all-good God, you might have bad thoughts during prayer. If you are venting at your boss, you might suddenly realize how much satisfaction it would give you to bury the claw end of a hammer in the top of his-her skull. You might realize you have a crush on a fellow employee. If you are a man, you might realize you envy women, or, if you are a woman, you might realize you envy men and have a crush on another woman. This is all normal. Just because you feel these things does not mean you have to act on them. This is part of being a mixed human being. This is part of what you get guidance about. Just let them pass, and go on to more pressing issues.

Feel free to get angry at God. Yell at him about how miserable the world is, and how bad a job he is doing. Tell him how to do it better. Think through the issues as you argue with God. How would you really do it better?

Try thanking God for a good job too. You can count your blessings as in the old Depression era songs, and you can also thank God for things that have nothing to do with you and that you might not even enjoy, like fly fishing or tuna casserole. Thank him for all the children that get well even if you do not know them. Thank him for all the self-indulgent crazy academics that do not believe in him.

Most of the time, your prayer will not frighten you. It will bring you satisfaction and peace. You will learn how to return to what you think is important. God will likely guide you to return to what he thinks is important.

You do not have to submit to pray. If you are angry at God at first, then it is not likely you will submit to him, although you do have to acknowledge him to get angry at him. If you keep praying over many weeks, eventually you will see what submission is all about, and submission will not be so hard. But you never have to submit just because you pray.

Some people pray but feel no connection to God through prayer even though they might believe in God otherwise. I am not sure what to say because I never had that problem. You probably should try at least twenty times before you give up entirely, and you might want to come back to it again after waiting a few months. Even if you feel no connection with God through prayer, you might want to pray as a method of therapy or mind training. There are a lot worse methods of mind training. If you really cannot get anything, then you might want to try meditation and forget about prayer. If meditation and prayer don't work, try art, sports, or current events.

It is not necessary to pray to have a relation with God or to submit to God. I think a lot of people go through life like that. People that cannot pray have to use intellect and gut feelings for everything. They

have to use reason more than most people do. They have to decide what is right or feel what is right, and hope that God intervenes indirectly in their decision making process without being asked. I am not sure how long you have to try praying before you give up on prayer and decide to take this path.

Praying to Jesus.

I think many standard Christians pray to Jesus. I pray only to God. I talk with Jesus. I sometimes ask Jesus for advice. I do not pray to him as to God. The attitude is different. Jesus is like a sibling, like Wally from "Leave it to Beaver". He is not like "Big Brother" from the novel "1984". God can and will respond to you directly, and you should not be afraid.

This is a touchy point. You should be able to have a direct relation with God. If you do not, or cannot, something is wrong. You might not be able to overcome what is wrong, you will not go to hell if you cannot, and you might have a good relation with God anyway even if you pray primarily to Jesus; but still something is wrong. To use Jesus as a god, or as an intercessor, is wrong because it blocks a direct relation with God. If you have to do it, do it, but try to get directly at God. At least once a month, try praying directly to God and only to God.

Protestants make the same point toward Roman Catholics by saying that Roman Catholics should not use saints as intermediaries, that praying to saints is like praying to lesser gods, it is a kind of idolatrous polytheism, and it blocks a far more important direct relation with Jesus. Roman Catholic arguments that saints are mere go-betweens, like a loving mother to a hard father, and that saints are always officially only human, do not carry weight with Protestants because people might know all that in their heads but are carried into the error of idolatry anyway. I apply the Protestant argument to anything that is not God, and Jesus is not God. At the same time, I know that I am only human, I have faults, and there is no point in kicking people to force them to do what they cannot, especially if forcing them to do what I think is right keeps them from doing what gives them greater benefit. I do not pray to Jesus but I do like to talk to Jesus sometimes. Understand the situation, and then do what you can.

Hero Mouse.

People are afraid that believing in God will turn them into a wimp. That might be a little true but it is not mostly true. Believing in God settles an internal conflict, which tends to unify you and give you more energy, which tends to make you braver, more confident, and more effective. If you have been bullying other people as a way to make up for insecurity, or if you have been using self-righteousness as a way to bully people, then believing in God can make you less a bully. Believing in God can make you more empathetic but it does not mean that your feelings are always subordinate to other people's feelings.

In C.S. Lewis' Narnia books, one of the heroes is a mouse who is highly skilled with a sword. You can see him in the second of the Narnia movies, "Prince Caspian", and the third, "Voyage of the Dawn Treader". He is a miniature D'Artagnan from "The Three Musketeers" ("Musketeer" sounds like "mouse-ke-teer"). The sword-wielding cat "Puss in Boots" in "Shrek" is a variation on the same theme. The mouse has a big chip on his shoulder. He imagines insults where there are none, and challenges anybody to a duel at the drop of a handkerchief. He is annoying. He is also loyal, honest, brave, dependable in a fight, and knows teamwork. If he is wrong, he admits it. He will not do what is not

honorable. The ship "Dawn Treader", sails metaphysical seas searching for heaven. When they find it, not all are allowed to enter right away. The first allowed into heaven is not the captain, wise person, or ruler, but the mouse. A good heart can be more important than a good head. Part of having a good heart is being an active person when you can to the extent you can. That is what believing can change you into, not into a "mousy" mouse but into a brave mouse. Lewis certainly romanticizes the story, and his version owes as much to Homer and to Mother Goose as to the Bible, but the basic idea is true enough.

God Bears the Burden.

It helps to know that you do not have to save the world all by yourself if you submit to God. All you have to do is to try really hard at the best things you can think of. If you do that, and a lot of other people do the same – whether they believe in God and Jesus or not – then the world will get better, and you might save the world. If you do not save the world, it is not your fault. When we feel Jesus' message, the whole world becomes our family. If we do not save the whole world, it is like letting our family be ravaged by bandits. Even if we tried really hard otherwise on other good projects, we could not bear to see our family ravaged, and our guilt would not go away. That is the burden of the bodhisattva in some kinds of Buddhism. But it is not really our burden. In the end, it is God's burden and his problem. If other people do not act decently, it is not your fault; it is their fault and God's fault.

We are not spared the burden of saving the world because Jesus already saved the world or because God will make sure the world does not fall into evil. If Jesus did already save the world in some way, he did it by showing enough people what to do so that they will collectively save the world through their efforts – whether they believe in him as God or not. Jesus did not save the world by magic. If we do not save the world by acting on Jesus' message then Jesus did not save the world either. The world might not get saved in the end. The world really could fall into evil for a long time. That is part of the real risk we face by living in the real world. God will not intervene to stop Nazis, Communists, fascist capitalists, PC people, Family Values people, various religious fundamentalists, terrorists, or to stop overpopulation and ecological abuse. If it gets done, we have to do it. If we do not do it, it will not get done. God wants us to do it for ourselves. If we do not do it, he will not do it for us. He will let us lie in our own bed. But if the task is too much, and we fail even though some of us genuinely tried, then the fault is not ours but God's.

Fortunately, we might be able to save the world if we all pull together, and if we learn how to design institutions so that people seeking their own self-interest eventually serve the welfare of the whole.

Apparently some Christians are burdened with great guilt because they cannot save the world and convert everybody. Some liberals have the same guilt although they do not think of converting everybody to Jesus but to some other belief system. I went through some liberal guilt when I was young, and I am still frustrated that people do not see simple truths of shared humanity and nature. But I do not feel guilty like I used to and I do not feel the urge to convert everybody to my point of view. I would be happy if people would just act a bit better. Maybe part of the "good news" of Jesus is that we do not have to feel guilty like that anymore.

Chapter 6.04 Golden Rule, What to Do, and Other Topics

Golden Rule.

People think the Golden Rule means we should always return kind words for bad, go out of our way to help, be a Good Samaritan even at the cost of our own family, be a Good Samaritan even to stupid people, be sweet, never put our interests above the group, and let bad people ride roughshod over life. In less kind words, people interpret the Golden Rule as, "Be a Doormat". In some cases, maybe that is so, but not usually. The Golden Rule says to do for other people what we would like them to do for us. I want other people to do what is best for me. For another person to lie down as my doormat is not best for me. It is not best for them if I lie down to be their doormat either. It can be hard to figure out what is best, but, if we can, that is what we should do.

Once when I was about fourteen years old, I was hitting balls on the city golf course driving range. Every time I hit a bad shot, I swore, which was often. The man standing next to me was much better. I asked him for advice. He said, before I could cure any problems with my swing, I had to cure a bad habit with my mouth. I did, and to this day I still do not swear too much. Sometimes the best thing for us is not sweetness but the truth. If it is good for other people to tell me the truth then I it is also good for other people if I tell them the truth.

We want God to do what is best for us, not what is easiest.

Often to do what is best for a person is hard both for the doer and the recipient. Yet that is the real Golden Rule, and I think that is what Jesus had in mind. It is hard to tell a friend that he-she is selfish or has a drinking problem but sometimes that is what we have to do.

We should not use this version of the Golden Rule as an excuse to be cruel or to hurt other people. This version is not a blank check to be the evil schoolmistress as in the movie "Matilda". "You have to be kind" is not an excuse to torture. Be the other person, and then think about what would really help you. Then try to do that and only that. If you hit people with the naked truth because you think you are doing them a favor then someday somebody will hit you with the naked truth that you are abusing the Golden Rule to be a self-indulgent bully.

Sometimes it is hard to help other people because even mildly intrusive behavior is still intrusive and often potentially obnoxious; it might not work; the recipients might resent it; or they might retaliate. It is hard to tell somebody he-she is a moocher and he-she needs to start carrying his-her own weight. The saintly action is to do it anyway. If you are really uncomfortable doing something intrusive, even if it might help, probably you should not do it. Do what you can do.

The Golden Rule can tolerate some white lies. Sometimes we all need to hear, "Oh, yeah, that really looks good on you" or "Wow, what a good recovery". Being honest in these cases is not what the Golden Rule is all about. If you abuse it this way, it will carry no force when you really need it. Use your good judgment.

Forgiveness and Enabling.

I am bad at forgiving. This section is not a pep talk to get readers to forgive everything from everybody. It recognizes that some things or some people cannot be forgiven, and then seeks the implications. Forgiveness comes in flavors. Sometimes we forgive to let go, so that primarily we heal ourselves. Sometimes forgiveness aims to heal the group and so get on with life. The New Testament has many passages on that kind. Both these kinds of forgiving are important but this section is not about them. Mostly this section is about what to do when the person does not deserve forgiveness. Jesus talked about all kinds of forgiving and it is hard to tease out the various flavors, especially since we have to think about whether the teaching comes primarily from him or from the Church, so I will not try.

It is easy to forgive some things: accidental mistakes for which the doer is really sorry and tries to make up; acts for which we do not expect the doer to have control, as when a four-year-old child takes the last ice cream bar out of the freezer; and acts done out of emotion for which the doer recognizes fault and tries to make up. It helps if there is little damage.

It is harder to forgive some things but we can still see that forgiving is a good idea, and we can try: somebody accidentally runs over our bicycle or our cat; a friend votes really badly in an election; a friend supports a bad policy due to passing patriotism or anger, such as the invasion of Iraq to the neglect of Afghanistan; a friend supports a rival at work because the rival is more powerful although our project is better; or a rival steals our idea.

Other things are hard to forgive even when the other person is genuinely sorry, such as adultery, hurting a child, or stealing an idea from us that might have made a big difference in our lives.

Some things I find hard to forgive not because the act is so big or the damage is so big but because the act shows the person's bad character, and the person is likely to stay in character and to keep on doing it. The clear examples are alcoholics, addicts to other drugs such as nicotine or meth, gamblers, emotional users, and sexual users; but life is full of lesser sins that are just as bad because they spoil the world. People that push "boomp whoomp" out of their cars do not just want to hear bad music played loudly, they want to force it on other people. It is assault. Forgiving them does no good, for them or anybody. People that stole my ideas would have done it again if I let them. People that do not pull their weight at work now likely never will. People that jump lines likely will always jump lines. People that smoke are likely to do it until they die of cancer. The compulsive chronic liar who hit my wife's car will keep on lying, even when someone catches her boldfaced as we did. Even worse, she will teach lying to her children, and they will probably become liars as well. Thieves keep on stealing. It does not matter if people were born with the bad trait or if they learned it.

We act badly toward normal decent people when we put up with assholes. It is not a laudable act of forgiveness on our part. It is not acting on the Golden Rule. We owe it to the good people, to ourselves, and to society, not to forgive assholes. We only make the situation worse, for ourselves and others, when we forgive out of a sense of duty yet we know that the other person will do more harm. We only make the situation worse when we feel guilty about not being forgiving enough when we know that forgiving is not

the best thing in this case. I am not sure what Jesus would do about bad people and the safety of society.

To be a follower of Jesus means not to be a tightly strung miserable moralist who holds a grudge against the world. This is where forgiveness is as much about us and society as it is about the person forgiven. Jesus said to give people the benefit of the doubt. See what happens first before giving up on a particular person or giving up on the world as a whole. Forgiveness can go a long way to getting people to get along. It can go a long way toward lessening our own tension.

I have no idea how long to keep on forgiving, or exactly what to do when we stop forgiving. I do not know if we should stop forgiving when forgiving no longer makes us feel better and begins to make us feel worse. I do not know if we should stop forgiving just at the point when forgiving begins to undermine social relations, or if we have an obligation to go further, and how much further. I wish honest Christian ministers would take up this topic and give us some real advice.

Sometimes an act of forgiveness can make a real difference in somebody's life. An act of forgiveness can turn a life around. I have never had to forgive anybody on this scale, and I do not want to offer examples for which I have no personal experience.

Sometimes when people are forgiven, they do not have to face themselves, do not become better people, and continue to hurt other people. Sometimes we have to be forced to face ourselves before we can change. If other people continually forgive us, then we never have to see ourselves and never have to change. If we always forgive the person who takes over the meeting and bullies everybody else, then he/she will never understand and never get better; and other people will never have a chance to speak. If we continue to forgive a chronic thief, then he/she will never understand what he/she is, and never understand the damage done.

I have been treated badly in academia several times, the details of which I had better leave out. When I was young, I did not forgive being treated badly so much as overlook it. I was stupid and naïve then; and horrible behavior usually freezes me in my tracks like a deer in headlights. Later on, I did not forgive the people involved because they never took responsibility. I did not confront them then because it would have been too stressful for me. I probably would have hurt them physically. Maybe I should have told them how bad they had been just so that they might have seen themselves and had a chance to get better. Maybe I should have told them how bad they had been because I might have been able to forgive them. Once one of my best friends murdered another of my best friends. The two were also best friends at the time. The murderer felt he had to do something drastic to protect himself and his family from financial ruin at the hands of his friend, but likely he did not have to murder. The son of the murderer warned me, with guns in hand, not to seek revenge. The murderer was miserable. He had to live in a little shack behind the main family house because his wife kicked him out and because he did not want revenge aimed at him to fall on his family. I felt sorry for him. He never really repented but he would have appreciated knowing that somebody forgave him. He died before I could tell him I forgave him, and that is too bad.

I have also seen forgiveness as enabling bad behavior, and I have seen enabling as a hidden form of passive aggression. I have had friends with drug problems, attitude problems, or ideology problems, and

forgiving them does not help. It enables them to carry on with bad behavior. Really, it hurts them. If you want to hurt them tacitly without overtly hurting them, then keep on forgiving them.

I do not know what to do if you try forgiving, people do not respond, and you have to keep on putting up with assholes. I do not know what to do when you forgive the person who never cleans up the microwave at work, and the person doesn't change. You find yourself becoming a grudge-laden semi-bitter moralist. This is when we need to forgive and to let go not because the other person deserves it but to preserve our own integrity. Grudges really do hurt us more than the wrong-doer more often than not. Poor people get forced into this situation of having to put up with crap. It is one of the biggest prices of poverty. Poor people have to forgive the selfish boss, landlord, loud drunk, noisy neighbor, or neighbor who makes passes. We need divine guidance for dilemmas like this.

Sometimes people do not understand what they have done and do not take responsibility but they really do not have a bad will or bad character either. They just do not get it now. Sometimes the dink at work who never does his-her share does not see that he-she is not getting away with something but is really hurting the other people that have to make up for him-her. Sometimes they get it after somebody tells them what is really going on. Sometimes they don't. Hopefully they will get it when they die and face God. Sometimes they are just too stupid to get it and sometimes they are so caught up in their own troubles that they just cannot see straight. This is what happened with my friend who murdered my other friend. We forgive them in the same way that we forgive a child.

Really Help People.

This section is more upbeat. This section does not aim to get Americans to quit giving to any charities. When I re-wrote this in the holiday season of 2011-2012, all charities desperately needed contributions. This section is primarily for people who can afford to give a lot sometimes.

For good reasons, people of different wealth and social rank do not meet in ways that allow them to understand each other. Instead even Christians of different class avoid each other, even though cross-class meetings seem to have been part of Jesus' program and part of the early Church. In the modern world, the people that have money do not know who the poor people are or what the poor really need. So the people that have money give to charities. The charities regive the donation the best way they can given that they are an institution: in little amounts to a lot of people so that a lot of people can get by. There is nothing wrong with that, and a lot right with it, but I want to suggest an addition.

If you can possibly afford it, give a large gift to somebody. Give enough so that it makes a permanent difference in their lives. Do it anonymously if you can, but do it anyhow. Also as I wrote in 2011, some saintly person was dropping gold coins into the Salvation Army buckets, and many saintly people were paying off the lay-away for people they had never met. For a while, forget that people have to "learn life's lessons the hard way". Give enough to a college so that the college can fund a student through an entire four-year education. Better yet, give enough directly to a student, or several students, for four years of college and four years of graduate school. Buy a young couple a house, a real house, not just a box - all at once, free and clear. For a young couple not to use up a big chunk of their income on a house but instead use it for more education, living, their kids' college, or a vacation, can mean everything in the long run. Maybe they will do the same for somebody else someday. Buy somebody a car and pay the

insurance on it for a year too. Pay the rent for somebody for an entire year or for five years. Pay the heating bill for somebody for an entire year or for five years. Pay off somebody's student loans – they do not even have to sleep with you as in "The Shop Girl". Help somebody start a business and do not ask for interest on the loan, or do not ask for a return at all. If the business succeeds, you will help not just one person but possibly dozens of employees too.

I do not know how to advise you how to find somebody to help. Co-workers and employees are a good hunting ground. The recipient does not even have to be the poorest person you will ever meet, it just has to be somebody who can make good use of the help. Of course, sometimes you will pay the rent for somebody for a year, and they will just use their leftover extra money on cocaine, but don't worry about it, all you can do is try.

Charities are not set up to handle this kind of giving, so you might have to meet the recipient face-to-face, or the recipient might find out who you are; and that can be awkward. It might tempt the recipient to try to forge a relation with you, or it might tempt him-her to ask for more later on. You might have to push them away, and that might seem as if it undoes the good that you did. That is a chance you have to take. Mostly these bad scenarios never come to pass. I have seen how much good a big gift can do, and it is worth the risk.

When people get a gift large enough to change their lives, often it does not just change their lives in the obvious way but it changes their hearts too. They see what giving has done for them and they want to pay it forward. Now they have the means to pay it forward. At the right time, they pass along the gift. They probably can't give as much as they got, but they can make a larger gift than otherwise, and their gift too can make a big difference to somebody else.

Once I knew a Frenchman from Brittany, who had served in the French Navy and had seen North Africa. He became an executive in a large drug company, and worked mostly in the Far East. As far as I can tell, he was not religious at all. But he had seen hardship and he knew how to help particular people in ways that they needed. When he helped, he helped a lot, such as by getting people out of war-torn areas to safety. Sadly, he died fairly young of brain cancer. I hope God treated him quite well.

Force.

People of the American South are trying to do two incompatible things. On the one hand, they want to be orthodox Christians. They want to emulate the early Church in all its supposed purity. On the other hand, they romanticize the military and violence. They think the military is among the highest callings for a Christian. They join in large numbers, and are the backbone of the military in the United States. Jesus was not a soldier. The fact that he tolerated soldiers, felt for them, helped them, and treated them like people, does not mean he approved of the military or that he wanted his followers to be soldiers. Jesus did the same for tax collectors and prostitutes, and he did not want his people to live that way. The Roman military killed Jesus. Christian propagandists paint the Roman military in horrible terms as the precursor of all fascist death squads, but really Roman soldiers were professionals who carried out their jobs efficiently and usually only with necessary cruelty. Often they were a boon to local law-abiding people. The American military wants to see itself the same way. No military is really much better at heart than the Roman military. In those days, the military were the police, so we can say the same about the

police. Early Christians were pacifists or near pacifists. They did not join the military. They left the military after their term of conscription was over and did not re-enlist. If Jesus and the early Christians did not want to join the Roman military, they likely would not want Christians now to join any military. How the early Christian attitude changed to extolling the military is a long story that cannot be told here. In any case, you cannot romanticize violence, the military, or police, and be a fully faithful follower of Jesus. Why Southerners keep this contradiction is a long story that cannot be told here either.

Yet in the real world, we need the police and military. They are not the same as tax collectors and prostitutes in Jesus' time. Without them, Christians would have no safe shell within which to operate. Even the early Church needed the Roman military for protection. It needed for protection an occupation that it looked down on. I am not sure if the attitude of the early Church toward the military was hypocrisy. So what attitude should we now in the modern world take toward the use of force and toward the military and police? This question has a long history in the West, and I do not review the history here. How do we have an effective police-and-military without romanticizing them and without overusing them? America did a pretty good job until recently. Even recently, the overuse of military force has not been due to soldiers but because civilian political leaders did not understand the world well enough. Abuse of the police has not been due to the police so much as because of bad economic, social, and drug policies that led people outside the law. Maybe the best corrective is to learn about the real world, real Jesus, and real early Christians, and to actually think "What Would Jesus Do?" Maybe the best corrective is good, realistic, human policies. When you realize you cannot do as Jesus ideally might have done, then you can get on with what needs to be done without romanticizing it and without overdoing it. A lot of soldiers and police understand all this more than we give them credit for, more than people that call out for swift official violence, and more than unrealistic well-meaning pacifists.

Jesus as Historical Fulcrum.

I was amused in a good way when I first learned that some Christians think of "history" as "His story". Because of Jesus, Jewish ideas of God and of history fused with Western ideas of science and government, resulting eventually in democracy, free enterprise, and modern science. The world changed permanently as a result of Jesus. Jesus is a key turning point in the history of the world.

Not all other religions agree fully with this assessment but they do accord Jesus much respect – a fact Christians tend to ignore. Mohammad thought Jesus was one of the greatest prophets, on a par with Moses, and would judge all souls. Hindus see him as a great avatar of love and truth. This is more than Christians usually accord to great figures in other religions.

I do not care who is most correct. I only want to think about the fact that Jesus changed history, and what it might imply.

Even if Jesus did change history, and God sent Jesus to change history, that fact does not overturn the attitude toward Jesus that I have developed here. Following Jesus is not like waiting for the inevitable proletarian revolution. You cannot sit back and wait for God and The Rapture. History will be made by people who do things every day for the good reasons of that day to make a better world. If you can, you are obligated to work hard to make a better world. You cannot rest in the comfort that Jesus already has

done it for you. If your work results in historical changes, so much the better for you. If not, do not worry about it.

People want their names in the historical record. People strive harder when they have ideals and they think they will be recognized. People built democracy, worked in science, and fought Hitler, from a combination of personal and public reasons. This is all great. I have no problem with this, and encourage it. We almost have heaven on Earth when personal striving leads to public benefit. God must have known that Jesus would change the world. I doubt Jesus knew that he would change the world as he did. So again we have to face the idea that God used Jesus, and Christians, to bring about changes that neither foresaw. Again I do not know what this says about God or about stupid stubborn people.

God used Jesus to change the world for the better. God interfered in the world to change it for the better. Then why not interfere more often? Why not make sure that the world gets on a good track and stays there, rather than allow the world to run on a track where we might fail? Why not interfere to prevent horrible individual tragedies such as cancer and burned children? Why not make sure that nobody reaches old age poor and alone? It makes little sense to accept the idea that God would send Jesus to change the world and yet to accept also that God will not intervene in other ways to make the world a better place. If God wishes us to use free will alone to manage this world then God should not have sent Jesus. Jesus was not the only prophet. If God wishes us to use our free will then why does God send, or need to send, any prophets? I do not know any answers to these questions.

It might be that the world is bad enough that humans cannot take care of it alone but good enough so that it is manageable with a little help. We are like children about thirteen years old who are venturing into their first jobs and social life. We can handle most of it but we cannot handle all of it without a little help. With only a little help we can learn to handle it all. We should not get too much help, or too much help will spoil us and defeat the purpose of growing up. So God sends prophets and Jesus. This sounds good but it does not explain cancer, parasites, wars, and burned children. Unfortunately, it is the best I can do.

Living and Dying for Jesus.

The Church did not spread primarily because people were willing to die for Jesus but because people found a meaningful and successful way of life within the Church as an institution. People lived for Jesus, or lived for the Church. Even so, some people have been willing to die for Jesus, and their sacrifice has helped to sustain the Church and to spread Jesus' message. In our time about as much as any time, around the world, people suffer persecution for the sake of Jesus and the Church. When Christian soldiers die, they die not just for their buddies, families, and country as do all soldiers but also for Jesus and for his truth and freedom. We should not overlook their sacrifice.

The Jesus that most people die for is not the Jesus-of-a-message that I have portrayed in this book but the Jesus-as-God-who-died-for-us, the God that sacrificed himself for others. In their way, the people that die for Jesus repay in the same coin what Jesus already paid. They are the few who give up much so the many others might have decent lives. Would the Jesus of this book inspire such faith, willingness to endure hardship, and willingness to sacrifice self? Would people die for the message of Jesus as

much as for his identity as God? Would people work to build a better world at much personal risk if they did not think Jesus was God? I do not know. I am not brave so I do not think I could endure for the message of Jesus what many standard Christians have endured for their God. I am not sure what that says for the truth except that I doubt we should judge truth by the willingness of people to die for it alone or to kill for it alone. Too many people have been willing to die, and to kill, for idols and lies. I hope the view of Jesus given in this book inspires people to live for him.

Chapter 6.05 Contradictions

Religion has always given advice on how to deal with life problems. If it did not, most people would ignore it. Modern life has its problems but modern religion offers few suggestions for how to deal with them. The lack of guidance leads people away from religion. Problems in modern life appear as contradictions in our institutions and our lives. This chapter describes some of the contradictions. Later chapters describe how people respond to them. We get confused if we do not face up to contradictions. We cannot work toward Jesus' message if we do not feel how we can get twisted up in the modern world. All social situations, all nations, and all types of government have contradictions and hypocrisy. This chapter is not about contradictions in general but only about contradictions in modern democratic states. Children have a hard time dealing with contradictions but adults have to. When we refuse to recognize contradictions we treat ourselves as children. Children cannot self-govern.

(1) People really are mixed in their moral talents. We really cannot fully live up to moral ideals. We do pretty well but not really well. People vary in their moral abilities. Some people are moral bricks while some people are moral mud. Neither our religious or political leaders will come to grips with this fact and tell us what to do.

(2) Religion played a role in the founding and running of nearly all nations that are still around today, including not just classic states such as Egypt and China but modern states such as the United States, France, England, and Thailand. All nations need a core set of ideas that are not negotiable and on which the state is founded. These ideas are sacred in all senses of the word except the ideas might not be overtly tied to a particular religion. Modern ideas include respect for individuals and the rule of law. In the United States, some of the core ideas are expressed in our founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution while some are widely and tacitly understood such as the right to privacy. Originally, basic ideas were intimately tied up with the religion-and-morals of the nation even among modern states that do not express a tie to any particular religion. Modern states require respect for each other and the law, and require good institutions to carry out good laws. Christianity was a key in the making of the modern state, its core ideas, its basic institutions, and the underlying attitudes, even among nations that are not Christian. Other religions now provide additional important ideas such as the role of the Buddhist Middle Path in Thailand. These ideas might play an increasing role on the world stage in the future. Yet the modern state cannot privilege Christianity or any other religion, and cannot rest its core ideas on any particular religion. States need sacred ideas at their core; religions provided the original core ideas for most states; one religion, Christianity, was a key to the birth of the modern state; other religions provide other key ideas; yet no state can privilege any religion.

(3) The problem of the secular state founded on a religious tradition is acute for states arising in the Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition. In Jewish tradition, to which Christians and Muslims owe their ideas, the state is holy. The state is from God, and it exists to express God on this Earth. (This relation of "heaven" and the state is true in other traditions too in slightly different ways, as for example in China and India). Rulers rule only as instruments of God. Subjects are not under the authority of officials as mere people but under the authority of God; rulers are only instruments to carry out the will of God. Laws come

directly from God's word. A breach of the Law is not only a breach of the civil order or of agreements among people but is a breach of the will of God. Offices are held in trust from God. A breach of God's Law or God's obvious intent, as God's obvious intent is shown through morality or through the prophets, is enough to remove a ruler from office. Every citizen is not just a resident of the state but is an actor of God's will and is like a small official of God's holy state. The constitution of Israel came directly from the scriptures. Christianity took over this tradition.

Yet the modern state cannot be like this, not even states founded directly in the Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition. So we have a contradiction at the core of our political life. This is not necessarily fatal any more than the contradiction between free will and determinism. When you have to accept a contradiction, it is better to face up to it and come to a livable resolution than to hide it. We have to accept a core set of basic principles that came out of one religion but then we have to put those principles into practice in a secular state with many beliefs. My personal resolution of this contradiction is that God put us in this situation and wants us to succeed in self-government and social justice in a secular state.

(4) An intrinsic part of the state (and of any relation with God) is social justice. The state has failed if any honest hard working people cannot get by. The state has failed even if people other than hard-working honest people do well and even if the state is a world power. Because of the Jewish stress on social justice and Jesus' emphasis on social justice, followers of Jesus have a special responsibility to strive for social justice.

To get true social justice in the modern state, we might have to work through the state. Unfortunately, at the same time, it is only human nature to abuse state help. People are lazy, dependent, and lose personal integrity when the state helps. Business firms, including the officers of business firms, are much the same when they get state help. The Golden Rule says we should not help people if by doing something for them we actually hurt them. We have to balance state action for social justice against the normal human tendency to abuse state help. The state does not owe anybody prosperity or a family. The state does not owe any business support. Not all business firms are "job creators" and we cannot fool ourselves into supporting business in general on that basis. We cannot use the state to right all wrongs or to promote all growth. We have to develop a sense for what issues we can use the state, and for what issues we should use private action.

(5) Despite serving us well in many ways, capitalism really does have intrinsic failings that call out for social justice; contrary to Christian apologists for capitalism, it is not Christianity on Earth until Jesus returns. Capitalism is not just as good as Jesus; it is not the modern equivalent of the Church. Capitalism has inevitable minimum unemployment so that even qualified willing people cannot find jobs. In the United States, the inevitable minimal rate used to be about four percent but now is closer to eight percent. Capitalism also has inevitable minimum poor employment so that even adept willing people can find jobs with only poor pay and no benefits. In the United States now, about twenty percent of people have poor jobs. Of course, some unemployment and poor employment results from laziness, stupidity, and ignorance, but the problems would still exist even without those contributing causes. The problems arise from the intrinsic nature of the system. The flaws in capitalism reinforce racism, sexism, ageism, and socio-economic classes. They reinforce the other contradictions of modern life. They give the need for justification a tool by which to bore into modern brains. They make rebelliousness inevitable but also silly. All nations now are necessarily part of world capitalism even though some nations are not developed or

do not thrive. We are all part of one world system. People in power deny the failings of capitalism because they do not know what to do, are not willing to do what it takes, or benefit from the failings. All major political parties participate in the denial. When ordinary people see that their leaders will not face up to reality, they know their leaders are not decent people following the core set of principles, and then ordinary people do not feel bound either.

(6) A democracy assumes that the large majority of people are competent to self-govern. Not only are most people of mixed moral competence, most people are not competent to be citizens in a democracy either. Yet we have to try anyway. Some people are too stupid, ignorant, lazy, or morally inept. Many people are maimed by ideology and religion. Even many professional people and business people are too busy to be informed and therefore too ignorant to be good citizens. Even if all the people who could be prepared were prepared, still a large minority of residents would be too stupid, morally inept, bad, or ruined by ideology; and their incompetence severely distorts politics. Pretending that everybody is automatically competent to be a good citizen only gives scoundrels opportunity and undermines democracy for the people that are competent. But to deny a large group of people participation because of widespread human failings would re-institute tyranny. If modern states did not have other deep problems such as with capitalism, we could probably overlook this contradiction by letting a select group of officials run the state, but we do have deep problems, the problems stir the people, and the people do not always solve the problems well. We have never found how to limit citizenship to qualified people so as to preserve democracy without also undermining democracy at the same time. We have never found how to run a real-world democracy so as not to undermine itself. Even the people that are not qualified to be good citizens can sense this trap and sense they are their own victims. Even bad citizens have been burned by other bad citizens and so know. Qualified good citizens resent the damage that the herd does in the service of bad leaders.

(7) In telling us that we are the depraved heirs of Original Sin, standard Christianity also says that we are not competent for self-government. The same is true for any religion that finds deep failing at the core of humanity such as Buddhism or Islam. Christian churches supported kings when kings claimed only they were competent to rule. Yet now churches support democracy. We cannot believe both that we are so depraved that we must be ruled by kings and that we are now suddenly competent for self-government. One or the other belief must give way. If we believe some people are competent for self-government but others are not, we do not thereby automatically also believe in Original Sin; in fact, the idea that some people are competent for self-government even while many other people are not competent is a strong argument against Original Sin because it denies that Original Sin could be universal. People gave up the idea of Original Sin when they wanted democracy. When people gave up the idea of Original Sin, they also had to give up many of the ideas of standard Christianity that had been merged with the idea of Original Sin, such as the divinity of Jesus.

(8) Jesus has not come back for 2000 years. He will not come back tomorrow. The promised messiah has not appeared for Christians, Jews, or Muslims. I have never met a bodhisattva, at least as they are described in Mahayana sutras. The major Christian churches refuse to accept the obvious fact of Jesus' absence. One implication of his obvious non-return is that we need to act on Jesus' teachings without worrying about whether or not he will return. We need to get on with realistic democracy rather than wait for an alien visitor to save us.

(9) John the Baptist stressed honesty in life, occupation, and in carrying out an office. This we can take directly from religion into modern citizenship. Unfortunately, people only really do it in a few nations, mostly those in Western Europe or descended from them such as Canada.

(10) For Jesus, membership in the Kingdom of God was perhaps the most important goal of this life. With the rise of modern states, and especially democracy, we mix the idea of membership in the Kingdom of God with citizenship in the state. We make the state holy, partly as a way to make our own normal lives holy and partly to use the state to control other people. This is part of the legacy of the old holy Jewish state but we have to be careful because the modern state is not the same. To the extent that being a member of the Kingdom of God first then leads us to be good citizens later, the mixture can be good. When we put the state first, and then see the Kingdom in terms of citizenship in the state, we err. When we substitute citizenship in the state for membership in the Kingdom, we cross the line. When we substitute the state for the Kingdom and we make the state holy, we cross the line. Rather than make the community like the Kingdom, we make the state holy. Conservatives in particular do all this, often without realizing it. PC people have their own version. Being a good citizen and being a member of the Kingdom of God can support each other but the two roles are not the same and cannot be made the same. Being a good citizen is something we do apart from being a member of the Kingdom of God. Many good citizens are not religious. Many religious people are not adept citizens. In particular, we cannot use the state as the primary instrument of our religion or our morality.

(11) Being a good citizen is hard work and takes a lot of time. We hope that being a good citizen also automatically satisfies whatever strenuous effort toward building a better world that Jesus expects of us. We do not want to have to be a saint on top of being a good citizen. In some cases, such as people who devote themselves to public service, being a good citizen is likely enough. For many of us, it is not enough. We have to be a good citizen and we have to do more in accord with what Jesus wanted.

(12) Where do good citizens come from? Schools are important but schools alone are not enough. We need a culture of good citizenship. We need good citizens as role models and to mold more good citizens. Religion was the original source for producing good citizens, and religion can still play a part, but, in the modern world, religion alone cannot produce the culture of good citizenship. Good citizens who are also religious can use their religion to promote good citizenship but they cannot use their religion as a filter to limit good citizenship only to fellow believers.

Despite the value of good citizens to the state, and the value of religion in creating good citizens, the state should not use religion to produce good citizens. The need for good citizens should not call forth any alliance between religion and the state. If the state can create citizens only by calling on a particular religion then it has failed.

Good citizenship does not preclude disagreeing with the state and does not preclude even rebelliousness. In fact, it can require disagreeing sometimes. A good citizen is not a mindless robot of a holy state. A good religious person, such as a follower of Jesus, is not a mindless robot of the state even when the state calls itself Conservative and says it is devoted to minimal government or even when the state says it is the guardian of social justice. Mindless robots of the state are neither good citizens nor good followers of Jesus.

(13) Because democracy is of the people, democracy has fostered the false hope that the state can and should do everything for us. If we cannot solve problems through our own state, then how can we solve them? Who else is there? Government can serve us better in some ways than it has recently in America, such as with realistic limited universal health care and with oversight of economic institutions. The state is the natural agent for big systems such as roads. But the state cannot solve all problems and it cannot do everything for us. Sometimes the state causes problems when it attempts to solve problems. The state should quit interfering in some ways in which it already does too much, such as with drugs and sex. Many problems have to be handled through private action, through charity, and through living privately to a higher moral standard than what is enforced by the state. We need guidance about where to draw the lines.

(14) When faced with deep endemic problems such as with capitalism, we naturally turn to the state, and the tendency is stronger in a democracy. Such problems seem beyond the power of private action, even dedicated organized private action based on a religious commitment for social justice. The state likely has to be the primary agent to take care of the problems caused by unemployment and under employment. But even then we should not expect the state to take care of every aspect of every problem. The state can give unemployed people food and health care but it cannot give them the means to raise families. We have to balance our zeal for social justice with caution about working through the state. Again we need guidance about where to draw lines.

(15) The quest for social justice lends itself to problems of justification and zealous crusading, especially because many problems are deep and do not have obvious solutions. Problems of justification and zealous crusading lend themselves to abuse of religion, social relations, the state, and the balance between state and church. The situation leads people to join groups to serve their own needs for justification rather than because the groups do real good. Because the problems are deep and have no easy solutions, groups do not agree, and oppose each other. Because the zealots often take their cues from religious ideologies, we get intrusion of religious groups into the state, and we break down the separation of church and state. Groups try to capture the state to use as their weapon in fights with other groups. People feel they must join a group, especially when other people join a group or when other groups gain control of the state. We get gangs of zealots focused on one issue rather than clusters of informed citizens doing what is generally best. We have to strive for social justice and at the same time not lapse into self-serving, hurtful, self-righteousness, crusading, and religious power groups. This is not easy. We need guidance in the issues and in how to address the issues.

(16) Religion is not only about giving to charity; it is also about the right kinds of institutions and the right kinds of leaders - even if no religion may determine the institutions and leadership of a democracy. We need guidance about our institutions and leaders. Even in a tyranny, we would need guidance. In a democracy, we need more guidance because ultimately we are the leaders and institutions. Religion has to guide us without taking over the state. Even with religions that are concerned profoundly with personal issues rather than social issues, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, religious leaders have to give the people guidance. Unfortunately, our religious leaders have given us little good guidance. Usually they avoid questions. Sometimes they urge us on a crusade while at other times they effectively urge us to seize the state as a theocracy.

If the state ran well all the time and had no contradictions, this issue probably would not matter much. But the state does have to deal with deep problems. So we need guidance even more, as long as the guidance does not urge zealotry or theocracy. When we don't get good guidance, we mistrust religion in general. We think that religion is not good for anything.

(17) Christian leaders have a special duty to be clear about social justice and the contradictions of modern life because of the Jewish tradition of social justice and Jesus' emphasis on social justice. Most people feel that modern religious leaders have failed in that duty except to support an occasional crusade or to support the state. Their failure amounts to complicity in making the problems worse. We need more than just projects for crusades; we need more than advice to support the state; we need education, clarity, good advice, and good models.

(18) Christian leaders fail more profoundly than neglecting to give us good advice. Much too often, churches support civil authority even when civil authority does not serve the people and even when it is wrong or corrupt. Official Christianity too often ignores the endemic problems of the modern state and of democracy, and the chain of problems that arise such as racism and sexism. Official Christianity chooses which issues to address and which to ignore not on the basis of merit but on the basis of alliance with power or with interest groups. Churches too often need the backing of the state, if not actively through money and power then indirectly through tax exemptions. When religious leaders owe civil leaders then religious leaders are complicit. In that case, all religion is undermined. When the churches and the state collude to mis-serve the people, the people feel lost and abandoned.

(19) In the character of its ideology, its fervor, its tendency to crusade for Justification, and its abuse of the search for social justice, PC is essentially a religion. To the extent PC does not understand endemic problems of the modern state and capitalism, or selects which problems to address and which to ignore on the basis of alliance to power, then it acts like any other church. PC people act much the same as Conservative Christians in many respects.

Before this train of thought becomes a blanket condemnation of institutional Christianity, I want to repeat that standard Christianity does much good and I do not want to debunk it. Some churches advise their members on what the issues are and on how to get informed about the issues without dictating to their members how to think. Many churches devote considerable effort to helping the poor, handicapped, and victims of tragedy. The least of their service is much more than I have done by writing this book. I hope church members carry on without worrying about the issues here. That is one way to be a good member of the Kingdom of God. But these issues need to be raised and faced so that we can avoid problems.

Chapter 6.06 Justifiable Rebellion

This chapter and the next are about responses to the contradictions and hypocrisy of modern life. The contradictions invert normality and they confuse anybody who is just trying to live according to the message of Jesus. This chapter does not cover all responses but focuses on rebellion as a way to understand inversions. That is enough to clarify other responses taken up in later chapters. Some people have a hard time accepting any religion. This chapter is not a roundabout way of talking somebody into religion. That is a bad idea. It is better if people make up their own minds and find their own religions. Sometimes people can find a religion if we remove the blinders and seductions. That is all that this chapter and the next few try to do.

Response by a Follower of Jesus. Rather than present the dilemmas first and the reasonable response later, it is better to give the reasonable response first so as to have a background by which to be clear. The response sounds like platitudes but sometimes those work. Most people on their own overcome the dilemmas to adopt pretty much this solution but it is worth stating the obvious.

-Don't worry about what group you fall into. Don't worry if you are a follower of Jesus, standard Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jew, Hindu, Black, White, Asian, Native American, cool, nerd, jock, artist, rebel, decent person, "rude boy", etc.

-Learn to understand the situation with the world and your country as best you can. Learn to recognize the problems and contradictions of modern life.

-Learn to recognize the situations of specific groups of people, such as the poor, unemployed, the old, animals, nature, working people, business people, and professionals.

-Think about what needs to be done.

-Think about your talents.

-Think about what you can actually do.

-Work hard to do it.

-If you can help through your special talents, such as through being a scientist or comedian, try doing that. If you feel you can help through your work, such as by being a police officer, try that. If you feel you should do even more, then go ahead as long as you don't burn out.

-Find likeminded people to work with without become crazed zealots.

-Learn the tactics of zealots and other bad groups so that you are not taken in.

-Work against bad guys when you have to.

-Try to find the right line between private action and public action, between what we can expect the state to do and what we have to do ourselves.

-Try to keep the big picture in mind so you can assess how the world is getting along and so you can change directions if you need to.

Band Aids versus Systemic Cures.

Before getting into rebellion, it helps so see something that modern people rebel against. People naturally can handle the following situation: A problem comes up. We find a solution - at least so that the bad effects almost go away and the problem will not recur very often. If it does recur, we can always use the same solution, or a similar solution, to address the problem again. This can be like buying a new car or like getting a flu shot. It might hurt at the time but we can live with it. Even if we do not avoid the flu fully but do get a milder case, we can live with it.

In contrast, people naturally dislike band aids. A problem comes up. We cannot find a way to completely solve it. We can find ways to soften some of the bad effects but not to cure the bad effects so much that we cure the problem. The problem never goes away. The bad effects always simmer just below the surface. They always threaten to erupt again. We always have to devote a piece of our minds to the problem. This way to soften the bad effects, by using band aids, is more a curse than a blessing. This is more like having a dog with chronic diarrhea than a dog with one bout of constipation.

Religion all too often is a band aid. It can be worse than a bad aid because it enables exploitation. Poor people never go away. Tending to the poor is a never ending job. Tending to the poor only allows the rich to exploit the poor more and to get richer because they know other good hearted people will be around to clean up their mess. The solution intensifies the problem it was designed to cure. Christianity is especially prone to this trap.

Who would want a religion that is only a band aid or worse? Who would want a religion that indirectly spurred the problems and aided oppressors in the name of goodness? This is a legitimate complaint against Christianity.

All I can say is that this is a short-run view. In the long run, we have made progress. We have cured problems. Maybe we did not cure problems directly through aid to the poor but we did cure problems indirectly through science, research, development, and democracy. Indirectly those all helped the poor enormously. Without Christianity, and without its band aid measures, we probably could not have done that. With Christianity, in the long run, we are more like the first problem situation than like band aids. I know it is hard to help poor people with handouts when you know that a real job for them in an honest economy would be a lot better. It is hard to help poor people when you know the job they really need is denied them so wealthy people can make even more money. But the poor need to stay alive in the meantime until we can find a real economy that will give them a job. It makes sense to give comfort to cancer victims until we find a cure for cancer. Unless we do comfort to cancer victims, and experiment on them while doing so, we will not find a cure for cancer.

If you can figure out how to make structural changes that will permanently cure problems and save people, then do it. If you can figure out how to cure core contradictions and hypocrisies, then do it. If you cannot participate in band aid measures, then don't. If you can't participate in band aid measures, then figure out something else to do with your insight, talent, and zeal, something that is genuinely useful. If you think exposing hypocrisy will help, even though people already know what you are exposing, then do it. On the other hand, if you see that merely exposing hypocrisy rarely gets people to change or to do any better, then I understand. In the meantime, don't look down on the people who are willing to work hard to help in any way they can and don't look down on people that help one case at a time.

Inversions.

When people have to live with contradictions and hypocrisies, they seek ways to turn the world right side up, in their dreams if not in everyday life. Too often they turn the world sideways instead (Marx said they (Hegel) had turned it upside down, and Marx's job was to turn it back right side up). What follows is so common now in popular culture that I won't bother to point out examples.

When we feel that religion and the law cannot serve decency and often serve indecency, then we feel that decent people have to live outside the law and outside religion.

When decent people have to live outside, then we begin to think that everybody who lives outside is secretly a decent person forced to live outside by power and corruption. We look at every outlaw as a saint. We look at every bad boy and bad girl as really an angel in disguise. We give selfish people, rude people, scoundrels, demagogues, and ideologues too much benefit of the doubt. We lose the ability to recognize bad people or to recognize bad tendencies in good people. We lose the ability to acknowledge the bad in us. We lose the ability to tell the difference between bad-on-the-outside-but-good-on-the-inside versus just plain bad.

We begin to look at all people within the law and religion as necessarily the servants of corruption and vice, as necessarily deluded and rationalizing, or as intrinsically bad. We look at all civil servants and business people as if they were corrupt members of an evil conspiracy. We look at the entire world as if it were "V for Vendetta". We forget how much we need good leaders and civil servants, and how often they do a good job. We lose the ability to see a good person when that person is within the law and religion.

When we cannot see a good person within the law or religion, then eventually we cannot see a good person at all. We get really confused.

Worst of all, because of our self-perpetuated confusion, the real bad guys win. We lose the ability to see the root contradictions clearly. We lose the ability to deal with the problems. We get fake versions of the problems, which blind us to the real versions. Instead of seeing bad government and bad religion clearly, we get lost in conspiracy theories. Bad people, preachers, and political commentators lead us on a wild goose chase against made-up bad government and made-up bad religion to keep us from seeing real bad government and real bad religion. Pop culture fantasies serve real bad government and bad religion by letting us rest content in our moral indignation over made-up unreal bad government and bad religion. Pop culture serves bad government and bad religion by letting us feel justified as bad boys and bad girls.

We clean up the imaginary corrupt town on TV instead of cleaning up real mundane problems of poverty and pollution.

The cure is to see the problems clearly, see why people need inversions, see the basis for the inversions in human nature, and then not to get sucked up into traps. We can't fully trust the system and the leaders. Simple realism requires a good dose of rebellion. But we can't live there. Left wing programs flounder because they cannot find an alternative system that works any better than the old system: "Meet the new boss, same as the old boss".

History of Well-Adjusted Rebellion.

A little history helps us to understand even rebellion. In the middle twentieth century (1900s), people realized: the world is tending toward one whole; the one world has a lot of good to offer, more good than bad for most people; but also the one world has intrinsic flaws that make it hard to enjoy. Maybe this is the modern notion of the Fall. Even if you are well off, it is hard to enjoy life if you think that, in the end, everybody in this world is all together, yet many people are bad off. Hunger, violence, poverty, unemployment, racism, sexism, bad health care, the maiming of nature, and the emptiness of suburbia, tarnish the world. People sense that much of the problems come from intrinsic flaws of capitalism and that capitalism is now the world system even with its flaws. The fact that people who suffer often do contribute to their own suffering through bad attitudes does not justify the situation or make the underlying problems disappear. It does not mean there are not problems that would persist even if the sufferers were angels. It does not allow us to blame the victims only. It does not allow us to enjoy our affluence with unconcern. It only adds another level of complexity and frustration.

In the 1950s and 1960s, with the rise of affluent middle class America, the response to the problems was largely on a personal level rather than on the level of social justice. This was so despite all the 1960s social activism that we read about. People sought to "be well adjusted". They figured there was more happiness than misery. If you were financially well off but still felt unhappy, something must be wrong with you personally rather than with the world. You might as well get your piece of the happiness pie. If you could not do anything about problems, you should ignore them or blame the victims. There was enough wealth to go around, so anyone who suffered financially was lazy. You could get help through therapists, alcohol, prescription drugs, schools, groups, or your church. While you were getting well adjusted, somebody else could suppress the people that had problems to make sure their discomfort did not spoil your well-adjustment. To be well adjusted was to be justified and saved.

At about the same time, we got existentialism. Existentialism is like an intellectual version of the work ethic. One version of the work ethic finds fulfillment through our calling. Existentialism sees fulfillment in our "project" and in being honest to ourselves in our project. Being honest in our project is the existential equivalent of justification that leads to salvation. If we become a doctor, banker, bank robber, private detective, or samurai, we can find salvation-and-justification in seeing out our project to the end and by living up to the code of our project. Samurais have to live by the samurai code. Private detectives have to live by their code, as "The Maltese Falcon" pounds into us. That might sound romantic and great, but that is not how it works in practice. Whatever existentialism might be as a high philosophy, for most people, existentialism is about merely changing attitude. It is a pretentious version of getting adjusted. Whatever your project, even if it is bad, even if it ignores social problems, even if it

hurts other people, you are saved as long as you are true to your project. Existentialism is about self. Social justice is irrelevant unless social justice happens to be in your project. The arena is you, not the world. You can change your life if you change your attitude and you make yourself feel good about yourself. Elaborate rationalizations replaced drugs and therapy as the props to sustain adjustment. If the world seems crappy, that is because you are not committed enough to your project. Existentialism goes along with some theologies in which salvation is entirely internal; and it fed modern poses of the victim, artist, rebel, rock and roll, confidante, crusader, teenage angst, celebrities, and politicians. It allowed people to dress up self-indulgence.

Unfortunately, cinema, TV, and popular music too often enabled the need of people to get well adjusted and to rationalize it with existential stances. Fortunately, enough art did not entirely buy this crap. For example, just because you feel good and feel honest working as a gigolo, prostitute, or corrupt politician does not make you a saint. Just because you feel good and feel honest about sticking up small stores does not make you a saint; although modern fiction does say it is OK if you rob banks instead of convenience stores and if you have a sense of style at the same time too. Some artists figured out you cannot feel truly good unless you also face up to the problems of the world, even if you don't solve them, including the problems of other people and nature. It is not just you, it is the world too. See the movie "The Hustler". The novel "Catch 22" shows how someone (Yossarian) felt who could sense problems but could not get other people to believe what he saw and could not get other people to do anything when other people did see. Other people were too interested in getting what they could in their own little project. The problems were with the world, not the hero. No amount of self-adjustment could solve problems that were outside of you rather than in you. When you understand this, you understand that dissatisfaction is not always asocial, amoral, or crazy; sometimes it is justified, moral, and completely sane.

Pseudo-philosophical rationalizations allow people to use contradiction to further their own ends, so people actually cultivated the contradictions described in the previous chapter as a way to feel good about caring while not really doing anything. For most people, the problems were not specific such as hunger next door but were a kind of general angst.

Dissatisfaction leads to rebellion. If rebellion really serves social justice then it can be good; but rebellion too often is a stance that allows us to feel good about ourselves without really doing anything. Especially rebellion works that way when combined with philosophical rationalizations. As long as you stay superficially true to the rebel code, and show off the rebel attitude, you are saved without having to confront real problems. Righteous rebellion is the drug and the media are your therapist.

Rebellion feels good, especially in America. Rebellion got entrenched and romanticized. A simplistic version of Tom Sawyer fused with a simplistic version of Huck Finn. Already by the time rebellion featured in teen movies in the 1950s, it was a major romantic force. You could symbolically solve difficult world problems by cleaning up the corrupt town singlehanded or by being the hero's girlfriend or sidekick. You were rebellious, justified, and saved if you wore jeans-and-a-tee-shirt and pouted hard. It does not take much to see through this pose. Even rock-n-roll had enough insight to satirize its own fantasy, as early as Dion and the Belmonts in the early 1960s: "I got my two fists of iron but I'm goin' nowhere".

The rise of Political Correctness in the 1970s and Conservatism in the 1980s are further elaborations on the theme of getting self-satisfaction while appearing to care about problems, but not really doing much about them that is not also in your own best interests. Both PC and Conservatism combined pseudo-moral strictness with rebellion; amazingly, the idea of the rebel Conservative caught on. As I revised this chapter in December 2012, Tea Party Republican House members had once again managed to shut down the country so as to serve their self-image as beleaguered Conservative rebels. Several other developments in the decades since the 1950s show the same signs. It would not add much here to go into the details.

Justified Rebellion.

In a world of endemic contradictions, attendant problems, social injustice, and hypocrisy, any religion, especially Christianity, seems like part of getting well adjusted, taking care of yourself first, seeking personal justification-and-salvation, and pretending to care about social justice. Christianity is especially prone to being used this way because of its emphasis on social justice and its historic ties to the godly state. Liberal and Conservative Christians each have their own versions but both are variations on the same theme. You can find comfort in your version of salvation and in people like you. Everybody else is a loser going to the appropriate poetic hell. You do not have to feel personally guilty anymore about the bad in the world, and so you do not have to think about it. You can easily overlook problems or can blame victims: "Blacks cause their own poverty. Whites are all corrupt oppressors; they hold authority not because of ability but because of conspiracy. Conservative fascists run the state and ruin it for everybody. Liberals tax everybody to support their clients." Anybody can simmer away in his-her own version of salvation. Jesus becomes another drug, like alcohol, "downers", therapy, existential stance, or rebellion.

Because the contradictions and hypocrisy are real, some rebellion against churches, formal and informal, against Christianity, and against any simple version of Jesus' message, is actually justified. It makes no sense to follow a version of Jesus that leads us to avoid real problems in the world or that leads us to see them as a threat against us, our families, and the people like us. It makes no sense to follow a version of Jesus that does not lead us to real cures, that just covers up the problems or makes the problems worse. Better to live without Jesus than to accept a version of Jesus that requires us to be blind. Jesus would not have accepted a version of himself that allowed such self-indulgent hypocrisy. Unless you want to accept some sort of quietism, if you are alive, you have to feel a little rebellious. You have to feel some anger. You have to want to do something.

While doing something, you have to avoid getting sucked into the traps that use your feeling of rebellion to neutralize itself. You have to make sure rebellion is not the band aid that you were trying to avoid in being rebellious. You have to make sure that rebellion does not become just an attitude or a pose without any real results. You have to make sure that you don't just rebel to feel righteous, to feel justified and saved. Some rebellion is justified but romanticized self-serving rebellion is the antithesis of what is really needed. Ridiculing the posers is justified but don't merely take a pose in ridiculing the posers. Get angry about the stupidity in the world, and then really do something about what you can understand and can really do something about.

Do what you think Jesus would want you to do. Act on a personal level if you can. Act through the programs of your church if you believe in them – many Christians also feel the problems and have developed programs in their churches to address the problems. Act on a political level if you think you know what you are doing. Get strongly involved in causes if you understand the causes and think they are the best uses of your talent. Do not take any drugs, chemical or ideological, that let you get well adjusted if you think getting well adjusted covers up reality. Do not take any chemicals or ideologies that let you wallow in rebellion, righteousness, attitude, existential stance, or victimization as a form of justification. Don't bother to put on attitude. People that actually do things don't need to put on attitude. Take the energy from your attitude and put it into something useful. Learn about the real world, and measure Jesus' ideal message by the standard of the real world. I don't know how justifiable rebellion meshes with Jesus' tendency toward sweetness and light but I am pretty sure they do get along somehow.

Chapter 6.07 Hard Cases

This chapter continues the series on responses to the contradictions of modern life. Some of us have a hard time accepting any religion, any comfort, and especially any comfort from religion. Try to understand what I say here without romanticizing.

Bad Decisions.

The movie "Bar Fly", roughly about author Charles "Bucky" Buckowski, offers a toast to bad decisions. Making bad decisions, waking up in bad situations, and being forced to face some of life's bad shit, can lead to some wisdom and to a deeper appreciation for life. It also leads to much pain. Too often, bad shit does not lead to wisdom. Too often, any wisdom gained does not tell us how to get out of the bad situations or the pain, and it does not make up for the pain. Pain does not always make us wise. Pain does not always make us grow spiritually, make us better people, or teach us how to help others. Sometimes pain just makes things worse. Sometimes you just have to endure. Sometimes you have to stay in a bad marriage until the kids get old enough. Sometimes you have to stay in a bad job with a brat boss because you cannot find a better job and because your family needs money. Sometimes you stay in a motel room with a bottle and cable TV.

Finding God can help, but it too does not always make up for the pain and the feeling of being trapped. Sometimes finding God helps us to endure, and sometimes not. Sometimes seeing God makes it worse because it makes us feel acutely the gap between what is and what might realistically have been (the gap between reality and the unreachable ideal usually does not hurt as much). Call the Kingdom of God "Jesus' banquet" or "Jesus' party". It is where people understand and accept each other, help each other out, and get along most of the time. People that have made bad decisions often understand the idea of the party much better than people that have only cruised through. Sometimes we get the idea of Jesus' party but we feel we cannot go to the party because we are trapped by bad decisions and bad events. In that case, we feel worse than if we had never known about the party. Jesus' invitation was supposed to get us out of bad situations into a party that anybody could go to and feel better; but it does not always work out that way. To think that Jesus' invitation always magically takes away the weight of bad decisions and bad situations is only to set people up for some big disappointments. Pretending that religious magic can make anybody rise up out of the grave is just an insult to people that have to endure real life, and betrays the people that do rise up and do find something better.

Thankfully, a lot of the time, an invitation to the party can do the job. People have been saved out of depression, alcoholism, addiction, zealotry, and bad ideology sometimes just by realizing that God loves them. But that does not always work. When you meet somebody for whom it does not work, it is better to accept that it does not work for them than to keep poking them with the stick of God's love. When it does not work, I am not sure what to do.

Somebody once said Jesus had it easy by dying so quickly and so young, especially so quickly after he realized life could betray us. He would have known a lot more about human life if he had lived, married, eked out a bad living under a bad boss, had kids that took drugs and got pregnant at fifteen, and endured

all that for forty more years. Maybe that is true but that is not what happened, it overstates the case, and seems to cut off hope. It leaves us wallowing in bad decisions and bad situations. Jesus is too idealistic but that is part of the point. Jesus gives us something to shoot for. We cannot reach his perfect ideal but most of us can reach a better condition here on earth. At least some people can go to his party even if not everybody who gets the invitation can accept it. We can help people get to the party. Limping into the party is not always enough when we feel really bad but it is usually enough and it is about all I can offer.

Future Perfect.

All major religions aim at their own demise. If they succeed, the moral calling for the religion disappears. Suppose the teachings of Jesus prevail, or of any major world religion prevail, people are well off, and there is not much for a dedicated do-gooder moralist to do. Suppose well-regulated capitalism and sustainable development really achieve for all people what world religions have dreamed of. The entire world becomes like an American middle class suburb, a European upper middle class complex, or a walled "village" in Asia, India, the Near East, or Latin America.

This is not paradise. Too many people that already live this way go nearly crazy. If everybody lived this way, we would have "Brave New World" in which people have to take drugs, have mindless casual sex, play tennis with square balls, and watch movies about abducting innocent pneumatic young people – much like what we have now. People would not live in accord with stereotyped family values. People would not be good at finding useful lives. The arts would not have the same meaning then as now. Not everybody would become a scientist and devote him-herself to nature's mysteries. Only so many people can be fascinated by the life of asteroids or the extravagance of sexual selection. Modern people in this less-than-perfect world already are bored with blurred genders, gay-ness, transgender, and backlash. I am not sure what to do in the apparently perfect world of successful religion and successful development.

The world will change much in the next few decades, and humans will have to deal with intelligent machines, bottle babies, genetic engineering, long lives, etc. Perhaps some people will find new meaning in that new world. Some people will cooperate with machines to do science, do new kinds of art, and develop new kinds of societies. Unfortunately, most people will not find new meaning in that new world and will not find anything to do. They will not starve. They will not fight in a heroic war between people and machines as in the "Terminator" movies because there will be no such war. More likely, they will live on "people reservations" where their material needs will be met but where they will not reproduce. They will not have much reason to live. I have no idea what to suggest for that life, and I have no idea what are the implications for the teachings of Jesus or any other religion. Maybe the world is not just for humans or even primarily for humans, and that is part of God's plan too.

Moral Ambiguity.

Coolness is like heaven or nirvana. The best way to get it is not to work for it. If you work for it, you will never get it. Violence is not cool. I saw violence and its effects in real life and at a job. Once I worked in a hospital where I saw hurt people. Friends have been murdered. It is not romantic. At the same time, I also like action movies, detective movies, films noir, and movies about moral ambiguity. Just as some Americans worship violence, others worship moral ambiguity, often as part of a pose of fake coolness. Too many people combine moral ambiguity with violence, and worship both, as in many of the

movies that give me guilty pleasure. People think that reveling in moral ambiguity is a way to get cool. They are wrong.

The cure is the same for worship of both violence and moral ambiguity: accept it and deal with it. Don't romanticize it. Move on. There is violence. We have to deal with violence, sometimes by using violence. That does not change the ideal of getting along. There is moral ambiguity. The existence of moral ambiguity does not undermine moral ideals and the need to strive for moral ideals. Even when we break some morals, we do it to achieve other ideals that we recognize as higher. Some morals contradict other morals. We want to save America from terrorists but we must not torture. People have to obey the law but sometimes poor people have to steal to feed their kids. If we do not romanticize moral ambiguity, usually we can cope. You just deal with it. We do it with regret and with a clear eye on our own fault. Still, we do it.

We all know people like the "Church Lady" from Saturday Night Live. We all know people that insist on moral absolutes in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, mostly so they can use moral absolutes to browbeat other people and so get their own way. We all know that sometimes poor people have to steal. We all know that some people deserve to die, and we might be better off if we could kill them. We all might be better off if we could forget about the law sometimes. By now, a lot of us know that the illegality of some drugs is worse than the drugs themselves. There are ethical dilemmas in the world. So what?

Being able to recognize moral dilemmas does make you more astute than other people, but not that much more astute. Being more astute than other people means you have more responsibility than them. It does not make you better. It does not mean you have the right to feel superior. To pose in moral ambiguity is to act like a shopping bimbo who thinks she-he is better than other people because she-he knows what "puce" means or knows the right brands of watches. Being able to see moral dilemmas should make you more sympathetic and helpful but I have never noticed the people that use moral dilemmas as a way to coolness really are cooler, helpful, or sympathetic. Recognizing moral ambiguity becomes as much a tactic as the Church Lady's moral absolutes. People that use moral ambiguity to assert their superiority imply that there are standards by which they can step outside moral ambiguity to judge moral ambiguity, and imply a different higher level of moral absolutes, but they do not specify their new standards. The lack of clarity helps them to manipulate other people and to sustain a pseudo-mysterious image. Not only whining students do this, people from all walks of life do this when they think that other people cannot possibly appreciate the tough decisions they have to make in their jobs and lives: teachers, housewives, house husbands, parents, soldiers on a peace keeping mission, Jack Nicholson in "A Few Good Men", rock and roll singers, rock and roll fans, and religious writers. People have enough trouble already with moral dilemmas so that they do not need to suffer both from Church Ladies and their mirror images.

Stop using moral relativity as a way to be cool. Be useful instead. Weigh alternatives, make a decision, live with it, and don't feel puffy.

Modern Ennui.

This section is not for people who rebel because they can't find anything better to do. It is for people who put Lou Reed or Sarah McLachlan on endless repeat.

In American pop culture now, Justification comes by creativity. If you are not creative, if you are not an artist, then you cannot be Justified and you cannot be Saved. Artistic creativity is the surest sign of Salvation. If you are a creative artist, then you are Justified and Saved.

Some sad people are cursed to find meaning only in activities for which they have no special creative aptitude themselves. If they cannot create in a medium they find meaningful, then they cannot find much meaning. They can find some meaning in appreciating what other people do but usually not enough meaning. They are like people that have made bad decisions except they are trapped by their nature and culture rather than their history. A lot of chronically depressed people are like this.

Some people are fairly smart and pretty good at understanding literature, music, song, and painting but do not have much talent themselves. To appreciate without also being creative is not enough. To appreciate without also being creative is not a joy but is the salve that allows a tortured body to heal only to be tortured again. Some people see that politics is important but do not know what to do because they cannot accept any particular party. They can see through most ideologies such as family values but have no better ideology to offer. Some people do not mind making money but they do not want to lose themselves in making money, and it seems that nearly every occupation requires that they lose themselves. Some people see only band aids; they cannot believe that trying hard to do good will make any lasting difference. They understand the idea of a better world but they do not feel that their action makes any difference in getting there.

When these people have something to do that they believe in, such as the latest big thing in art or the latest political cause, they can be a lot of fun. But because they often have nothing creative that they can do personally, they use up a lot of their lives in bars. Often they rebel, or drift into romanticizing the underbelly of society. In the long run, that diversion bores them as well. To fight boredom, they play games of artistic holier-than-thou or PC holier-than-thou. These people are Elvira Madigan (see the movie) in Goth drag, alterna-rock drag, or post-modernist drag.

I have no idea what to say even though I have often been like this myself. Probably my childhood religious faith saved me. Probably the basic human tendency to get over it and to have a family saves most people. You either get it or you do not. Not everybody gets it. You cannot explain it so that people get it any more than you can talk people out of a history of bad decisions or out of depression.

It is alright to appreciate without being creative yourself. It is alright to work for a political cause even if the cause is not perfect and will not save the world. Most honest jobs contribute to the well-being of everybody even if they do not save everybody and even if they continue the innate flaws of capitalism. Just because you see the innate flaws of capitalism does not mean you may not earn a living. Maybe if following Jesus meant more than doling out food at a local shelter, then modern bored strangled people would be more receptive. If there were some way to follow Jesus that also meant something to these people in itself, and for which they had an aptitude, then they would get the message and do it well. If they could do "art for Jesus" and believe it, they probably would, even if their art was not radically new. If they could do "politics for Jesus" without feeling sleazy, and without expecting to save the world

tomorrow, they likely would. If they could be a “housing loan manager for Jesus”, as in “It’s A Wonderful Life”, then they might be happy. You cannot talk people into feeling those options are possible, that those options do not betray their pseudo-heroic stance, or that those options are satisfying. You can only hope that people stop looking to silly role models and figure it out themselves.

Lonely.

“All the lonely people, where do they all come from?” The world is full of external problems such as poverty, sexism, racism, oppression, and the destruction of nature. We can all do something about them, if not personally then by giving to an agency. If that is enough for you, then fine. Those problems are outside the daily lives of most Americans. In the daily life of most Americans, the biggest problem is probably loneliness. Even people that help solve other problems can still feel deeply painful loneliness. Millions of us sit lonely in front of the TV every night when all it would take is to sit in front of the same TV with friends. I do not belittle the damage caused by big outside problems such as sexism, but I think loneliness causes more total pain. To help a lonely person is a great service, a great way to carry out the message of Jesus, a great “mitzvah”. Curing loneliness would drastically cut down on medication. I am really bad at helping out lonely people, and I suffer from loneliness too. I do not know how to help the lonely people in the modern world.

Media such as Facebook help but I don’t think those by themselves are really enough, and not everybody has access to them now anyway. Telling lonely people to join a church to meet other lonely people can work, and it is quite common in the American South, but it does not work well enough even here. I want to join a church because I agree with its beliefs, not because it is a social club. Socializing with people just because they are there works if you grew up with the people but it is hard to do when you did not grow up with the people. It feels artificial and unsatisfying. You want to socialize with people with whom you share common interests. Sometimes you can develop interests so that you can socialize with people that have the same interests, like developing an interest in comic books or in guns. But mostly we want to have natural interests that show our true selves, and then find people that share those same interests.

Unluckily, in the modern world, many natural interests we can enjoy alone even though we used to need people to carry them out. The greatest interest of most people is probably some kind of art, like the drama on TV and movies, or music. We used to have to get together with friends to play music, go to concerts, or go to the theater to see plays. Now we can just sit there alone and turn on the TV. The TV makes us feel temporarily better even while in the long run it reinforces our isolation. We can download tunes and insert little ear buds. Even people that go shopping can be alone in a shopping mall full of a hundred thousand ghosts. I am not saying this is evil, or that the modern world is bad; I like the modern world. I am just saying that our technological servants only reinforce our loneliness, like rich people of the past trapped in giant ornate castles with only their dumb servants.

Ironically, reading about religion and thus realizing the religious roots of working to build a better world actually reinforced my loneliness – at least in the short run. If I were a good propagandist, I would suppress this confession, but I would rather tell the truth. What I believe keeps me out of most churches. What I believe keeps me separated from most academics. I think a very large number of Americans agree with what I believe but there is no church for us and no way for us to meet. We walk past each other on the streets and up into our living rooms with the TV sets without ever knowing. There are no

common institutions where we can show our views and help each other figure out what to do, a kind of Salvation Army Hall where normal people can get together to do what good they can. I do not know how to build institutions to help people; I have not the skill of Luther or Calvin or Billy Graham. Maybe as a result of writing this book, people that feel similarly will be able to find other people and will benefit.

Crawl Out of Your Hole First.

Sometimes religion can inspire us to overcome depression, loneliness, substance abuse, the leftover debris of a bad relationship, the perfidy of the world, the selfishness of humanity, the dead certainty that "it's all screwed up", or just feeling like crap. Sometimes religion only makes it worse. If we feel like shit, we don't usually like to hear about working to build a better world. We don't want to hear that working to help others paradoxically gets us out of our shell and saves us at the same time too. That might be true if you are not too far down in a hole, or if you are a lucky person; but if you are too far down, and for many regular non-lucky people, it doesn't work. Then, banging the religious drum just makes a bad headache into a throbbing ringing blinding pounder.

The only advice I can give is take care of yourself first any way you can. Don't worry about Jesus or about contributing to the world. Stop all the crap if you can. Crawl out of the apartment and walk around the block once. Do it every day. Get self help books, even the crappy ones written by self-serving get-rich-quick artists. Try to find genuine books by people that went through what you are going through. Go somewhere you can just look at people where you don't have to interact or even say "hello". Meditate for one minute a day until you can do more. Don't worry if you "do it right" or if you only breathe. Pray if you can. When you have to, roll up in a ball and shake and moan until it stops. Then unroll and try again to get better. Do whatever it takes. When you feel better enough about yourself, you can try saying "hello". The standard advice is to seek professional help but sometimes you have to work up out of the hole on your own just to get to the point where you can even think about getting some help. Jesus will not send you to hell because you have to look at the world through a moldy shower curtain. You are the one who needs help, not the one who has to give it. When you can give help, you will. Good luck.

Chapter 6.08 Jesus, Religion, and the State

This chapter asserts that church and state should be kept separate. Nearly all modern people live in a state and practice religion in a state. Like it or not, we have to think about how to live in a state. We have to think about how to live our religion in a state. For example, nearly all people depend on the state for religious security. We have to think about how to follow Jesus within a state. Too many people use the state as the tool of their self-interest, religion, and morality. In so doing, they corrupt the state and corrupt all religion including their own. We have to learn how to follow our religion within the state without making the state our tool. This chapter omits questions of international relations.

Synopsis.

Even though some major religion played a role in the foundation of all major states (including Communist states and political correctness), modern states should aim to be secular. The domestic duties of a modern state are to maintain order, maintain a basic level of common decency, and enforce some morals that all people agree on such as “do not murder” and “do not have sex with minors”. For example, the state may ban smoking in public places because smoke is a threat to health. Often the morals that everybody agrees on are also needed for basic order and common decency, such as “do not murder”. The state may carry out projects that lead to general benefit, without creating greater cost than benefit, and without leading the citizens into dependency, such as a system of national roads or regulated banking. The state may address a systemic problem, especially if the problem touches general moral sense. For example, because capitalism has unavoidable minimum unemployment even among willing workers, the state may help people that are inevitably unemployed or poorly employed, such as by providing welfare and health insurance – as long as the state does not encourage too much dependency. This chapter does not enter debate about the general role of the state.

The state should not enforce all morals, not even morals that everybody agrees on such as, “do not lie”. The state is one agent of general morality but the state is not the primary moral agent of life. Some morals do not need to be enforced by the state because people enforce them on their own (do not commit adultery), some are too hard to enforce (do not get drunk), some do not contribute much to general order or to common decency (sexual acts), and some represent particular groups (Sabbath laws for Jews, Christians, and Muslims). The state should not enforce any morals that are not needed for general order, not needed for common decency, are hard to enforce, not generally agreed upon, or generate other hard problems. When the state enforces any morals, it intrudes into life. When the state enforces some morals unnecessarily, it intrudes into life too much. The state should never serve as the moral agent of any one group, such as religious fundamentalists or strident PC people. When the state serves as the agent of one group, it necessarily oppresses other groups and intrudes too much into life. Trying to enforce morals inevitably leads the state to extend its power too far. Once extended, the state rarely withdraws power.

Jesus’ teachings fostered the active participation that is needed by citizens in a modern democracy. That attitude toward citizenship and good government is now a part of the political culture of the West and the structure of Western nations. Having been exposed to this role, non-Western states, and religions other

than Christianity, adapted the role to their needs and ideas. They made it theirs. While it is useful to know the roots of modern citizenship in Jesus' teachings, it is not useful to stress the roots if to do so annoys people, makes them lesser citizens, or turns them against Jesus and Christians.

If you feel the laws of the modern secular state are too lax for your group, then you should live by stricter laws yourself. Do not try to push your laws on others through the state. Do not expect your children to feel as you do. If you feel that secular-based laws, as they are now, do not support general order, general morality, or common decency, then you can try to change the laws as long as you remain within the scope of secular. If you feel that secular-based laws can never be good enough, and must be lifted to the standards of some religion, then you should consider moving. If you think that secular-based laws are never good enough, and that the moral code of your particular religion would make the laws good enough, then you should think about moving. If you think that secular-based laws are never good enough, some religion has to uplift the laws, and religions have to compete to see which takes control, then you should think about moving. If you try to impose the laws of your religion beyond what is needed for general order, morality, and decency, then you should expect to be thwarted.

Jesus and Christianity.

The classical Jewish idea of church and state was theocracy. God, state, and the people were one. The priests and the aristocrats administered the state in God's place. Whether they administered the state for the good of the people was irrelevant as long as they did what God said. Fortunately, God did insist on social justice. Because God collectively rewarded obedience and punished disobedience, if the rulers did as God bid, the state as a whole should do well. If the state did well, the people should do well. There was no idea of modern citizenship except as the people participated in the theocracy of the Temple, all people adhered to God's Law, and all people were rewarded or punished.

This is not the idea of a group that was current in the original human hunting-gathering way of life. There was no state in the original human way of life, so there were no ideas about the state and about the relation of people, religion, morality, and the state. Jewish ideas of the state, God, and the people are typical of agricultural states in general. They also differed in important ways. How Jewish ideas are typical and distinct is important but I cannot go into it here. Although modern states are not agricultural, they inherited their ideas from their agricultural precursors, including that the state is collectively punished or rewarded for behavior and the state should implement the morality of a particular religion. Only within the last 300 years have states changed that old basic attitude to the modern secular attitude. Exactly how modern non-agricultural states differ from agricultural states and from Israel is another large topic.

Jewish ideas of God, state, rulers, people, and Law did bring significant advances, such as modern ideas of morality, law, persons, and history. This is an important topic. Please refer to the Bibliography.

You cannot argue out of the conclusion that Israel was an aristocratic theocracy. It is a fact. You cannot argue around it by saying the Jewish version was the true version, was the best version, or was necessary for modern ideas of the state. Traditional Jewish ideas of the state cannot serve as the model for modern states although they can contribute key ideas, and have. Modern states changed from the

basic model of Israel. Instead of trying to “get back to Israel” in various devious ways, we should think about how to run the modern state.

Jesus accepted the Jewish ideas current in his time. In some ways, he was right. But in some ways, he was just wrong, at least as the ideas apply to our times. I think it is better to face what he was right and wrong about. Christians cannot accept that he was wrong about anything so they try to avoid this dilemma. To do so, you have to redefine Jesus in ways that I do not believe Jesus would recognize or approve.

Jesus was right that God had used the Israelites to develop ideas of God and to develop a simple and useful morality. Jesus was right in seeing a shift away from collective reward and punishment to a focus on individual responsibility. I hope Jesus was right in seeing Israel as a great moral leader that would inspire other nations to follow the best in religion and morality.

If Jesus felt that Israel would dominate the world politically and militarily, then he was wrong. If Jesus felt there would be a dramatic series of events which would lead to the dominance of Israel and the rule of God then so far Jesus has been wrong.

Jesus was wrong about the close relation between religion and the state. It is possible to have a good state without necessarily having a single religion, especially without necessarily having Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. It might be that most of the people in the state are good religious people, and most of them might even be Jews, Christians, or Muslims, but that does not mean the state should be a religious state based on one of those religions or should be a theocracy. In fact, the state works best, and religions work best, when the state does not try to be the agent of God and when no religion tries to make the state its tool.

I think history has directions, and I think God foresaw the course that life would take on a planet such as ours, but I do not think God has been rewarding and punishing people in general to make them carry history in particular directions. If God did that in the past with Israel, he is not doing that now with any particular nation and he is not doing that now with humanity as a whole. There is now no longer any particular chosen nation leading humanity toward a certain historical point. Now, we have many nations trying to do better and trying to lead their people toward understood goals of freedom, responsibility, and economic security. At any particular time, some particular nation might take a brief leadership role but no particular nation has that role now as Israel might have had it in the past.

God probably does not intervene much in our lives to teach us proper behavior. He probably does not reward and punish us. He set up the world so that it would do so for him, and then let the world do its job.

The fact that Jesus was wrong about the relation of state and religion, and wrong about a big change in the world, does not mean that Jesus was wrong about what is good and bad. Jesus was still a great leader and great prophet. His message is still valid.

Christian Citizen.

Jesus had an unusual idea of the relation of a follower to his-her group, of the relation of a follower to the movement that Jesus himself began. The roots of Jesus' ideas are not clear, and I do not speculate here. Jesus had more in mind than the usual relation between an Israelite and the state of Israel. Jesus had more in mind than the usual resident-citizen in an Eastern nation such as in Egypt or Babylon. To Jesus, as with the Pharisees, each person in the movement was almost like a citizen-ruler-priest, almost like a priest of the Temple. Each person was equal because each was holy, and vice versa. As long as we do not think this automatically entitles us to run a state along the lines of our own morality, as if we are an instrument of God, this is not such a bad way to think of ourselves and our relation to other people.

When the Church began to organize after Jesus died, it took over his idea of a strong relation between members and the Church as a whole. Every member of the Church was like a priest of the Jewish Temple. I am not arguing that the Church should not have a clergy or that every Christian is a bishop. I am stressing that the relation of Christians to the Church was stronger than the relation of most members to their religious organization or state at the time. (A similar relation might have prevailed between members of "cults" and their "churches" of the time but I cannot go into that here.) Jesus' idea was a relatively new idea. Because it was new, the exact terms of the strong relation, and the exact status of the individual, were not clear, and had to be hammered out over the next two thousand years.

One way in which the ideas became clearer was to mix them with the idea of a citizen in a Greek city state. All members of the Christian Church were like the ruling members of the aristocracy in a Greek city state. All members participated in the Church rites, all had a voice in governing, and none was too superior to others. The Church was not absolutely egalitarian, not even at the start, and so Church members did not expect that. But the ruling aristocratic citizens of a Greek city state were not absolutely equal either, and so it was easy to see parallels. The office of Bishop was powerful but it was not hereditary, like the temporary ruler of Greek city states.

Ideas of membership in the Church merged with ideas of being a citizen in a Greek city state. There the ideas slept until they were revived from time to time, as whenever the West fumbled toward democracy. When the West did fumble toward democracy, it could look toward semi-egalitarian relations in the Church as models. As long as we understand that this Christian model does not commit us toward identity between church and state, then this is a pretty good model of citizenship. It is another legacy of Jesus' good teachings.

Modern Bad Versions of Ancient Israel.

The developing Church did not rest with Jesus' ideas of a close relation among members of the earliest Church but naturally also took over ideas of Israel and its close relation with God. The developing early Church thought of itself as the New Israel. The biggest difference was that the Church, at first, could not hint at any military-political takeover of the world, and could not stress a close relation between church and state. It had to be very careful of those points in the Roman Empire. Later as Rome diminished and Christianity took over the West, the Church could claim a close relation between church and state, and it could claim that one day the Church and its states would take over the world. It then transferred Jewish ideas about God, the priests, the Temple, and the state to the Christian Church and its political states. That is about where we stand now.

I am not clear about the official doctrines of major churches now such as the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian Churches. If they still see themselves as the new Israel, then they have to see a close relation between church and state, and have to look forward to the Church and its partner states taking over the world. The churches have to look forward to God collectively punishing any nation that does not vigorously try to follow morality as the particular church defines morality.

If you listen to Right Wing religious leaders in the media such as Pat Robertson, and listen to Right Wing not-so-religious leaders in the media, such as Rush Limbau and Glenn Beck, this ideology of the new Israel, including politics and the military, seems alive and well, even if it is not stated outright in so many words. I still half-laugh and half-cry when I think of Pat Robertson expecting God to send storms and earthquakes against any city in America that supports the teaching of evolution in its schools and/or supports the "gay agenda". I can only cry when I think of churches picketing the funerals of dead American soldiers because they think America is going against God's Laws against homosexuality, and are trying to forestall the collective punishment that they are sure must follow.

America and Christianity are not the only culprits. Almost every European nation has thought of itself in these terms. Many Muslim nations, or Islam collectively, thinks of itself in these terms now. America, Europeans, and Muslims, have done, continue to do, and will do, bad things as a result. This is what makes atheists condemn religion.

Early Christians would not participate in the civic religions of the particular city states or the Roman Empire or the general civic religion of the Empire. Yet the United States now has the equivalent of a civic religion, the Christian churches here enthusiastically embrace it, and they demand of Christians that they participate. The United States does not require that citizens offer a sacrifice to a god but we, the people of the United States, do everything in civic religion short of that demand. Our civic religion consists of Mom, children, business, labor, apple pie, the flag, cars, electronic devices, celebrity, pledges of allegiance, wearing flag pins, extolling the military, and holding elaborate ceremonies on civic holy days such as the Fourth of July. We sacrifice to our civic gods on those days through our parades and gifts and taxes. As long as we carefully make sure people understand the state is not holy, all this civic religion need not be so bad. But people do not understand the state is not holy, and the active participation of the churches in civic religion does not make the distinction clear. I think early Christians would have see what Americans do as civic religion and would be very wary of it. Christians now embrace what early Christians feared and shunned.

Sacred Secular States.

The material in this section appears to contradict my desire to keep the state and religion distinct but it does not. It faces some points of reality about human nature that we have to go through to keep our balance.

Much as we might like to found the modern state on a purely rational basis, we cannot. Much as we might like to found morality on a purely rational basis and then use rational morality to found the state, we cannot. All states ultimately rest on a core set of ideas that are sacred and are not up for discussion. These ideas might make some rational sense but that is not why we accept them. We accept them

because they make sacred and moral sense. For a modern state, the ideas include democracy, rule of law, individual rights, individual responsibility, privacy, freedom of speech, etc. Even when we can find some rational basis for one of these sacred ideas, as we find a rational basis for the Golden Rule in equality under the law, usually we did not get the ideas through rationality but through a religious teacher. We do not accept ideas such as the Golden Rule because it is so rational but because Jesus taught it to us. We do not accept equality under the law because it is self-evident but because it is an extension of a deeper moral idea that some great teacher taught us, in this case the prophets of Israel who were concerned with social justice and individual responsibility.

This fact does not mean that every state is a hidden theocracy or every state should become an open theocracy. Once we have the deep underlying moral idea we do not have to accept all the tenets of the religion that gave it to us. We can accept the Golden Rule without also accepting that Jesus will return from Heaven to lead a never-ending Jewish state. We can accept the Silver Rule as a basis for good government without also accepting circumcision. We can accept that God leaves signs for us through his creation without also making a pilgrimage to Mecca. We can accept democracy without also having to give offerings to Athena.

We have to do just what political philosophers have been telling us to do since Classical Greece: look at our values, try to harmonize the values, be sensitive to the contradictions, and do the best we can. It helps to be honest that they are values and to acknowledge the source of our values in history and religion.

I believe the values of the modern secular state largely coincide with the large general points of moral logic that evolved as part of human sentient-moral nature: applies equally, the Golden Rule, empathy, and respect similarities and differences. Modern states do not ideally embody those values but they do best represent those values in our times. Future times might see other situations. I doubt that any particular religion, religiously based morality, or church, shows these values better than a successful modern secular state. I am not saying that evolution aimed to produce the modern state in some kind of metaphysical plot, or that the modern state is the physical embodiment of evolution as Jesus is supposed to be the physical embodiment of God. I do not praise the modern state in this chapter because it goes along with my ideas of the inherent tendencies of evolution but because I have used my evolved mind to figure out what seems best to me in the conditions under which I live. I do not think I surreptitiously projected my ideals of the modern secular state backward into evolution so that I could find them again and use them to praise the modern secular state. I cannot go further into this topic here.

Ideal Moral Groups.

The state is not a giant band of hunter-gatherers. The state is not a giant small community. The state is not the family or household writ gigantic. The state is not a giant church. The state is something else. We need to be careful using images of ideal communities to guide our thought about the state.

In the original human condition, human communities approached, but did not achieve, groups of self-selected good guys. Even now the human ideal of community is much like a group of self-selected good guys. It is only natural to think of the state as a giant community of self-selected good guys. We can

use that image as one ideal to think about the state but the state is not a giant community of self-selected good guys, and we should keep in mind how they differ.

Religious-moral-political-economic small subgroups within states think of themselves as self-selected good guys, as better than the state in general, and as better than nearly all other small groups within the state. "We are good; we are the best; everybody should try to be like us; and the state should be us writ large." Their tendency to think that way, and some of the tactics they use to get that way, were probably inherited from original human groups but have been intensified by life as a subgroup within a larger modern state. The way of life of a subgroup within the state is not the same as the original human life as self-selected groups of good guys and is not the same as the state as a whole. We should not follow them as models of the state. We should not think of the state as a labor union, church, business firm, business organization, political party, PAC, or any other group writ large.

People in original human groups of self-selected good guys liked to think they shared enough of morality, religion, and ideas so that they could always understand each other and could always get along. They were not as diverse as a modern secular state but they were not all alike in ideas, ideals, morality, or religion. I guess that nearly all original human groups were more diverse than most small churches in the United States, and might have been more diverse than the official doctrine of any large church too. Original humans wanted people to think alike enough to be get along but they just did not care about making people think uniformly in the same way that modern groups do. The modest tendency toward uniformity in original human groups might give power to the tendency toward uniformity in subgroups in a modern state but we should not let our natural tendency toward uniformity in small groups drive our image of uniformity in the modern state.

Original groups had, and small groups now have, enforcers of behavior. The enforcers took an active role, likely more active than we would like modern people to play. Probably they did not enforce much through physical force but mostly through gossip, suggestion, behavior, inclusion, and exclusion, much as we have among small groups today. Modern people inherited the role of enforcers, and we intensify the role in subgroups in the state. Modern states also need agents to look after general order, decency, and morality; but we do not need moral police or the thought police. The modern state should be more lax than small groups.

Fighting Bad Invaders.

Recall that self-selected groups of good guys are vulnerable to bad people within them and bad people without. It is easy to take advantage of people who always play by the rules and who give everybody the benefit of the doubt many times. Taking advantage is what people do who wish to use a successful secular state as the tool of their religion. Using morality itself as their tool, they invade the state from within, like bad people invading a group of self-selected good guys.

When the state already is primarily secular and already reasonably successful, then the advice given above to be open-minded still stands. But that is not the case as much as we need. Too often, the state already has been invaded by self-interest groups that use morality and religion. Too often, the subgroups already wield enough power so they cannot be controlled by rational decency. Since the

early 1960s, and especially since the 1980s, this has been so in America. What then? I can't give much good advice.

Unfortunately, craziness often works against other craziness. Commitment works, and craziness is a kind of commitment. When we face crazy people with some power, we become crazy too. We push our religion and morality to the exclusion of other ideas and without compromise. We use the state as the tool of our way of life. We see all compromise as betrayal. We redefine common good, common decency, and general morality to coincide with our view of morality and to exclude other views. We say we are only promoting the general good when really we promote our ideas in the fight against others. Probably, the other groups, the invaders, have already done this. We see them as immoral invaders, and that is how they see us. Even if people point out our fault, we still feel justified because other groups already did it first. As I wrote in late 2011 and early 2012, several times the Tea Party had brought the United States to a halt based on this mentality.

Jesus advised us not to resort to forceful craziness. He advised using kindness even in the face of craziness and power, even if kindness got you killed and even if it temporarily set you're your group and your cause. He relied on God to set things right in the end if kindness did not work now. You have to decide if you can follow Jesus here, and, if not, what you and your cause will become.

State as Kingdom of God.

Throughout this book, I have urged people to be good citizens, and I sometimes implied that being a good citizen was one way to act properly in the Kingdom of God. That is true, but it tends to foster some mistakes, and I need to make sure nobody makes them.

First, the state is not the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of God is not the state. That is what I have argued throughout this chapter. A good citizen of the Kingdom of God does not aim to make the state a theocracy. We cannot turn the state into the Kingdom of God. We cannot turn the Kingdom of God into a political state. All that thinking is idolatry. We should not think that the Kingdom of God has a right to use the state. The Kingdom of God is something apart from the state. A good state would have many of the same goals as the Kingdom of God and would tend to breed the same kind of people as would want to live in the Kingdom of God, but, even so, the state and the Kingdom are not the same. The state would do well to learn from good people in the Kingdom of God, Christians and from other religions too, but the state cannot pattern itself after those people only. Get clear about the Kingdom first and then you can more easily get clear about its relations to the state.

Second, we should not think that being a good citizen of the state is always enough to make us a good citizen of the Kingdom of God. Sometimes it is, but often it isn't. This is another version of identifying the state and the Kingdom of God. Just because we are an informed rational voter does not mean we are automatically a good citizen of the Kingdom of God and that we don't have to do anything else. Just because we have spent a lifetime in service to the state does not have to mean we have also been a good citizen of the Kingdom of God, although I am inclined to think God would be favorably disposed to seeing it that way. You have to assess your situation, and the situation of the state, to decide what is best.

Third, we should not think that being a good citizen of the Kingdom of God automatically makes us a good citizen of the state. Plenty of people with good natures make lousy citizens of the state. It is two different skill sets. Find out what you are good at, work at what you need to make better, and make up your mind.

Morality Tales.

About the time of Jesus, the Roman Emperor Augustus (Octavian) Caesar declared that people had to live in stereotypically standard Roman families and had to behave according to unrealistic idealized Roman family values, much like idealized stereotyped modern family values. Urban Roman citizens were not marrying and producing children as they had in the past, and Augustus Caesar was worried that the noble Roman way of life would die out under the wave of modernization and new radical religions. People had to get married, have children, and live in the right kind of family households. They had to understand the Roman legacy and worship traditional gods. Augustus Caesar was highly revered, genuinely popular, and quite powerful. People agreed with his policy in theory. Yet Augustus Caesar failed miserably in his attempt to legislate family values. People just would not do as he ordered but instead lived the kind of lives that worked for them in the new urbanized empire.

Before Constantine de facto made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire after 340 CE (AD), Christians had already done well in the supposedly decadent secular Empire. Before Constantine, the Roman Empire had seen some bad times, but was on the rise again. Both Christians and the Empire had done well while Christians were not in power. After Christians came to power, the Empire slid into the "Dark Ages", and remained dark for a thousand years. Everybody was worse off when the Christians gained power, even the Christians. In fairness, the slide did not begin right away, and Christians did not alone cause the slide. But the fact that the slide happened after Christians got power makes an important point: when a religious group gains power over the state, things do not always get better, not even for the religious group that gains power. Power is not always a gift from God. God does not always give political power to his religious group. Having political power does not mean you are on the right side of God. Be careful what you wish for, you might just get it.

Christians have not always wanted the state to enforce their morality and religion. Sometimes they are content to live within the state as long as the state does not persecute them, living by a stricter moral code than the state in general, serving as an example for other groups, recruiting through their example, and recruiting through their ability to offer financial aid and social security. Christians in the Empire lived with prostitution, abortion, infanticide, animal sacrifice, drug use, slavery, racism, sexism, homosexuality, gambling, drinking, promiscuity, debauchery, military service, big differences in wealth and power, diverse religions, and many other behaviors that Christians considered sins and still do. Other than Augustus' brief failed interlude, most Roman laws were not concerned with what we think of as moral life and family values but with property and social order. Under those conditions, Christians thrived as much as any other group. Until Constantine, Christians did not try to change the Roman laws or the Roman state. Christians first followed Roman laws, and then followed their own laws on top of Roman laws. Some Christian groups live in the United States this way now, such as the Amish. It is a simple idea, yet people often are not satisfied but still wish to impose their life on everybody else too.

If you want to be politically active in a modern state, do so primarily as a citizen of the state who is concerned with the general welfare and general order of the state. Do not act primarily as a religious person using the state as an instrument of your own religious ideas and morality. If you can limit yourself, in the long run you will serve both the state and your religion best.

American core principles require the state to take some action for general order and decency but do not require the state to become involved in many aspects of daily life. Our core principles require the state to keep out of most aspects of life. The state is primarily an instrument of order, basic general good, and common simple moral decency; it is not primarily an instrument of any greater morality; it is not an instrument for the morality of any particular religion; and it is not even an instrument for the full morality of the people in general.

As with the early Christians in Rome, our morality does not have to coincide with the general morality enforced by the state. We have to think about which of our morals have to be enforced by the state. If any of our morals is not necessary for public order, then we are better off not using the state to enforce it. Instead, we can live more strictly according to our morals within the state and let other people live as they wish. I lived in Alabama in 2008. Alabama does not have a lottery because a small but powerful minority considers it immoral. Most Alabamans seem to like to gamble, are happy to go to Mississippi for casinos, to dog tracks, to casinos run by Native Americans, and to places where bingo machines operate. To any objective observer, the bingo machines are like slot machines. The government was fighting with a casino about whether the casino was breaking the law with its bingo machines. In the long run, it might be easier to accept some gambling than to spend resources enforcing the morals of a minority. If some people do not wish to gamble, they need not. We only have to think how much gambling, and what kinds of gambling, are a real threat to public order.

Some moral issues do demand action, and sometimes action can only happen through the state, as when America ended slavery. Even in these cases, we have to be careful. Some people think homosexuality is so bad it has to be stopped, and the state has to be the agent to stop it. In contrast, some people think repression of gays is so bad it has to be stopped, and the state has to be the agent to stop it. That we can have two opposed points of view on the same topic, with both groups calling on the state as their agent, should make us stop to think really hard before we conclude that any behavior is so morally bad that it must be controlled for everybody and that the state has to be the agent of our morality. I am not saying there are no such serious moral issues – there are – I am only saying we need to be careful. We should consider other modes of action besides the state. If the state does have to intervene, we should consider alternatives other than enforcing a particular morality. I discuss gay marriage later in the book.

In the movie trilogy “The Matrix”, Agent Smith was the Devil. Agent Smith could not stand the Matrix world. He needed everybody to be like him. Only when everybody was just like him could Agent Smith feel comfortable in the Matrix. He found a way to make everybody like him after he merged with Neo. Citizens in a modern state too often act like Agent Smith. It is natural to want other people to serve our interests and natural to want to control them. One way to control them is to make them like us. We do not feel fully comfortable unless other people are under control or unless other people are exactly like us. Like Agent Smith, modern people found a way too: use the state as a tool of control by invoking moral indignation. When people do not act according to our morals, use the state to make them act that way.

When enough people act as we want them to act, then we are in control and successful. When enough people are moral clones of us, we are safe. We ought not to act like Agent Smith.

When the first group has control of the state, it uses moral indignation to control others, and this first group feels good. It praises the state as the natural agent of all morality, meaning its own particular morality. Later, when a second group takes over the state, it uses moral indignation to persecute the first group. Then the second group feels good and praises the state as the natural agent of all morality, meaning its particular morality. When any particular group comes to power, it uses supposed differences in morality as excuses to oppress rivals and to exert general control. It uses morality as a tool of its power. After the first group lost power, too late, it knew the danger of using the state as a moral tool, of anybody's morality. Then it appealed to the second group for sanity and moderation but the second group would not listen. This is not a made-up story. It happened scores after the Reformation when Protestants took over from Roman Catholics and when Roman Catholics took over again from Protestants. It happened when one Protestant group took over from another Protestant group or one Catholic group took over from another. This theme dominated the French Revolution. It happened after World War I with the Treaty of Versailles when the imposed penalty on Germany paved the way for Nazis. It happens now in America every time the President and Senate have to fill a Supreme Court seat. It happens when we fight over abortion or gay rights. It happens when we fight over whether to legalize marijuana. It happens daily in Africa when one ethnic group seizes power and terrorizes other ethnic groups. It will happen to PC people if Fundamentalist Christians take over the United States and will happen to Fundamentalist Christians if strident PC people take over. If we accept that we want to use the state as the instrument of our power and morality, then maybe we can overcome our desire. We would all be better off.

Chapter 6.09 Abortion

Abortion is a hot issue in the “culture wars” in America. This chapter aims to calm people down by showing to both sides the rationality and humanity in the other side. I take a typical liberal stance. We should keep doing what we do now; the state should allow abortion. We should think of the issue in terms of persons and rights. We should vigorously encourage both birth control and self-control of sex. This is about what most Americans want. The strength of the chapter is its explanations of the logic of *Roe v. Wade*, the logic of the anti-abortion stance, and how people might have viewed abortion in pre-modern times.

Roe v. Wade.

To the extent that I understand, the famous Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* lays out these ideas:

-Abortion is not a question of “when does life begin?” or “when is the fetus a fully human person?” It does not matter if life begins at conception or at any other time. It does not matter when a fetus becomes a fully human person. The court did not define when two sets of chromosomes become alive and then become a person.

-Abortion is a question of rights, especially of greater rights. Who has what rights when? What is the basis for the rights? When do rights conflict? Whose rights prevail when?

-A woman has rights based on privacy and on control of her body. I think the right to control her body is based on her (implied) Constitutional right to privacy.

-A fetus also has rights. I am not sure on what the fetus’ rights are based: being alive, being a human person, length of life, or what.

-The woman’s rights are already fully developed when the problem pregnancy begins.

-It is not clear when the fetus’s rights begin. This has to be defined.

-At conception, the fetus is considered either not to have rights yet or to have rights less than the rights of the woman. The woman’s rights prevail.

-As long as the rights of the woman prevail over the rights of the fetus, the woman may abort the fetus. If she aborts during the time when her rights prevail, it is not murder. Whether it is killing is not relevant.

-After the rights of the fetus prevail over the rights of the woman, then she may not abort the fetus. After that time, killing the fetus is a kind of murder.

-It is not necessary that the rights of the fetus begin at conception or at some particular time after conception such as at age six months or when the fetus is viable outside the mother. It is only

necessary that the rights of the fetus begin by the time set by the court for when the fetus' rights overcome the rights of the woman.

-It is not clear what is implied by: the fact that the fetus has (develops) rights; the rights have to begin sometime during the course of the pregnancy; the rights begin at any particular time such as at conception, six months, or viability; the rights of the fetus eventually overcome the rights of the mother; or the rights of the fetus overcome the rights of the mother at any particular time such as at conception, six months, or viability.

-The problem is to decide when greater right shifts from the woman to the fetus, and why. It is useful to have a criterion for the shift in rights.

-The court decided that the criterion for the pivot point in rights is self-viability for the fetus. A self-viable fetus is like an autonomous human person (something Americans value highly). As long as the fetus likely is not viable outside the woman's body, her rights prevail and she may abort the fetus. When the fetus likely is viable outside the woman's body, then the fetus' rights prevail over the woman's rights.

-The court provided an index to decide when the fetus might be viable outside the woman. The court used modern medical success as the basis for its index, and converted that to a time period. If modern medicine says that fetuses of six months old or greater usually survive outside the woman, then that is when the rights of the fetus prevail over the rights of the woman. Before that age, the woman may abort the fetus. After that age, the woman may not abort the fetus.

-That the fetus has (develops) some rights at some time during pregnancy does not have to mean: the fetus has rights from conception, the fetus is a full human person from conception, life begins at conception, the fetus gets rights at any particular time, the rights of the fetus overcome the rights of the woman from conception or at any particular time, or the rights of the fetus are based on its being alive or being a person. It only means that the fetus gets rights at some time during pregnancy.

-That the rights of the fetus eventually overcome the rights of the woman at some time during pregnancy does not have to mean: the fetus has those strong rights from conception, is a full human person from conception, life begins at conception, the strong rights of the fetus are based on its being alive or being a person, or the strong rights of the fetus come at the same time the fetus gets any rights at all. It only means that at some time during pregnancy the rights of the fetus prevail over the rights of the woman.

-In the future, the court might use a criterion other than viability, or might use an index other than the age of the fetus. The court might decide that the rights of the fetus prevail when the fetus shows signs of central nervous system development. The court might decide that occurs at the age of five months (I don't know when it occurs) or might decide that occurs when a fetus can be trained to distinguish between specific sounds.

-In the future, on one hand, the court might think the rights of the fetus begin at conception, and the rights of the fetus prevail over the rights of the mother from then. On the other hand, the court might decide the fetus does not have rights at all until it is born naturally at full term regardless of whether it is alive or a

person. The court might decide the fetus has rights from conception but the rights of the fetus do not prevail over the rights of the mother until the fetus is born naturally at full term.

-In the future, the court might look at rights in a different way, or might not consider the matter in terms of rights at all but on a different basis such as natural types.

-Not to think primarily in terms of persons and rights likely goes against the grain of American legal history and American political culture.

-In the opinion of a layperson (me), the thinking of the court on these issues is quite good.

Logical Points.

For clarity, here is a restatement. There are six distinct considerations:

(1) When the fetus is alive.

(2) When the fetus is a person (to be a person, normally you have to be alive).

(3) When the fetus begins to have rights (to have rights, normally you have to be a living person).

(4) When the rights of the fetus prevail over the rights of the woman.

(5) Some criterion of when the rights of the fetus prevail, such as viability outside the woman.

(6) An index of the criterion. Usually measurable indexes are easiest to use, such as a fetus is viable at six months of age.

It might seem as if the second step about personhood is not necessary but I think in the long run it is necessary.

The question is of greater rights, not of rights alone, personhood, or life. Life and personhood matter only as they might confer right on the fetus, and might confer on the fetus rights greater than the rights of the woman. Even if the court grants that the fetus is alive from conception, that view does not mean the fetus is a person, has rights, or that any rights of the fetus overcome the rights of the woman at any particular time. Even if the court grants that the fetus is a person, from conception, that view does not mean the fetus has rights or that any rights of the fetus overcome the rights of the woman at any particular time. Even if the court grants that the fetus is alive, is a person, and has some rights, from conception, that view does not mean the rights of the fetus overcome the rights of the woman at any particular time.

It is not clear that any state legislature, or even Congress, has the power to declare the fetus is alive, is a person, has rights, and that the rights of the fetus overcome the rights of the woman, at a particular time. For the Supreme Court to declare that any legislature, including Congress, may decide these issues, the court also has to declare that the right of legislatures overcomes the right to privacy as implied in the Constitution, not only the right to privacy and control of her body of a woman-with-a-fetus but the right of

all persons to various kinds of privacy. If a group wishes definitely to ban abortion, it might need a Constitutional amendment that declares the fetus is alive at conception, a person then, has rights then, and the rights of the fetus overcome the rights of the mother then. The amendment must be clear about what it does to general rights to privacy, as, for example, rights to privacy that are important in freedom of religion. If the Supreme Court declares that legislatures do have the power to decide these issues, then each legislature will have to work it out individually. Congress will have to decide what it wants to control and what it wants to allow to state legislatures.

To my mind, despite the Constitution, the Supreme Court and Congress have not been clear on what is a person or not a person, what kinds of persons there are, what rights any kind of person has simply by being that kind of person, why a person has those rights, when a person has those rights, and why the particular rights of one person overcome the rights of another person. In the near future, these questions are important because business corporations technically are a kind of person with some rights; but we do not want them to have the full rights of flesh-and-blood human beings. We do not want them to have free speech, marry, have children, give bequests at death, or give to campaigns. In the more distant future, we will have to work out these issues fully because of biotechnology and artificial intelligence. I do not bring up the parallel question of what responsibilities are entailed by what rights.

“Right to Life”.

The anti-abortion movement sometimes calls itself “Right to Life”. In so doing, it recognizes that the issue depends legally on rights; but it wants to define rights so as to bolster a total ban on abortion. It defines the fetus as a full human person from conception; says the fetus’s status as a full human person gives the fetus full rights; one of the rights is a “right to life” (like self-defense); and the right to life of the fetus always outweighs the rights of the woman from the time of conception. In effect, the “Right to Life” movement defines fetal rights so as to negate any woman’s rights, and so negate any possibility of abortion. This is another way to re-assert, in terms of rights, ideas that are not about rights at all but about God-given natural types; see below. The “right to life” movement is not really about rights but about using the idea of rights to gain legally what it wants for other reasons. This tactic is common in politics and law, and so should not be held strongly against the “right to life” movement. The “right to choose” movement is not too much different. You should consider all arguments by all sides, and then decide according to what you consider the important principles.

Natural God-Given Types.

To the extent that I understand the position of the Roman Catholic (RC) Church, I use its position to stand for a reasoned coherent alternative view of the topic. Whether the RC Church really can represent the anti-abortion (pro-life) view in general, I cannot say. I take the points below from my reading of RC Church doctrine (principally Thomism), RC Church catechism, and pamphlets on abortion. I do not comment on whether this point of view is true or not. It is widely shared. I apologize if I am not accurate.

-There are natural types. Natural types reflect God’s will. We must respect natural types as an expression of God’s will. We have some obligation to defend natural types. We cannot go against natural types without good reasons. We cannot always argue about natural types in terms of competing

rights. (The fact of natural types does not necessarily argue against evolution by natural selection. The RC Church now apparently accepts Darwinian evolution.)

-These are very important natural types: life, innocence, babies and children, parent-child relations, and the mother-child relation. These types can overlap. When they do, they are even more important. For example, babies are innocent life.

-These natural types are sacred. Especially life is sacred. It has a high value. In some cases, it has a higher value than freedom or privacy. In some cases, any of these natural types might have a value higher than freedom or privacy. I am not sure if "higher value" can translate directly into "greater right". For example, I am not sure if life has a greater priority of rights than the right to privacy in the Confessional.

-People have an obligation to protect life, innocence, innocent life, babies, mothers, fathers, and the parent-child bond. It is not clear if this obligation extends to all instances of these natural kinds such as to animals and to nature as a whole. It is not clear what priority this obligation has, as for example more priority than a right to privacy in the Confessional.

-Parents have a strong natural obligation to defend their children. For a parent not to defend a child is a breach of several natural types and of God's will. For a parent to commit abortion is a breach of several natural types and of God's will.

-Even people that are not themselves the parents of a child have an obligation to defend babies and to defend the parent-child bond.

-Again, it is not clear if the obligation to defend babies and the parent-child bond as natural types extends to all kinds of innocent life such as to animals and to nature as a whole. It is not clear what priority this obligation has, as for example more priority than a right to privacy such as in the Confessional.

-The RC Church does not want the state, any private group, or science, to decide these issues. It does not want the state to decide what natural types are, when life begins, when life becomes human, when killing is murder, what natural types prevail over others, when natural types prevail or rights prevail, whose rights prevail in a case of life versus life, or how rights work in cases of natural types. These are moral issues, which the RC Church should decide.

-Information Interlude: Early Christians avoided infanticide. Early Christians condemned abortion but it is not clear what they did to people that got abortions. Around the time of Jesus, infanticide was more common than abortion; abortion was not very common and so not really much of an issue; see below. I think Early Christians tolerated abortion sometimes but very likely they did not allow it often. It is very unlikely Early Christians used ideas about when life begins, natural types, or whose rights prevail when, to decide about infanticide and abortion. People then did not worry about when life begins, children did not have rights unless they had been declared an early heir of a propertied man, and natural types got broken all the time. Many non-Christians thought Christians violated natural types, as for example when Christians ate human flesh and drank human blood in the Eucharist. Early Christians did not need analysis based on legal-theological-philosophical ideas to condemn infanticide and to frown on abortion.

In any case, the RC Church believes its position is the most consistent with the total tradition of Christianity. I am not sure if it is the most consistent but it is well in line with the historical tradition.

-Return to RC Church position: Fetal life begins at conception. A pregnant woman is a mother from conception. A pregnant woman, together with her child, form a natural type from the time of conception. The obligations to defend life, innocence, children, and the parent-child bond begin at conception. The natural type of a mother-and-her-child-from-conception can be used as the basis for moral argument; it can trump other natural types and trump other arguments based on other grounds such as rights.

-Abortion is not primarily a question of rights. It is a question of preserving natural types, in particular life, innocence, babies, and the parent-child bond. If the question must be seen in terms of rights, in any conflict of rights between the mother and the fetus, the rights of the fetus prevail.

-Although killing might be right in some circumstances, murder is always wrong, and the killing of the fetus is necessarily murder.

-Abortion is wrong even with incest, rape, or genetic defect. There might be some allowance for these cases now, the details of which I do not know.

-It is not enough to let the state enact one set of laws while members of the RC Church live up to a stricter set of Church laws. It is not enough that the state allows abortion while members of the RC Church do not practice abortion. Because innocent life and the parent-child bond are at stake, the RC Church and its members must act to help, and must act through the state to help.

-The RC Church, and members of the RC Church, should push the state, and push its particular officials, to enact laws in accord with the RC Church's moral position on important issues. The RC Church and its members should make the state the instrument of RC Church morality on important issues. Abortion is an issue for which the RC Church and its members should make the state the instrument of RC Church morality. The RC Church and its members should urge laws to protect life, innocence, children born or unborn, and the parent-child bond; laws against abortion are a way to protect all these natural types.

Comments.

Other churches have similar well-thought-out positions which include using the state as a tool of their morality. Other anti-abortion activists do not always have a well-thought-out position. Pro-abortion (pro-choice) advocates also use the state as the tool of their morality.

The natural types described above are related to, but are not exactly the same as, the natural types that were mentioned in Part Five of this book, on evolution. How they are similar and different is too much to go into. I think the natural types listed above carry more "cultural" baggage than the natural types from Part Five. I think the natural types here are more "made up" by particular cultures and subgroups within cultures than the natural types of Part Five. You can see why social scientists might be wary of natural types.

The RC Church argument is framed in terms of “when does life begin” and “life begins at conception” but the dispute goes beyond that. It is about natural types regardless of when they begin. The idea that life begins at conception is a way to invoke relevant natural types.

Natural types in general, and the specific natural types of life, innocence, child, mother, and the parent-child bond, are important in Christian theology beyond this particular controversy. For example, the scandal over child abuse in churches is so sharp largely because it is about the violation of the same natural types as in the abortion controversy and it is about the violation of natural types by constructed types such as priests. The natural type of innocence is important in Western culture and especially in American pop culture. Groups other than anti-abortion groups use natural types, including secular humanists. The environmental movement ultimately depends on the idea of natural types. Natural types do not provide foolproof grounds for conservative arguments; natural types can work both for and against Conservative arguments. I do not know of a good simple book on the relation of natural types and legal rights.

Just as we want to think nature and morality coincide even though they do not, we want to think natural types are all completely compatible and there could be no conflicts between natural types that could not be resolved gracefully. Mothers and children always get along. Anything else would be like finding a contradiction in God’s will. In fact, of course natural types do not always get along. People that use natural types in arguments want to think they know all the natural types and so they know God’s will. Nobody could bring in a natural type that they did not know about. There has to be complete agreement on natural types or else it is again like a contradiction in God’s will. In fact, people do not agree on natural types and there might not be one perfect complete set of natural types. Almost everybody can agree that a human person is a natural type but what about a bishop or a priest? What about maiden aunts or homosexuals? When natural types do not agree, or when people are not sure about the natural types, people have to make decisions on another basis. That is when we invoke courts and rights. I do not know the implications for God’s will.

Not the RC Church or any other organization operates fully in accord with natural types and only natural types. Some Christian doctrines violate natural types and are important just because they violate natural types, such as the Resurrection, the Eucharist, and even Baptism. Current evolutionary theory about religion predicts this situation. What this situation says about God’s will, I do not know either.

Not only are mothers and children natural types, but so also is the mother-with-children-already-who-cannot-afford-more-children a natural type. So also is the woman-without-a-child-but-is-pregnant-and-cannot-take-care-of-this-child-without-endangering-her-future-family a natural type.

They are not just women in dilemmas, they are natural types. Now, we have to figure out which natural types prevail, and why. Invoking natural types does not fully solve the problem of abortion.

In the courts, if the argument about abortion were framed in terms of “when does life begin” or “life begins at conception”, it could not be framed primarily in terms of rights but would have to be framed primarily in terms of natural types. I think a shift away from rights to natural types would be a major shift in American legal culture and political culture. The shift would have implications far outside abortion.

Non-Modern Settings.

People did not have abortion as we know it now until recently, not until the 1900s. Abortion was not the main method of dealing with an unwanted baby. The main method was to kill the baby after it was born or to neglect it until it died. The main reason for dealing with an unwanted baby through most of human history has been the need to take care of yourself, your other present children, and future children. The desire to do what you want, have casual sex, and have fun, has never been the main reason for abortion; it is not the main reason now despite Right Wing misinformation. So both abortion practice and anti-abortion fervor of the modern kinds are new. It helps to look at what people faced before.

Until recently, people did not have the chemical or surgical means to abort a fetus safely. The fetus could be killed while in the uterus by techniques like binding the stomach or sticking needles up the vagina; but only at risk to the mother. People had some drugs that supposedly caused abortion but most of the drugs were useless, about as effective as most natural remedies now. Any drugs that did work were also dangerous. Women lost their lives trying to get rid of an unwanted fetus.

When I first started graduate school, Roe v. Wade was only a few years old, and the courts were still working out where to draw the line. The discussion was in terms of trimesters of a pregnancy, in particular if the line should fall between the second and third trimesters. A professor liked to get people to think by saying, "Why not abortion in the fourth trimester or the fifth trimester?" In other words: why not infanticide? (I thank Steve Fjellman for pointing this out to me.) That might sound crazy, but is not. Until recently, most "abortion" was by infanticide. Because it was too dangerous to the mother to try abortion while the child was still in her, parents waited until a child was born, and then killed it directly by strangulation, smothering, or drowning, or killed it indirectly by exposure. Sometimes parents killed it indirectly by neglecting it until it died of starvation or disease. When one or both parents died, the surviving kin of children as old as ten years killed the children or allowed them to die. Even now, a lot of de facto abortion is by indirect infanticide, especially in poor countries, or in poor areas of rich countries. Abortion has always been around, but it was usually abortion of fetuses that are already born (that is, children, by infanticide) rather than of fetuses still in the womb.

If evolution programmed us to want families, then how could it allow a parent to kill her-his child? Evolution did not program us to seek every child as it comes along, or to seek the most children in the short run. Evolution programmed us to seek maximum reproductive success over the long run. Not every child now is a real increase in long-term reproductive success. Another child now can endanger itself, children that we already have, and children that we will have. A mother with a two-year old and a one-year-old already simply cannot feed another baby. If she tries, likely all three will die. Better to let the new baby die than to kill all three. Even if a woman does not have children already, she can see that having a child now will endanger her ability to have the right number of children, at the right times, in the right circumstances, in the future. If she has to take care of a child now, as a young inexperienced woman, she will not be able to learn how to hunt and gather properly, learn the right skills such as sewing, and make the right connections with other women and other families that she and her children will need in the future. Women need a man not just to get pregnant but need the support of a man to reproduce maximally over the long run. They need his protection for the children that he will claim as his own. Women use sex, and the promise of reproduction, to forge bonds with a man so that the man will

help with their family together, especially protect her children. If a woman already has a child by another man, then potential future men will not be as interested in her and not nearly as likely to help her and their future children together. She is much better off getting rid of this child and so offering men a clean platform on which together they can build their own new family. This assessment might not sound sweet but it is realistic. Women have needed to plan and arrange for a lot longer than since Roe v. Wade. One unwanted child can destroy all their planning and the lives of future children. Sometimes it is better to get rid of a short-term modest gain in favor of long-term greater success.

Now we see why the mother-with-her-viable-children-now-and-in-the-future, and the mother-without-children-now-but-potentially-with-her-viable-children-in-the-future are both natural types on which we can base moral reasoning. They are natural types that can trump other natural types such as mother-with-her-child-(fetus)-now, especially if mother-with-her-child-(fetus)-now risks other current children and future children. In the past, the natural types of the potential-mother-who-did-not-want-this-child have trumped other natural types, such as the father's family, and so should trump some other natural types now. Thus abortion is natural and people could feel moral enough about it. Thinking in terms of natural types is a two-edged sword. It does not work only for anti-abortion activists. It can help pro-choice activists. Thinking in terms of natural types works for anti-abortion activists now only because of how Americans mistakenly see natural types from the safety of our urban affluence.

More facts strengthen the argument. Much as we do not like to admit it, we value people differently according to age. People die naturally at all ages. Generally, younger people die more often (have a higher death rate) than older people until about age forty. Fetuses die more often than babies; babies die more often than toddlers; toddlers die more often than children; and children die more often than adults. Weak people die early. Strong people live longer. Just by living longer you show that you are probably stronger than the average younger person. Until at least the teen years, the longer a person has lived, the more likely the person will live another year. In particular, a child of five is more valuable than a baby of one month and is more likely to live another year. If you can only support one of them, you are better off letting the baby die so as to maintain the child. Some cultures do not think that a child is really a full human until it can talk fairly well, which means until it is about five years old. Until then, its death is not a great loss. Often a young child does not get a full funeral. Even now in America, small children do not get a full adult funeral. Maybe in our affluent age we can afford to say we value all life equally, that we would like to see a baby in the same terms as a proven child; but really we do not.

I have never read a case where a sane parent enjoyed killing his-her own child, although I have read cases where a stepparent did or a crazy parent might have. Parents abort their babies or kill their children because they have to for the sake of their other children now or their other children to be. Parents abort their babies or kill their children because they have to. Usually they hate it but they get over it.

When pre-modern women had to kill a baby, other members of the group usually did not interfere. Even when the baby was related to other members of the group, the mother had final say because she had to look after the child and she had to consider her other children, real now or to come. The mother had to decide. Other people did not interfere because they knew they, or their own daughters, someday might be in the same fix and they did not want other people to interfere then. The modern situation is odd and unnatural, in which people unrelated to a woman, not in the immediate group of the woman, and who do

not benefit or lose from her decision, stand hard on an abstract moral principle so as to tell the woman what to do with her own child and reproduction.

In societies that came later, among some agricultural societies, parents could sell their children, even when parents knew the life into which they were sold would be bad and even when the child might die as a result. Sometimes older children had the right to sell younger children. Parents in the Bible sold their children. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. The idea is the same as abortion even when one child is already alive: one child can be sacrificed for the welfare of the parent or the welfare of other children, even against the will of the child. Then, sacrificing one child for the welfare of several others is natural and moral.

Modern Setting.

Modern women inherited the capacity to plan their reproduction just as did their ancestors, which capacity includes being able to regretfully get rid of an unwanted child if they have to. Modern women also have new burdens of modern life: waiting a long time in school before starting a family, having little education in sex and relationships before starting a family, having to work for a living outside the home and having to work with strangers, and meeting many strange men that are hard to evaluate for their potential as husbands and fathers. Fortunately, modern women have the advantages of birth control and of the opportunity to abort a child as a fetus rather than wait until it is born to expose it.

Few modern women use abortion as a primary form of contraception, few women like getting an abortion, and few are traumatized by it either. Women feel relieved but they do not feel happy. A few women feel guilty for a time but most feel relief. Women tend to feel guilty for a long time only if they have more than one abortion as the result of bad planning. Women know there is something wrong with aborting a fetus, and feel bad about it; but they also know there is something more wrong with having a baby when not ready, living in poverty and regret, disabling their lives, the life of the baby, and the lives of any future children too. Abortion is something they have to do, do it, get it over with, and move on, hopefully to better families.

Anti-abortion advocates differ from our ancestors because modern life allows them the luxury to differ. Modern wealth allows them to get morally huffy about other people, when our ancestors had to keep a necessary silence. Modern life allows them to use state institutions to impose their morality and their self-interest on other people, when our ancestors had to act directly or, more often, not act at all.

Modern Liberal Solution.

In this situation, the best thing to do, the best compromise of nature and morality, the resolution most in line with evolved human nature, the resolution that includes natural types and morality, seems to be what modern women have worked (back) to: Abortion is a private affair. Do not be a slut. Have sex when appropriate and mostly only then. Sometimes have sex for fun but always remember there might be consequences. Use sex as one way to learn about relations and as one way to attract men and hold men. Use birth control from the time you first start having sex. Do not have unprotected sex. Do not commit infanticide either directly or by neglect. Know that having a child now could hurt present children or future children, and could end your ability to plan your life and your future family life. If you get

pregnant, think about having the baby and giving it up for adoption, as in the movie “Juno”. Accept that some fetuses die anyway but not all fetuses die anyway. If having a baby and giving it up for adoption seem wrong while abortion seems tolerable, then get the abortion. Do not use abortion as a regular method of birth control. Do not get abortions often. Stay out of the lives of other people who have to make similar hard decisions.

Anti-Abortion.

Why do anti-abortion activists insist their morality and their natural types must trump other ideas even when they make allowance in cases such as murder and robbery? I do not take on the whole of the “culture wars” here. I repeat a bit from above. I do not mean to mock. Take the arguments seriously. You share much of the logic but might apply it differently.

Reason 1: Morality, and Using the State to Support Morality.

1A: The Principle of LIFE. Anti-abortion people call themselves “pro-life” for good reasons. The preservation of life is good in itself. Anything that hurts life usually is intrinsically bad. Anything that supports life usually is intrinsically good. Pro-lifers support fetuses for the same reason environmentalists save whales, baby seals, owls, fish, and bugs; for the same reason advocates of the poor support the poor; why many people want true national health care; and why some people are vegetarians. I think pro-life activists often love pets. If you support any kind of life, then you have to have some sympathy for supporting fetuses. Why should we support one kind of life but not another, or support one kind of life but kill another?

Of course, if anti-abortion activists support fetuses then they also should support all kinds of life in all kinds of other causes. Usually they do not. I have never taken a survey, but I guess that anti-abortion activists are not environmentalists and they doubt global climate change. Then we need to know why human life is better than other kinds of life. We need to know why human comfort is more important than devastating all of nature. We need to know why fetuses are more important than the poor, sick, older children, or children not yet even conceived. We need to know why, if you will expend energy for the support of one kind of human life, you do not spend energy for the support of all life, human and non-human. At the same time, if environmentalists support whales and seals, then they have to be able to tell us why they are not against abortion, and why non-human life might have more priority than human life. If the answer in any case is “because I have only so much time and energy, and I choose to use it this way” then activists have to understand that their cause might not be absolute, and might not be absolutely holy and compelling for all people.

1B: Defending the Helpless and Innocent. Fetuses are not just alive, they are helpless and innocent. When child molesters go to prison, the other inmates treat them like crap, and for good reasons. An obvious comparison is to slavery. Slaves needed somebody to help them. If any modern American is against racism or against slavery, then he-she must explain why she-he is not also against abortion. If you would have fought slavery, or did fight racism, then you should also fight abortion. See below.

1C: Parenthood and Natural Relations. The relation between parents and children, especially between a mother and her children, is a natural type. For a mother to kill her children, does not just deny a

natural relation, it turns around and subverts what should be one of the most basic and purest natural relations. If this natural relation can be perverted, any natural relation can be perverted, nothing is secure, and no relations are secure. There is no moral universe and no stability. This natural type must be defended to defend all natural types.

1D: The Family as the Basic Unit of Society and Human Life. The family is not really the basic unit of human social life but the family is important and many people think that it is the basic unit. It is important enough to play a role in the abortion controversy. An abortion seems like a strike at the heart of the family. As a strike at the heart of the family, it is a strike at the heart of society. If people will undermine the family then they will undermine society. To preserve society, we have to preserve the family. We cannot preserve the family and society if we allow mothers to kill their own unborn children.

1E: Slippery Slope. If we allow exceptions for any one kind of life or natural relation, then we are likely to fall down the slippery slope where we selectively defend particular kinds of life for our own reasons. We will selectively kill life for our own reasons. If we do not defend all fetuses, all the time, everywhere, then we will kill old people because they are inconvenient or because we want their wealth. We will practice infanticide, kill children, sell children, use children as slaves, use children as prostitutes, and kill our annoying spouses. We can only defend any life if we defend all life all the time.

1F: Using the State. With a problem as large as abortion, the only enforcer is the state. Abortion is a large genuine moral question and a true question of common decency. The state is the proper agent for any true large question of morality and common decency. We cannot leave it up to individual conscience or the free market. The state must act as advocate of the innocent and the helpless, just as with Civil Rights and with laws that protect against racism, sexism, and gay bashing.

Reason 2: Using Morality as a Tool

The anti-abortion ideal is easier to crusade for if you are a middle class person, with a secure job, with benefits, than if you are a poor person with a crappy job, and you live in an extended family, expanded family, or other non-stereotypical family. In my experience, most people who strongly oppose abortion are middle class or nearly middle class whether Black, White, or any ethnicity. They fear the uncertain working class beneath them and the poor. They fear the unemployed and poorly employed. By enforcing anti-abortion, they de-stabilize the poor and make sure the poor cannot compete against them for jobs. A strong anti-abortion ideology that uses the state for enforcement also uses morality as a tool in class competition.

All competition is comparative. Anti-abortion laws differentially hurt the poor and anti-abortion stigma differentially hurts the poor. Poor people especially need to manage their reproduction. Poor people are especially vulnerable to disruptions in reproductive strategy. An unwanted child is an inconvenience to a middle class family such as in the movie "Juno" or for the Palins but it can devastate a modest working class family. It can take away all chances for all children to go to college. Even when abortion is illegal, a middle class family usually finds a way to get one. Poor families cannot. Laws are not enforced as strictly against middle class people as against poor people and punishment is harsher on the poor for the same crime. Judges are likely to be sympathetic toward a middle class woman but

likely to condemn a poor woman who has an abortion. Neighbors are likely to sympathize with a middle class woman or her daughter but likely to condemn a poor girl as promiscuous.

My assessment only says that poor people should not be differentially denied abortion. My assessment does not imply that poor people have a right to badly manage their reproduction, a right to support from the state for early pregnancy, or a right to abuse state support programs. Rights come with duties. If poor people want respect, they have to earn it by having babies only when they can fully support them for a long time.

Reason 3: Feeling Self-Righteous and Worthwhile

Crusading for innocent, helpless LIFE makes people feel justified and saved. It makes people feel better about themselves, feel righteous, gives them a reason to live, ties them to something bigger than themselves, makes them feel as if they will leave a legacy, allows them to focus their energy on one topic, allows them to avoid thinking about the bigger picture, and lets them find other people like themselves to reinforce the whole package. It makes them vulnerable to bad leaders. People who crusade in this way care more about themselves than they do about people in general or even about their specific cause. They don't care who they hurt as long as they feel good. They do not see other people as people. It is easy to get behind the crusade against abortion if you don't want to think too much. Crusading for other principles such as CHOICE, FREEDOM, or NATURE can have the same effect. Left-wing environmentalists crusade for LIFE just as do anti-abortionists but do so in a different arena. Rarely have I met anti-abortion activists that learn very much about real biology, real ecology, and real nature, about the moral issues, about how people have dealt with unwanted pregnancy in other times and places, or about the role of the state. They learn only enough to see the issue their way, and to see they can use it to justify themselves. If you want to fight against abortion, think it out first. If you decide to fight, then do it, but be ready to explain. Life, innocence, children, parents, women, mothers, families, the poor, and people of all socio-economic classes and all races all deserve better than what the culture wars and the anti-abortion movement have given them so far.

Role of the State.

I think the state is on the right track in the wake of Roe v. Wade, and should continue much as it has since then.

-I see no compelling reasons having to do with maintaining order so that the state needs to make abortion completely illegal. There is no evidence that people commit infanticide more often if abortion is illegal, or that people abuse children in other ways. There is good evidence that strict laws against abortion erode order in that strict laws require women to break the law and that they de-stabilize the poor.

-I see no compelling reason that the state needs to strictly enforce anti-abortion as a moral issue. Allowing abortion does not break down general morality, and does not break down the morality needed for general order. Even if we all agree that abortion is morally suspect, it is not the kind of moral issue that the state has to do something about. It is more like gambling or drinking than robbery or murder. Abortion is a bit like slavery but the two issues differ for reasons summarized below. To legally enforce morality in this issue tempts the state to do so on other issues as well, and so should be avoided.

-The state does have to regulate abortion. The state has to recognize the sides of the mother, present children, future children, present fetus, and present unborn child when the fetus reaches the status of an unborn child. The state has to serve as the arbiter in drawing the line between sides.

-The state needs to force the burden of proof on any group that wishes to change the current balance, especially any group that wishes the rights of the fetus to dominate the rights of the mother from conception, or the rights of the mother to dominate the rights of the fetus at all times.

-Local units of the central state, such as American states, counties, cities, towns, and school districts, owe people a clear explanation of this issue.

-Abortion should be allowable under health insurance programs, including any national health insurance. The state should make sure that private insurance programs do not exclude abortion. Some provision can be made for institutions, such as churches, that condemn abortion, but the provisions should be conservative and based on proven long-term commitment.

-Prevention is the best approach by far. The state should help people with birth control. The state should educate people about various kinds of birth control, including abstinence but not limited to abstinence. Birth control should be a part of state health insurance. Children should have access to birth control if they request, even if their parents do not grant permission. The state should do nothing to prohibit knowledge of birth control and should do nothing to inhibit agencies that help people to get birth control.

-We should keep the issue of abortion framed in terms of rights and persons, and should strive for more clarity about rights and persons. A parallel issue shows why. I think the rights of the woman in *Roe v. Wade* are based on the right to privacy. The right to privacy is widely known and accepted in America. The right of executive privilege is the right of the executive branch (President) to maintain some secrecy from the other branches so as to run smoothly. Executive privilege is well established in law. The Constitution does not explicitly guarantee either the right to privacy or executive privilege. I think the right to privacy is not in the Constitution because the founders of the United States took the right to privacy completely for granted as a powerful right equal to any rights explicitly cited. They did not need to write it in. I think executive privilege is not in the Constitution mostly because the founders did not think the executive branch had a dire need for secrecy and autonomy. Yet Conservative Right Wingers stress executive privilege while diminishing the right to privacy. They recognize the rights of a social unit while overlooking the rights of real flesh-and-blood human persons. That path leads to a police state. The right to privacy is far more important than executive privilege. Rightists do not explain why executive privilege is more important to them than a right to privacy or why the right to executive privilege is more implied in the Constitution than the right to privacy. We need to protect the right to privacy. To do so, we need to think in terms of persons and rights even when they are not explicit in the Constitution. We need to think in terms that block powerful groups from seizing more power. Framing abortion entirely in terms of a black-and-white right to life by a fetus, as a natural type, that trumps the right to privacy, and trumps other claims about rights and persons, undercuts all reasonable discussion about rights and persons, and it erodes arguments about the right to privacy. Eventually not thinking in terms of persons and rights will support not life but tyranny and anti-life.

What Anti-Abortion (Pro-Life) Advocates Can Do to Live With This.

- Understand that abortion is not an attack on morality, the family, or the state. Allowing abortion will not necessarily undermine morality. Historical evidence says that it does not.
- Understand that morality is not the same as the stereotypical suburban nuclear family.
- Understand that the stereotypical family is not the basic unit of human social life or the state, and that the state will not stand or fall because abortion supposedly undermines the family.
- Accept that the state is not the primary and best agent of all your moral convictions. Understand the limited role of the state as the supporter only of order and of generally recognized common decency.
- Understand that using the state as the agent of your moral convictions can harm your moral convictions and religious group in the long run.
- Do not support political candidates that stand or fall on this one issue. In particular, do not support candidates who promise to make the state the agent of your morality alone.
- Live under the modern secular state much as early Christians did in the Roman Empire. Live a stricter life by your morals. Do not have abortions.
- Provide counseling, guidance, and love to women who need it, without judgment. If a woman is determined to have an abortion and you cannot counsel her, send her to a good place elsewhere.
- If permitted by your faith, provide birth control.
- Search your soul to make sure you are not acting primarily to feel good about yourself, to feel justified, righteous, and saved. Make sure you act primarily because you think anti-abortion activism is the best use of your talent, time, and energy.
- Support the poor. Support other pro-life causes such as environmentalism.
- Adopt children. Foster children. Support charities that support children. Pay for a child to go to camp or to go to school. Make sure your local children have enough to eat, and good shelter. I find it hard to take seriously anti-abortion pro-life activists who have not done several of these other activities, especially adopt a child.
- Keep in mind that technological changes will make abortion as we know it obsolete, perhaps in about as many decades from now as we have already had Roe v. Wade. Prepare yourself for the more important future fights.

-Explain clearly to yourself, and be prepared to explain clearly to others, why you oppose abortion but favor the death penalty, favor guns, allow people to use deadly force in defense of property, glamorize violence, hurt the poor, or hurt nature.

Optional: Abortion and Slavery.

Abortion and slavery are similar issues due to the weakness and (situational) innocence of the victims: fetuses and slaves. We need think how the two issues might differ, why we might want to use the state to abolish slavery but not use the state to abolish abortion. This argument is not about whether slavery is worse than abortion. This argument is not about whether abolishing slavery is more morally compelling than abolishing abortion. This argument is about whether the state should intervene as much with abortion as it did with slavery. The points are about how people see the role of the state in abortion and slavery. Some reasons are not pretty; some are downright ugly. Some reasons apply to related issues such as why we do not allow infanticide even if we allow abortion although I do not elaborate on these extensions. Recall that the American Civil War was not at first about abolishing slavery but about secession, and that abolishing slavery was probably never the biggest reason for the fighting.

-In assessing these issues, it helps to have lived where children are forced into slavery and prostitution, especially surplus children; and it helps to recognize the modern debt industry as a form of de facto slavery. In the light of those cases, it seems obvious that slavery and abortion are not the same, and that the state should fight slavery even if it does not oppose abortion.

-Except for some clandestine sex slavery, slavery is a public visible institution, often on a large scale. Everybody can see when we have it and when we don't have it. It can be eradicated once and for all by state action because it is public and visible. Expenditure on eradicating slavery is limited in scope and in time. In contrast, abortion is a small private act. You can't tell by looking at a woman if she has had an abortion. Evidence clearly shows that the state cannot eradicate abortion. Unlike slavery, if the state makes abortion illegal, the state has to commit continual resources to fight it.

-Slavery does lead to disorder and slavery would have high maintenance costs, especially in a modern technological economy. The state would have to erect and maintain a large judicial and enforcement apparatus to sustain slavery. Abolishing slavery eliminates the cost of creating and sustaining the apparatus.

-Abortion does not lead to disorder and does not have much maintenance cost for the state other than the licensing of medical personnel.

-Slaves were not fetuses. Many were adults. They were already fully and undeniably human and already they fully and undeniably had good chances of survival. Unlike fetuses, there was no obvious reason why slaves could not have fully adult rights.

-To all but racially blind people, slaves were obviously already human persons like us. Fetuses are potentially humans like us but they only somewhat resemble us, even with modern viewing techniques like ultrasound. They are not yet fully human persons.

-It is hard to really put yourself in the place of a fetus so that the principle of “applies equally to everybody” obviously holds. It is much easier to put yourself in the place of a slave, even if the slave is of another race, religion, or gender.

-More urgently than abortion, slavery raises the problems of the “slippery slope” and it calls on us to think about the principle of “applies equally to everybody”. If a Black person can be a slave, then why not a White woman, Asian, Canadian, Mexican, or any other non-White, non-male, non-American person? If a Black man can be a slave, then why not a White man or a White woman? If we do not want to be enslaved, and we do not want our children to be enslaved, then we better not allow anybody else to be enslaved. If we do allow others to be enslaved, then we tacitly give permission that we might be enslaved under different conditions. To destroy a fetus does not mean that we open ourselves up for destruction. To allow abortion is not to give permission that we might be murdered under different conditions.

-Even if we are not Black and so subject to possible immediate slavery, what if we are in a group that might become slaves by extension such as Southern Europeans, Eastern Europeans, Indians, Native Americans, or Asians? More than abortion, slavery leads us to see that it might happen to us, and causes us to think about “applies equally to everybody”. Because we are old enough to think about abortion, automatically we are old enough not to be aborted, and so, with abortion, but unlike with slavery, we are always talking about somebody else. We are never in the group that might be aborted. But we could become slaves if the laws changed or if power changed, and so, with slavery, we could be in the group of slaves, and we have to think about ourselves. We have to think about the full consequences of “applies equally”.

-Because we are never ourselves in the group that might be aborted (adults making the laws are never fetuses), we have to stress our ability for empathy in the case of abortion. Some people can make this leap but many people cannot, and do not feel the need. Because we might be in the group of slaves, and we are adults like them, we do not have to stretch much to feel empathy. Most people can make this leap of empathy. In fact, to maintain slavery, most people have to suppress their natural empathy for the slaves.

-The presence of some slaves leads us to think of any children as possible slaves. Child slaves are often prostitutes. The presence of any slaves leads us to think of selling our own children or of using any children as slaves. Unlike fetuses, parents already have invested quite a bit into children of the age to be sold, and would not want to lose that investment. Parents do not want to allow any slavery because it opens the door to the loss of the investment in their children. Even if people allow abortion, they do not lose nearly as much as if they would lose for a child sold to slavery, and so this argument about lost investment is not as strong against abortion. Even if parents get money for selling their children, they fear that the price did not compensate for the loss of the child. They fear that the institution of selling children poses a threat so large even to unsold children that the threat to everybody overcomes any price for the children actually sold.

-Freed slaves, if properly processed, likely make a good work force of proven ability. As free people, they can be assets to society and to order. Fetuses are not yet an asset, can be a big liability, and might lose any investment (die) before they get old enough to be valuable. As a matter of fact, the

United States did not help its slaves well enough after it freed them, and so missed an opportunity, but that is a tactical error rather than an error in the logic of this point.

-The above reasons are a mixture of practicality and morality. The practical issues can bolster the moral issues so that abolishing slavery can be presented as a compelling moral duty, a moral duty proper to the state.

-You can allow abortion while also opposing slavery. You can allow slavery while also opposing abortion. You can be against both. You can allow both. In any case, you have to give reasons. The reasons have to take some account of the principles given here.

Chapter 6.10 Gay Marriage

This chapter explains what the state should do about marriage, in particular whether the state should recognize gay marriage equally with straight marriage. I think the state should recognize only civil unions for any people, gay or straight. If the state insists on recognizing marriage, then it should recognize gay marriage. This chapter is not about the morality of homosexuality, heterosexuality, or any sexuality, or about the morality of any kind of marriage. Some readers will think I am dodging the issue, so I give a lot of explanation. I do not like the word "gay" but here I go along with public usage. I use the term "gay-ness" to refer to the attitude and to the sexual orientation. I use the terms for men and women. I know of no accepted term like "gay" for transsexuals and trans-gendered people. Current usage sometimes extends "gay" incorrectly (I think) to them. They too should not be restricted by the state, so the argument here applies to them although they are not explicitly mentioned.

Core Points.

If we focus on the attitude of the state, and keep in mind the arguments of previous chapters, the situation is clearer than what we see in the media:

Gay people rarely hurt anybody. Gay people add to the sum total of human happiness when they enjoy themselves together and when they fall in love, just like straight people. There is little point in suppressing an activity that does little harm and sometimes does a lot of good. There is no point in committing the power of the state to controlling activities that do little harm and do some people a lot of good.

There is no strong case that homosexuality is immoral. As with straight sex, I think gay sex is morally neutral in general. I do not believe homosexuality is immoral in general. (Some gay acts might be immoral just as some straight acts are immoral; but that is not at issue here.) It is not up to defenders of gay-ness to prove that it is morally neutral. It is up to people who condemn gay-ness to prove that it is immoral.

Even more, if people who condemn gay-ness assert that it is immoral, it is up to them to prove it is so immoral that the state should get involved. The state allows many kinds of immorality because it is not up to the state to commit its power to controlling all kinds of immorality. The state does not control all kinds of lying. The state should only commit to controlling some kinds of immorality. Even if gay activity is immoral, gay activity is not one of the immoralities with which the state need bother.

God would only collectively punish the United States for being tolerant of homosexuality if homosexuality was immoral. I see no evidence it is. God will not collectively punish the United States for not suppressing gay people. God will not collectively punish the United States for allowing gay people most of the same rights as straight people. It is not up to people who accept gays to prove God will not punish the nation for tolerating gays. It is up to people who think gay-ness is sternly against God's will to prove that God will punish a nation for tolerating it.

Even if people who condemn gay-ness can make a case that homosexuality is immoral, they still have to prove homosexuality is the kind of immorality for which God would punish a nation collectively. God does not punish a nation for all badness; God does not punish a nation for excessive drunkenness. God does not even punish the United States for allowing atheism and other religions, that is, for idolatry, the worst sin in the Tanakh. God does not punish the United States for violating the Sabbath.

Even if homosexuality was the kind of immorality over which God was seriously piqued, the people who condemn gay-ness have to show why a secular state should commit its power to controlling a behavior that annoys God. Even if people who condemn gay-ness could show that God did not like homosexuality, it is not clear what the nation should do.

In summary: Homosexuality can add to overall happiness by allowing the happiness of some people. Homosexuality is not hurtful and not immoral, and God will not punish the United States for allowing gay people to lead a normal life. There is no case for using the power of the state to control gay people, and a good case for the state not being involved at all.

Ideally, the state should have nothing to do with marriage. The state should establish civil unions, especially when children are involved. Gay and straight people both should have equal access to civil unions and be covered equally by the rules of civil unions.

If the state does have to get involved in marriage, and sanctions straight marriage, then the state should sanction gay marriage as well.

Religious people should think of better ways to spend their religious zeal, and to be good decent citizens, than to go after gay people.

In More Depth.

The state should not serve as the instrument of any morality except when the morality is needed to preserve general order, basic morality, and common decency. The state should not serve as the instrument of the morality of any particular religious, ethnic, or gender group. When the state gets involved in one moral dispute, then it gets involved in other disputes, gets too involved, and acts as the partisan for one group. It is better to make the mistake of too little involvement than to make the mistakes of too much. I think a lot of people are morally horrible but I do not want the state to be the instrument of carrying out my moral judgment.

Marriage of any kind is no business of the modern state. The state gains nothing from recognizing marriage in general or any particular kind of marriage. The state should stop recognizing marriage in general or any kind of marriage. Instead, the state should substitute voluntary registration of consenting adults in partner relations, now called "civil unions".

In the past, various states have recognized various marriage patterns because it was in the interests of the state to do so. Jewish, Roman, and European states all recognized their versions of marriage based on their needs. Polygamy has been recognized when useful. The recognition that the present American state gives to marriage is a holdover from the past, molded somewhat to fit present state needs. Just

because states in the past recognized marriage to suit their needs then does not mean recognizing marriage suits needs now, recognizing marriage suits needs better than registering civil unions, or we should recognize marriage even if recognizing it does suit some needs.

The state needs to keep track of who is responsible for children. The state needs to keep track of some personal relations, such as for purposes of inheritance, insurance, liability, pensions, and medical care. A common human relation is coupling, and the state can recognize a coupling relation for the purpose of taking care of children and other needs. Recognizing a coupling relation does not amount to recognizing marriage. Couples are sometimes called “partners”.

People may declare as a partner whoever they wish for whatever reasons they wish. The declaration should not be unilateral or against the will of anybody. Usually it should be mutual. The state can recognize a mutual declaration between consenting adults when consenting adults register with the state.

If people wish to get married, they can go to a religious institution. The institution would decide who was eligible or not eligible. The policy of the religious institution would be no business of the state. Getting married in a religious institution would not automatically lead the state to consider two people to be a couple (partners). The people would have to register separately with the state.

Ordinarily if a person got married, he-she would register the marital partner as his-her legal partner as well. Even though a person ordinarily registers his-her marital partner as his-her legal partner, the two events are logically and legally separate. One does not entail the other.

A person could marry one person but recognize another as his-her partner. That would be rather odd, probably callous, and maybe immoral, but it would not be the business of the state. The state would be concerned only with the legal registration.

Two registered people would have legal obligations to each other, such as for support. I do not know if the legal obligations would be symmetrical but probably so. Two married people that were not also registered would not have any legal obligations. Anybody that got married but did not also register would accept a certain risk.

The state should recognize partner registration (civil unions) in foreign countries and should recognize marriages in foreign countries as equivalent to partner registration here, especially if foreign countries do not have partner registration.

If we had universal health care and universal retirement, a person would not have to get married to obtain support, and getting married would not necessarily confer any better support than not being married. A person would not have to register in a union to obtain support, and registering in a union would not necessarily confer any better support than being registered. Universal health care and retirement would make registration a much clearer and more egalitarian relation than current marriage. People would register, and stay registered, because they wanted to, not because they had to. Universal health care and retirement would lessen a lot of other social problems.

Biblical Point of View.

Traditional Jewish culture, and original Christian culture, clearly disliked male homosexuality, especially male transvestite homosexuals. It is not clear what Jewish culture felt about male transvestites who were not homosexual – the most common case of “cross dressing”. I suspect Jewish culture would have disliked but not condemned. We cannot avoid accepting that Jewish culture disliked male homosexuality, although we can find voices of tolerance in the Bible amid the general disapproval. It is not clear what traditional Jewish culture and early Christian culture thought of female homosexuals and transvestites, but likely they disapproved. The Bible appears more concerned with regulating particular acts than with sexual orientation apart from acts. Contrary to popular opinion, Biblical texts on gay-ness are sparse, are not conclusively against it, and are not harsh in the recommended punishment except for one text that recommends death for gay men who have sex wherein at least one partner acts like a woman.

The Bible (Tanakh) called for death for many “crimes” that we let slide nowadays, such as neglecting burnt offerings, improper burnt offerings, disrespecting parents, working on the Sabbath, collecting interest, and adultery by women. We select acts from the Tanakh that we want to abhor. We pick the acts we abhor to use as tools in disputes with other groups and as tools to get the state to be our agent of power. The Bible did not single out gay behavior as one of the acts that we have to worry much about now. Likely Jewish culture did not worry about the problem nearly as much as do modern Christian anti-gay activists. Many Christians, Jews, and Muslims work on the Sabbath, make employees work, or work at a firm that is open on the Sabbath even if they do not work on the Sabbath themselves. Many Christians, Jews, and Muslims still collect interest not only from other religious groups but from their own people. Many of them work for banks that collect interest without regard to religious group. The Tanakh condemns breaking the Sabbath and collecting interest far more harshly than it does homosexuality. If we were consistent with all Biblical texts, then many upright standard Christians, Jews, and Muslims, who oppose homosexuality, should be stoned to death right now in front of their own congregations. We need a theory of what texts to be strict about and what texts to let slide that is not based on self-interest.

Jesus' view, the view of original Christians, and the view of traditional Jewish culture, were not necessarily all the same. We cannot know for sure what Jesus thought of gay people. Likely, he would not have approved of some acts such as when one man behaved like a woman but he would not have condemned harshly either. I do not know if he would allow acts in which people did not behave like the other gender. Remember, Jesus was celibate. Jesus thought the world would soon change drastically, and people would not have the usual marital and sexual relations. Many Christians became celibate while waiting the imminent arrival of the Kingdom. Some Christians became celibate because they disapproved of sex in general, contrary to Jewish culture and the apparent views of Jesus. Jesus probably would have told gay people to suppress their actions until the Kingdom of God arrived, and then God would sort it out. He might have allowed them consensual sex if no man acted like a woman. I do not know what Jesus would have told men transvestites who were basically heterosexual. What God would allow, nobody knows. The term “eunuch” could mean a castrated man or a gay man, and Jesus said that eunuchs should be allowed into the Kingdom of God. Until it became apparent that the Kingdom of God would not soon arrive, that decision about eunuchs is what early Christians first told homosexuals, thereby implying that homosexuals could enter the Kingdom. After it was apparent the Kingdom of God was not imminent, statements in early Christian literature against gay men seem to have gotten harsher. I do not know if there is a link, or why. Nobody knows what Jesus would have said if he knew the

Kingdom of God would not arrive soon. I think he would allow consensual non-hurtful sexuality that was done discretely, but my judgment might reflect my liberal bias.

Just as most Christians do not agree with Jesus on violence, we do not have to agree fully with Jesus on homosexuality. If Jesus followed Jewish tradition and looked down on men who participated in sex acts as if they were women, we can disagree with Jesus. If Jesus disallowed any homosexual conduct regardless of what role the actors took, we can disagree with Jesus. If Jesus would have allowed homosexual acts if they men did not act like women, but Jesus was silent otherwise, we can agree with him. We can allow all consensual acts wherein nobody is hurt. We just have to be honest about where we stand, and why. We have to be honest if we think we disagree with Jesus but want to go ahead with our opinion anyway, and why.

It is easy to use the Bible to argue incompatible positions:

(1) All homosexual feelings and all homosexual acts are immoral and so should be totally suppressed. In the strong form of this argument: homosexual people should be killed.

(2) Homosexual acts between men are sometimes permissible as long as neither one acts or dresses as a woman. Perhaps homosexual acts between women are sometimes permissible as long as neither of the women acts like a man, although the texts on women are sparse and unclear.

(3) Regardless of the writings of early Christians, the spirit of Jesus' teachings would have us accept gay people and allow them to be themselves, to be gay, as long as they do not hurt anybody. Since they are not likely to hurt anybody, no special provision for gay people is necessary.

(4) Gay people cannot change how they feel but they should suppress acting gay even if gay acts do not hurt consenting adults. They should not have homosexual sex and should not dress as the opposite gender. I think this is the position of the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and of some other major Christian churches.

None of these four arguments can prevail on the basis of Biblical proof texts. So we have to decide for ourselves using other criteria as well. I do not like making people suppress behavior that does not hurt anybody else, and I do not find gay acts immoral, so I opt for argument (3) even without being sure Jesus would go along. Jesus will not condemn me to hell if I disagree with him on this. There is a lot worse immorality to be worried about.

Accepting gay people freely without requiring them to give up gay-ness might be a stretch of original Christian ideals of acceptance but other changes that we do not think about now were probably bigger stretches in their time, such as Christians in the military or the police, or Christian politicians. To early Christians, the modern Christian warrior might seem more immoral than the gay man worshipping quietly in the back pew, and the modern Christian politician might seem a lot more disruptive to Church order and general social order.

Regardless of how I feel or anybody feels, the real question is what the modern state should do about it. On that, see above.

Current Culture Fighting.

The fuss over gay-ness and over gay marriage is a lot more fuss than the issue deserves. The easy and obvious thing to do is treat gay people as much like anybody else as possible, and most people know that. The fuss is not really about whether gay people are real human beings like everybody else or about whether conservatives are real human beings like everybody else. The fuss is not about abstract issues such as big government or small government, the idea of consenting adults as a moral principle or as a political principle, the role of traditional religious texts in morality, the spirit of Jesus' teachings versus the letter of early Christian writings, or the spirit of Jesus' teachings versus the letter of the Old Testament (Tanakh). The fuss is not about preserving the idealized nuclear family against moral erosion, about greater diversity, or even about any morality. The fuss is really about the "culture wars" and about power; but to explain would require another book. Our society has split into two groups, locked in combat. The groups are not content to let the large majority of decent people carry on with their lives but seem intent on winning. They use issues as ploys to sort people into sides. Even if they care a bit about the issues, the content is less important than using the issues for litmus tests. Both deniers of gay freedom and advocates of gay freedom are too often foot soldiers and cannon fodder in the culture-and-power wars. Problems over gayness are a ruse to let people fight for power behind the scenes. Many of us are disgusted and we do not want to be pawns in somebody else's war. We have a way out if we want it through refusing to let either side use the state as a moral agent. To keep the culture warriors from using the state as a moral agent, we do not let anybody use the state as a moral agent; we minimize the role of the state as anybody's moral agent. Just say "No" to the culture wars. This way out not only settles the issue but also reinforces the proper role of the state in general.

Marriage.

Originally Jews and Christians did not get married in a temple or church, and marriage was not a sacrament. How it became a sacrament that takes place in religious holy setting is a separate story.

Whether a church (or Jewish congregation) will marry gay people is up to the church. If one church will not marry a gay couple, the couple can always join another church. If a gay couple insists on getting married but will not join a church, then too bad for them. The same is true for straight people. On the whole, I would rather see gay people get married, pretty much like straight people. From what I have seen, they love each other about as much as straights, intend to care for each other about as much, and make about the same mistakes; so there is no big reason for most churches not to let them marry.

I do have one reservation, and this reservation will bring down PC ire, so I better preface it with a story. A black panther is actually a variation of a regular leopard. It has spots too but its fur is so dark that you cannot see the spots unless you look closely. A black panther is still a natural kind in itself, but we should see a black panther in terms of the regular leopard, not see a regular leopard in terms of a black panther, and not see a black panther wholly apart from a regular leopard. I have a blood condition that is like a mild version of sickle cell anemia. To understand my blood, it is best to see my blood as a variation of common normal blood. My blood is useful in its own right in some settings but my blood would be a puzzle if we did not know first how normal blood works. Some things in nature really are

prior, and really do form the basic mold for later things, even if later things have an identity in their own right and are interesting in their own right.

In the same way, we can see most gay sex and gay emotional relations as based on straight sex and straight emotional relations. The basic mold is heterosexual sex and emotional relations. The basic pattern is male and female, with natural variants. This does not mean that only heterosexual love and sex is moral and that everything else is necessarily immoral. This does not mean gay sex is deviant, perverted, degenerate, not a thing in itself, or necessarily immoral, any more than a black panther is. It does not mean a gay man is really a woman or a gay woman is really a man. It does not mean there are really only two sexes (genders), and we have to see everything narrowly in terms of our stereotypes of two sexes. It means gay sex and gay relations are naturally recurring variants on an underlying pattern, naturally recurring variants with status, identity, and persistence of their own – natural kinds. Gay sex and gay relations are a natural type that is a variation on another natural type. The real situation is more complex and interesting than any stereotypes, including those gay people have of themselves. Gay people are what they are, like black panthers. Gay people are likely a variant that necessarily recurs in the normal operation of human sexuality. They are like the green eyes or hazel eyes that occur in a mixed population of blue eyes and brown eyes. They are like the pink roses that are normal in maintaining red roses and white roses, and that we could not eliminate. They are like the various shades of skin color that naturally recur in a temperate land where both light and dark skin are useful in their own ways yet neither pure variation can stand on its own. Thus they are as much a part of normal sexuality as stereotypical men and women. As with any naturally recurring variant, they have been part of the normal genetic relations that lead to the recurrence of all variants. They have, or had, uses in our evolutionary past that we now do not see clearly because we are removed from our origins and our minds are clouded by ulterior motives. Kurt Vonnegut understood this idea in his novels when his alien heroes saw half-a-dozen genders among humans, several of which were necessary for reproduction, including gay men.

The problem with recognizing gay marriage is that to do so de-stresses the importance of straight marriage. This is part of the conservative objection. Even though gay people are a recurring variant with an identity of their own, straight people are still the common and underlying pattern – like normal blood is to my blood. Straight people are still the usual way to make children; straight people are still needed as “breeders”, at least so far. In fact, many gay relations are modeled after modern straight liberal middle class liberal “sensitive” stereotypes. Many gay families are modeled after idealized relations of modern middle class liberal “sensitive” straight families, perhaps mostly among lesbians with children; see “The Kids are Alright” and/or follow on TV any gay male celebrity couple that adopts children. Straight sex life and emotional life are difficult. Gay sex life and emotional life are not easy. Gay people have their share of jealousy and confusion. But gay people do not have to work across genders. Straight life is basic and hard. Even when we recognize gay marriage, there ought to be some way to additionally recognize the basic-ness, special role, and difficulty of straight marriage.

Unfortunately, I cannot see any way to give straight marriage a special role without also making everything else third class, including gay marriage. It is better to recognize gay marriage and to risk under-appreciating straight marriage than to doom gay people to third-class citizenship so as to extol idealized straight marriage. I do not have a good solution to this problem.

Many gay people are sensitive to this problem, probably more so than straight people are sensitive to how gay people feel. I doubt most gay people want to impose their will just for the sake of imposing their will (except when they fight as foot soldiers for the power blocs in the culture wars). They want to be treated like full human beings, and are sorry they cannot give straight people due recognition too because they know what it feels like not to get due recognition. If any gay people could have come up with a good solution that gives full due to all kinds of people and marriage, they probably would have done so by now. In the meantime, allow gay marriage.