



September 2011

# A Fourth Use of the Law? The Decalogue in the Workplace

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## Recommended Citation

Gill, David W. (2011) "A Fourth Use of the Law? The Decalogue in the Workplace," *Journal of Religion and Business Ethics*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 4.

Available at: <http://via.library.depaul.edu/jrbe/vol2/iss2/4>

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## A Fourth Use of the Law? The Decalogue in the Workplace

### **Cover Page Footnote**

The author wishes to acknowledge the Society of Christian Ethics, Pacific Section Annual Meeting at Santa Clara University where this paper was presented on 12 February 2010. He also wishes to thank his theological students at Fuller Seminary and Regent College and his MBA students at St. Mary's College of California for their lively and constructive interaction around these ideas. Biblical scholar Dr. Anthony Petrotta and business leader Dr. Albert Erisman served as special conversation partners in this project.

## INTRODUCTION

Any student of church history will become aware of the debates and controversies, especially among the Protestant Reformers, over the contemporary role and relevance of Old Testament Law.<sup>1</sup> For Luther and Calvin there was agreement on what has been called the *pedagogical* or *theological* use of the Law.<sup>2</sup> As St. Paul puts it in the *Letter to the Galatians* (3:23-25, NRSV): “Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came [KJV: “schoolmaster to lead us to Christ”], so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian.” The Decalogue, the heart of the Law, teaches (hence, “pedagogical”) God’s standards to all who will listen. The realization that we cannot adequately measure up to these divine standards is expected to motivate us to turn in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord, and God. The Law has then done its first great work.

Of course, this pedagogical function of the Decalogue has broad application outside the faith community. In fact that is its primary application: announcing God’s religious/ethical standards to all who will hear in the marketplace or anywhere else. But we must note that this “first use” pedagogical task can be accomplished even without the written Law being present. In the opening sections of his *Letter to the Romans* (2:14-15, NRSV), St. Paul says that “When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness.” We will come back to the idea of an “instinctive, written on the heart, conscience-attesting” law later. But note that these standards are not, for Paul anyway, very promising as ethical guidelines since neither the written law nor the unwritten law (on the heart) leads to compliance. The law is stated and may be known, but it is routinely violated and ineffective except in the pedagogical sense that it teaches us our failure and need of another kind of help from God.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I will use “Law” to mean Decalogue, acknowledging that the term is elastic and can also refer (a) to all 613 laws of the Pentateuch, (b) the Pentateuch itself, (c) the Old Testament as a whole. For general introduction see Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), William P. Brown, ed., *The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), Paul Grimley Kuntz, *The Ten Commandments in History* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2004), Ben-Zion Segal, *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990), and David W. Gill, *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin discusses the three uses of the Law in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7.6-16.

The second use of the law, in Reformation thinking at any rate, is the *political* or *social* use. In this case, the Ten Commandments state the basic, fundamental laws of all civilization. Society breaks down unless murder, theft, and libel are prohibited. But those are the easy ones! Laws against profaning the name of Yahweh, creating images of God, or allowing anyone but Yahweh to be worshipped as God imply a certain kind of theocracy. And laws prohibiting the interior attitude of covetousness don't seem to be politically or socially enforceable. Nevertheless, the tradition stands that somehow the Decalogue is good guidance for the legal or constitutional organization of a state.

The possible third use of the law has been the subject of great debate during the Reformation era and since. This third use is the *sanctifying* or *ethical* use in the lives of Christian believers. The usual summary of the argument has it that the Lutheran tradition rejected the third use while Calvin and the Reformed tradition embraced it. In the Lutheran perspective, the law has finished its work when conversion occurs; thereafter the Christian life is one of freedom in Christ, following the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The great difficulty with attributing this view too simply to Martin Luther and his followers is the prominent place of the Decalogue in Luther's *Larger Catechism*, fully one third of which is a very practical, lively, and thoughtful exposition of the practical meaning of the Ten Commandments for Christians.

In any case, Calvin and the Reformed tradition were emphatic in holding up the Decalogue (Law) as essential in the Christian life. Calvin says the third use is actually "the principal use."<sup>3</sup> The biblical roots of this position include (a) the Exodus story itself in which the Law is not given as a condition of being liberated from Egypt but rather clearly as a description of Covenant faithfulness following God's redemptive act; (b) Jesus' statement about "fulfilling" rather than "abolishing the Law," immediately followed by repetition and intensification ("filling full") two of the commands (not "antitheses" but intensifications of the law); and (c) Paul's comment to the Romans (8:3-4) that "God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, *so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*" (my emphasis). Seen in isolation from the Gospel, Paul argues, the Law is a thankless and severe burden. But after conversion, walking with the Spirit, believers can and should seek to fulfill the requirements of the Law in daily life.

We do have to note of course that in this understanding of the role of the Decalogue in the Christian life there are two prerequisites, one explicit and the other clearly implied. The explicit precondition of living under the guidance of

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<sup>3</sup>*Institutes*, 2.7.12.

the Law is a relationship with the Lawgiver. The prologue to the Decalogue establishes this relational foundation: “I am the LORD *your God*, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exodus 20:2). The Decalogue is the Covenant between God and his people – not a set of abstract, universal, scientific, context-free maxims. The Law describes ten guidelines for loving God whole-heartedly and observing his righteousness and justice. It is also clearly *implied* in the biblical texts that the Decalogue is given not to isolated, individual “moral athletes” but to a community of faith. It is in community that individuals will seek to understand and carry out the will of God expressed in the Decalogue. The commandments are given to a redeemed “people” not just to individual pilgrims on their own.

With this as a backdrop and introduction, could it be that there is nevertheless a “fourth use” of the Law, that is, as ethically relevant guidance for relationships, decisions and actions among non-believers, or among believers in other gods than Yahweh? Could the message be more than just a pre-conversion conviction of guilt as a condemned ethical failure? Could this guidance be broader than just an insight into the requirements of workable political institutions? Could it be a helpful insight into ethical workplace behavior, relationships, and leadership?

#### AN ETHIC FOR JEWS, CHRISTIANS, MUSLIMS, AND BEYOND

One of the most ambitious and impressive recent studies of the Decalogue along these lines is *Les Dix Commandements Aujourd'hui* by André Chouraqui (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2000). Chouraqui (1917-2007) was born in Algeria and pursued Law and Rabbinical Studies in Paris in the Thirties. He was active in the French Resistance in the early 1940s and then served as a lawyer and judge in France. In 1958 he settled in Jerusalem where he became advisor to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion on the integration in Israel of Jews from Muslim countries and on intercommunity relations. In 1965 he was elected Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem in charge of cultural affairs, international and intercultural relations of the City of Jerusalem. He has been a leader in the World Congress of Religions for Peace and has been a part of continuous efforts to build global and interreligious understanding. Chouraqui is a rare scholar who has published original translations of the Hebrew Bible, Christian New Testament, and Islamic Koran – all three.

Chouraqui describes how his friend René Cassin led the drafting of the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights at the end of World War II. Cassin sometimes said that the UN Declaration was a kind of modern “lay Decalogue” for all people everywhere but Chouraqui points out that while the word “right” appears some 59 times, the word “duty” occurs only once in the Declaration. Where are the universal human obligations, responsibilities, and

duties that are the essential counterpart to this eloquent listing of rights? For Chouraqui, it is the Decalogue.

Chouraqui walks through the ten commandments, one at a time, discussing first the original vocabulary and setting, then highlighting the way Judaism has viewed the command, then a section on Christianity, one on Islam, and finally a section on implications for a global ethic. Some chapters include insights from Hinduism, Buddhism, and other traditions. The three Abrahamic religions all ostensibly regard the Decalogue as divine guidance on how to live. Readers can't help but wish that, on the basis of this common ground of the Decalogue, these three faith communities, so often in conflict and at war, could come together in peace and justice.

But Chouraqui's vision is even broader as he strives to find a universal ethical wisdom in each of the ten. "The range of the Ten Commandments is not limited to the three Abrahamic religions. The place of their proclamation is a desert. The desert belongs to no one; an object found among its dry terrain belongs to whoever will bother to bend down to pick it up. The Ten Commandments address themselves to humanity as a whole in that they summarize in a few sentences the human condition and the conditions on which the survival of humanity depends."<sup>4</sup> So Chouraqui is arguing for a "fourth use" of the law in the sense that its core precepts not only are relevant to all three Abrahamic faith communities but even have relevance outside traditional religious faith.

Fuller Seminary's long time professor of ethics, Lewis Smedes, also saw the human, not just Christian, relevance of the Decalogue. For Smedes the Decalogue is a "digest of human rights."

In the Decalogue... we find a series of five basic human rights laid down. Each commandment which forbids me to injure you implies that you have a fundamental right not to be injured by me or anyone else. Every 'Thou shalt not' signals a right... [Justice means *respect*,] a sense for the other person's right to be who he is, to have what he properly has coming to him, and to be allowed to do what he is called to do... The moral commandments of the Decalogue... match the configurations of life as God created it. Each commandment seems to cordon off a sector of life and pinpoint the moral nucleus of that sector[:] family life,... marriage,... communication.... If we think of any community as a network of these sectors, we can see that the commandments are survival guidelines for the human community.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>André Chouraqui, *Les Dix Commandements Aujourd'hui* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2000), 23.

Author's translations.

<sup>5</sup>Lewis B. Smedes, *Mere Morality: What God Expects from Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 15, 32, 55. While I agree with Smedes in general, I would argue that in the Decalogue we find ten basic rights, not just five, and that they are first of all ten rights or claims that God has on us, and, derivatively, they are ten rights of all people made in God's

Generally speaking, the major ethical teachings of the Bible are delivered to and practiced within the community of faith. The Decalogue is given to the covenant people, not to an individual and not to the nations outside the covenant. The Sermon on the Mount is delivered to the band of disciples, not to an individual or to the crowds per se. Paul's ethical message of Romans 12 – 13 is for the body of believers who resist conformity to the world around them and are children of the eschatological coming day.

There are recurring promises and predictions that lives shaped by the Decalogue will be good for the practitioners. Love God and keep his commandments “so that you may live” and experience God's “steadfast love” (Deut 4:1; 5:10), so that your “days will be long” and it will “go well” with you “all the days of your life” in a “land flowing with milk and honey” (Deut 6:2-3). “Do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, so that it may go well with you... . The LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case” (Deut 6:18, 24). So too, Matthew's Sermon on the Mount promises that its practitioners will be “blessed” (Greek *makarios*).

Nevertheless, there is a secondary message throughout the biblical canon, that there is an ethical guidance originating in God that is relevant and recognizable to all people, not just believers. Perhaps the first account of this is in the creation and fall accounts of early Genesis, where there is a “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” While disobediently eating of the fruit of this tree is at the heart of the “Fall” it is important to note that this tree was created by God, not by the serpent, and that it really did deliver some knowledge of good and evil, i.e., of ethics.

In an interesting comment, Deuteronomy notes that the Decalogue doesn't just speak to a detached enclave of the redeemed. Others outside the faith community are watching: “You must observe [the Ten Commandments] diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!’... what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law...?” (Deut 4:6-8). The point is that even without a personal faith relationship to the God who liberated from Egypt, the surrounding peoples were able to see the wisdom, justice, and value of the Decalogue as demonstrated in Israel.

And even though the primary audience for the Sermon on the Mount was the band of disciples, it turns out at the very end of the Sermon (Matthew 7:28-29)

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image. Paul Lehmann's *The Decalogue and A Human Future: The Meaning of the Commandments for Making and Keeping Human Life Human* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995) also sees the Decalogue as insight into human life and relationships in general, not just the life of the believing community.

that the “crowds” had been there listening the whole time and were “astounded at his teaching” and the authority they discerned in it. And recall the words of Paul cited earlier (Romans 2:14-15, NRSV): “When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness.” The point is not merely that God has provided some ethical guidance for those outside the community of faith; the point here is the *similarity*, if not complete identity, of the core content of that ethics. The guidelines that are “instinctive, written on the heart, and attested by one’s conscience” are not different from those written on the two tablets.

#### THE DECALOGUE AS ETHICAL ROADMAP FOR THE WORLD

In short, the broad themes of Jewish and Christian Scripture suggest that the Ten Commandments are primarily intended to be the principles of love, freedom and justice for a worldwide community of people in a living faith-based relationship with God. These commandments are both a gift and a requirement for God’s followers.<sup>6</sup> But while it is wrong to *impose* this Law on others (a relationship with God can only begin with the free, uncoerced assent of a new disciple), its principles correspond to human reality in a profound way. The author of the Decalogue is the Creator of all people, not just of Israel or the church. People of the Law can offer what they have learned to whoever cares to listen, and should not be surprised if it provides insight and finds acceptance.

But how are these ten words best stated, summarized, and interpreted for those outside the community of faith? As a preface, remember that this is not an argument *against* the “first use” of the Law but rather *for* a “fourth use.” There is every reason to allow the Decalogue to challenge all people on the question of “who or what sits on the throne of your life?” Or “are you enslaved to the worship of unworthy idols and material things in your life?” These are among the “first use” big questions of life.

But is there another tapestry of “fourth use” ethical guidance to be found in the Decalogue? We can safely say that the Law is an account of rights, righteousness, and justice. A second interpretive theme is that the Decalogue is an account of how to love. In the double “Love Commandment”: Jesus quotes from the *shema*, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart” (Deut. 6:5) and the Holiness Code, “You shall love... your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18) as a summary of the law. St. Paul says, “The commandments... are summed up in this

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<sup>6</sup> Max L. Stackhouse, “The Ten Commandments: Economic Implications” (in Max Stackhouse, Dennis McCann, et al, eds, *On Moral Business* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 59-62) does a nice job of applying all ten commands to the marketplace but it is still primarily a “third use” theological/ethical message to Christians.



word, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love... is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:8-10). In *Galatians*, Paul writes again: “For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal 5:14). Note that Paul does not say just “the second half” of the law but the *whole* law, *all* of the commandments, are ways of loving your neighbor as yourself. So the Decalogue has for good reasons often been interpreted as ten principles of justice and love. The justice angle suggests that there are rights, duties, entitlements, and obligations detailed in the Ten. The love angle suggests that these are ways of caring for others, building relationships, and going beyond the minimum requirements of justice.

There is a popular tradition in the interpretation of the Decalogue that sees the first few commandments as an account of love and duty toward God (religious guidelines) and the second half of the Decalogue as a description of love and duty toward other people (social ethical guidelines). The wording of the commandments certainly invites such a division on first glance. But there is good reason not to invest too much in such a two-part division. First of all, the whole of the Decalogue is above all a Covenant with God; the Covenant with God is not just the first tablet but both tablets equally. And the explicit teaching of much of the Bible is that murder is wrong not just because you violate the victim’s rights but because you violate God’s rights over all of life. To violate a marriage with adultery is not just an offense against other people but a violation of “what God has joined together.” So all ten commands can (and should) guide the relationship with God. But second, as the quotations from St. Paul make clear, all the commandments, not just the second half, are about loving the neighbor.

A perspective that rarely has entered the discussion of the commandments is the *imago dei*, the biblical idea of human beings being made in the image and likeness of their Creator. Bringing this notion of the *imago dei* to the Decalogue can be a powerful and fruitful key to development of what I am calling the fourth use of the law. If the Decalogue describes the ten ways to treat God with love, justice, and respect, these may, in principle, be the same ten basic ways of treating people-made-in-God’s image-and-likeness with appropriate love, justice, and respect. In some very profound ways, men and women are “like” their God. For example, like God, people have a will to create things, a desire for relationships, an appreciation of beauty as well as utility, a capacity to communicate by word, and so on. If this is the case, when we learn the basic movements and components in loving *God*, we are also learning the basic movements in loving a *neighbor-made-in-the-image-of-God*. What God wants, we also want in some sense. Of course there are vast differences between the Creator and creature. God is infinite, we are finite; God is holy and perfect, humans are blemished and imperfect. But emphasizing only these differences can blind us to the similarities.

But how can we best understand and express these ten ways, these concepts, for a “fourth use” approach outside the faith community and its usual God-talk? The starting point is to try to understand the core concept or idea in each of the Ten Commandments. Sixteenth-century Genevan Reformer John Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, said about each of the commandments that we should seek to be “guided by the *principle* of the commandment – viz., to consider in the case of each what the purpose is for which it was given.”<sup>7</sup> Rabbi André Chouraqui writes, “We attempt to discern the *fundamental principles* of the Decalogue at the sources of the human and of all morality, religious or otherwise.”<sup>8</sup> Old Testament scholar Bruce Birch says, “The Decalogue appears not so much as a legal code itself as the *foundational principles* of the covenant on which subsequent legal codes may be based... The Decalogue seems more intended to lay out *broad principles* and general moral presumptions which require further legal application and refinement in particular contexts.”<sup>9</sup>

So we are looking for basic, core, essential principles in the Ten Commandments and then exploring how to communicate and apply these principles in the marketplace, the political sphere, and other arenas. This is not, by the way, an argument that the original authors and editors of the text had this application in mind. Maybe they did – maybe not. But while authorial intention is important, the meaning of texts is not confined to what was consciously in the heads of the original authors. Texts have a life of their own and sometimes acquire meanings that are more powerful than their authors could have imagined. Of course, neither can we twist texts to mean just anything we want. Every interpretation needs to be critically examined.

#### THE FIRST FOUR PRINCIPLES OF HIGHLY ETHICAL BUSINESS LEADERS

In the interest of space we will confine this exploration to the first four commandments. This choice has the virtue of being less obvious than working from the later commandments on the list (killing, theft, false witness, etc.). We will consider four ethical principles inspired by the first four commandments, with a particular focus on the workplace. They are presented in both positive and negative formulations.

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<sup>7</sup>John Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.8.8.

<sup>8</sup>André Chouraqui, *Les Dix Commandements Aujourd'hui* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2000), 26. Author's translation.

<sup>9</sup>*Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics and Christian Life* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 168.

*Principle One: Treat all people as unique, valuable individuals. Never treat anyone as though they are dispensable, without value, or “just a number.”*

The first commandment in the Decalogue is “You shall have no other gods before me” (or “between me and you”). Why is this the first command? What is its essential, core point? How can this be the first way of showing love, respect, and justice to God? The point is that no other *gods* should come between you and your God. Nothing and nobody should be offered the god-place or the god-role in one’s life. Technology, for example, should not be treated with awe and reverence, should not be sacrificed to or bowed down to, should not be adored and exalted, should not be viewed as the Savior and Director of our lives and destinies. This is how God wants to be loved; this is something God has a right to expect. This could be called the principle of “exclusivity” or “uniqueness.” *The first way to love and care for the other is by granting them a special, unique place in your existence and not letting any rivals emerge to threaten or take that place.*

In a flash, something occurred to me as I was giving a lecture on the Decalogue to a group of students at UNLV years ago: this is exactly the first thing that my spouse wants from me – to have the partner/spouse place in my life unthreatened by any rivals. (Of course I knew this about marriage before that night – the new insight was that the first movement of love and justice was the *same* for God, for a spouse, for anyone). In the case of marriage, one may have other good friends, other people who one loves. But no one should be offered the special place of life-long soulmate, lover, and unconditionally-intimate life partner that one has dedicated and committed to a spouse. While there are many ways of threatening a good marriage, the most threatening of all is to allow a rival to enter the picture, to begin to come between you and your spouse. The point is easily seen in the marriage illustration but it applies equally to parenting: each of your children must know that they occupy a unique, irreplaceable position in your heart and mind. If they come to doubt that, the relationship is in trouble.

The principle applies in business as well: each of our employees (and customers and colleagues) need to feel valued by, and unique before, their employers and colleagues if they are to flourish. Are they overlooked, dispensable, replaceable, or “just a number”? How will they perform if that’s the case? People can usually sense whether we notice them and value their individual existence. The fact is that every person *is* unique in their DNA, in their upbringing, experience, and perspective. Everyone does have value somehow, somewhere (even in the case where they do not fit into our organization and must be replaced). Because people are unique, they deserve – have a right – to be treated as unique individuals.

Learning to treat God as valuable, unique, worthy of his own place as God in our lives habituates us to a fundamental pattern of how to love anybody. Our

neighbors (including spouses, housemates, colleagues, strangers and enemies) are made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, as we learn to love God, we learn at the very same time, in principle, how to love the neighbor. The first movement of love is always and everywhere, in this moral perspective, value, uniqueness, and exclusivity. It is not surprising, then, that we should find this principle strongly affirmed by a philosopher like Kant, for whom the categorical imperative can be stated, “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.”<sup>10</sup>

Nor is it surprising then to find this principle strongly affirmed by business leaders and scholars. Legendary founder of Hewlett-Packard, David Packard has written “...Our strong belief [is] that individuals be treated with consideration and respect... Every person in our company is important, and every job is important.”<sup>11</sup> And Stanford business school professors Charles O’Reilly and Jeffrey Pfeffer concluded their major study of personnel and management practices of successful companies by arguing that “[t]hese places are also better at attracting and retaining people as a byproduct of how they operate. That is because great people want to work at places where they can actually use their talents, where they are treated with dignity, trust, and respect...”<sup>12</sup>

*Principle Two: Support every individual’s freedom, growth, and development. Never view anyone through stereotypes and images, or as fixed and unchangeable.*<sup>13</sup>

The second commandment in the Decalogue is “Do not make any idols or graven images.” The issue of idolatry and image-making is not the same as the issue of exclusivity and uniqueness raised by the first command. The core issue here is life, vitality, and growth. As the Hebrew prophets saw it, the problem with idolatry was making images not just of false gods, but of the true God. In the famous Exodus episode, as Moses came down from the mountain, Aaron’s golden calf party was announced as “a feast to Yahweh, to the gods who brought us out of Egypt” (Exodus 32:4-5). Right God, wrong approach! The infinite God in Israel could not be reduced to a finite object. Even more, the living God could not be represented by a fixed, mechanical image. (The only valid image of God is born by living men and women). God is alive. God listens, speaks, acts. God even

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<sup>10</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785)

<sup>11</sup> *The HP Way* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1995), 127

<sup>12</sup> *Hidden Value: How Great Companies Achieve Extraordinary Results With Ordinary People* (Boston: Harvard Business, 2000), 3.

<sup>13</sup> I am following the Reformed tradition in numbering the commandments.

changes his mind according to the Bible. Even if an image could represent in an inspiring way some aspect of God's reality, it would fail to capture it all. And it would be dead.

No wonder then that, analogously, human beings (made in God's image and likeness) deeply resent it whenever they are viewed through the lens of stereotypes and fixed images. Whenever we describe someone as "just a..." or "always..." or "only..." we are imposing unfair, misleading, dehumanizing images on them. Beware of generalizations and stereotypes. Beware of taking people for granted. Beware of assuming you know someone completely. People change, people grow. People are alive – just like their creator. Thus, in a marriage, in parenting, in a classroom, or in managing employees, the second basic principle of ethical people is to create and protect opportunity for others to grow. Rather than assuming that they always know what's best for an employee, ethical leaders ask, "how would you like to grow in your skills and experiences this year?" "What can I do to help you get where you want to go?" "How can our company unleash you to be all you want to be?"

Relating to God in this vital, image-rejecting fashion habituates us to the second way of expressing love to any of my neighbors, all of whom are made in God's image. Jan Milič Lochman is one of few commentators who see this point:

This prohibition of images is also of vital importance for our human relationships with one another. We human beings have a notorious and almost incorrigible tendency to 'image making' in relation to our neighbors. We make our own image of them, seek to 'capture' them, take possession of them, to define for ourselves and for them what they 'really' are... Caricatures of this sort obstruct our real access to one another and diminish our mutual human freedom, just as God's freedom is endangered when we make a fetish of our theological images and concepts.<sup>14</sup>

French Reformed theologian, Alphonse Maillot pushes in the same direction. God "wants also for others to always be new, never fixed, never assassinated by a definition in an image or in a statue." Stereotypes of people violate the command and undermine our compliance with the other commands.

God has prohibited images... because they freeze one attitude and one definitive personality, that which we imagine. In so doing they freeze our relationships with them, and they then freeze ourselves in one definitive attitude. The image 'murders' the other as much as ourselves. It makes of the other, even of God, a statue now silent and stiff, which can only repeat itself. And by the same action it makes us into a petrified statue. The image imprisons the other as much as it imprisons us... [The image] is the death of all freedom, of the freedom of the

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<sup>14</sup> Jan Milič Lochman, *Signposts to Freedom* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 1982), 49-50. An extraordinary book.

other as much as our own. Let's take an example: call someone regularly 'an imbecile' and this other, whatever he does or says, will be for you confined, incarcerated in his imbecility, and you too will be fixed in your attitude toward the other by this definitive judgment. But for the God of the Bible, life is freedom, not anarchy or craziness but freedom in the sense of newness. Life is future and not at all past, open and not at all imprisoned.<sup>15</sup>

We can easily see why this is true in loving a child, a patient, a client, a co-worker – or an enemy. Images get in the way of freedom and love. People must be set (or left) free to be alive. We will never overcome racial division as long as stereotypes and images rule our thinking about each other. Even on the level of international politics, for example, the United States will never be able to relate constructively to Iran or Libya or Korea if it always relates to a fixed image that assumes the other cannot grow or change.

Any good manager or business leader approaches people with respect for their freedom, vitality, and growth, and refuses to stereotype any employee as “only a techie,” or “only a secretary,” or “only a bureaucratic functionary.” A good manager is open to the creative growth potential of each employee and regularly asks what they want to learn next, how they would like to grow and improve in the coming year, and then supports and enables this freedom and growth. Bill Pollard, former CEO of the ServiceMaster corporation has described as the “basic ethical question of the marketplace: What is happening to the person in the process? Is she developing and growing as a whole person?”<sup>16</sup> David Packard reflected that, “[i]t has always been important to Bill and me to create an environment in which people have a chance to be their best, to realize their potential...”<sup>17</sup>

*Principle Three: Communicate to people by name with respect. Never use or impose demeaning, trivializing, or derogatory names on others.*

The third commandment is “Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God.” Do not take God's name in a vain or empty fashion. God commands people not to misuse his name – that is, to say the name when they don't intend to start a conversation with him or, at least, describe him to others. Profanity, cursing, and falsely swearing oaths in God's name – these are ways of misusing God's name. The biblically-proper way to use God's name is to pray, to call upon God, to sing about what he has done, or to lament how tough life is and how you wish he

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<sup>15</sup> Alphonse Maillot, *Le Decalogue*, (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1985), 40-42, 47-48. Author's translations.

<sup>16</sup> C. William Pollard, *The Soul of the Firm* (HarperBusiness, 1996), 2.

<sup>17</sup> *The HP Way* (HarperBusiness, 1995), 127.

would help out. We love God, thirdly, by speaking to him, by initiating conversation by calling out his name. And it is a matter of justice: God has a right to be spoken to, not ignored, and a right to have his name used with respect.

The point of the command is about communication. No relationships of any substance and value can exist without good communication. Pronouncing someone's name initiates interpersonal communication. Names represent persons, who and what they are. Imposing a trivializing or demeaning name on someone or some group is an act of violence against their reality. Not knowing or making an effort to learn people's names is a clear indicator that we do not value communication and relationships with them. Good teachers and leaders learn peoples' names and then use them to initiate relationship-building conversations.

To understand how important this principle is in human relationships think about how grown children sometimes *rename* themselves as a way of building an independent identity and separating from their youth or past. And think about how "liberated" groups usually rename themselves (or their countries, e.g., Congo to Zaire to Congo) to express their new freedom and identity. It is an important assertion of strength and power. So the "girls" and "ladies" asked to be called "women" (or "womyn"). African slaves achieved some progress and respect when insulting epithets were replaced by "colored people" (as in NAACP) and "Negroes." They really came out in power in the Sixties when they insisted on being called "Blacks" and "Afro-Americans" (now "African Americans" and "people of color"). If blacks say "Now we want to be called "African-Americans" not "Afro-Americans" or if they say "call us people of color not colored people" – this should be done without hesitation. Why? It is a critical sign of respect to a people who have been humiliated beyond all measure over the past four centuries, often in the form of names and labels imposed on them. If Malcolm Little says "call me Malcolm X," if Lew Alcindor says "call me Muhammed Abdul-Jabbar," if Betty X decides to change her name to "Betty Shabazz" – we should do it. Respecting the name of the other is a fundamental ethical principle.

André Chouraqui points out that, "[t]he modern world has lost awareness of the value of words. One forgets that the word has an impact on the being itself and that words can 'denature' the being that it supposedly designates. From the ontological point of view, words become approximations of the truth."<sup>18</sup> The third commandment affirms to us the importance of the word. By practicing the third command with God we are habituated to a pattern for relating to people (made in God's image and likeness). Whether it is in the classroom, or around the international diplomacy table, or in the halls of business, a strong candidate for

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<sup>18</sup> Chouraqui, *Les Dix Commandements*, 98. Chouraqui translated the Hebrew Bible, the Greek New Testament, and the Arabic Koran. "Reestablish the meaning of words – this is what I have attempted to do for readers of the Bible," he says. p. 106. Author's translation.

third place on the list of top ethical principles is “Communicate to others by name with respect.”

In the business arena, Max DePree, former CEO of Herman Miller, has written that “Communication is an ethical question. Good communication means a respect for individuals... We owe each other truth and courtesy... “There may be no single thing more important in our efforts to achieve meaningful work and fulfilling relationships than to learn and practice the art of communication.”<sup>19</sup> In her landmark study of the world’s most successful airline, Southwest, Jody Hoffer Gittel writes “Southwest employees were observed to speak respectfully of their colleagues in other functions and to interact comfortably with them, whether that person’s job was to empty the toilets or fly the plane.”<sup>20</sup> Communicating to others “by name with respect” is a powerful ethical principle for the business world, not just for the religious life.

*Principle Four: Model and encourage a balanced life of good work and rest. Do not adopt policies or make demands on others that undermine balanced lives.*

The fourth commandment is a double one: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall work.” Here the pattern of “what’s good for God is good for people made in God’s likeness” is made explicit: According to the Book of Exodus (20:11 recalling Genesis 1 – 2), God worked six and rested the seventh; now you (following God’s pattern) work six and rest the seventh. Why, in the first place, should people stop working for a Sabbath? The basic reason is to get free to spend quality time with God. The Sabbath is for God. And why, in the first place, do we work? According to the Genesis account, we work for God as stewards of his creation, caretakers of his people. The message of the fourth command seems to be that God wants to be *loved* both by our choice to spend Sabbath time with him – and by our choice to work for him. Moreover, God *deserves* to be given such quality time and attention, and he deserves to be served by our quality work efforts. It represents justice as well as love.

This is a pattern that seems to fit with our human nature. Obsessive workaholics are living unhealthy lives; they are not to be viewed as heroes. The story suggests that God *could have* worked on the seventh day but he didn’t. So too, people *could* work seven days a week, checking email, working on projects at home at night, traveling obsessively, etc. But if we are beating up our bodies and minds in the process and becoming unbalanced, dehumanized shadows of fully

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<sup>19</sup> Max DePree, *Leadership is An Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 91-96.

<sup>20</sup> Gittel, *The Southwest Airlines Way: Using the Power of Relationships to Achieve High Performance* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 34.



developed human beings, and if our relationships get trashed by this imbalance, does it not become something unethical?

The other side of the principle is that seems to be built into human nature to need to perform creative and redemptive work six days a week. Designing and making things, organizing, fixing, and healing things – these activities express our humanity in the image and likeness of our Creator and Redeemer. Not to have opportunity to do such work is also dehumanizing. Not to engage in good work because one is lazy and irresponsible would also be an attack on both our self and our community (which then has to pick up after us).

At the heart of this double-command is the insight that we care for someone both by *working for* them and by *being with* them. We show love for God and for others by working hard for them for six days (roughly) each week as well as by ceasing our work and being with them for some “quality time” each week. There is justification in the Bible for arguing that one need not be overly-rigorous or legalistic about *when* such Sabbaths are observed – or *how* they should be observed. The point is to value the basic principle and invent ways of implementing it, modeling it and helping others pursue it. We treat others ethically when we help them create balanced lives of good work and good rest. What is true for interpersonal relationships also goes for our businesses and in the world of international politics. All good human relationships require that we work on behalf of others – and also carve out time to be focused on the other.

The good business leader or manager, in this perspective, serves her employees and colleagues by her exertions and efforts on behalf of them. She shows her care and support by doing things for them. But she moves from good to great when she also takes a moment to be *with* each person in a focused, undistracted quality encounter. Obviously the issues of size, scale, and dispersion of the workforce will dictate some limits to these practices. But the principle remains as a guidepost: “work for” and “be with.” This pattern is an important expression of love and care; it is also a kind of right we acknowledge in such relationships. You are someone working for me; you deserve to have me work for you as well as stop to pay some attention to you.

Anne Mulcahy, former Chair and CEO of the Xerox Corporation, has said that “Work/life benefits allow companies meaningful ways for responding to their employees’ needs; they can be a powerful tool for transforming a workforce and driving a business’s success.”<sup>21</sup> Some companies and managers still view work and non-work as competing factors in a zero sum game but “a small but growing number... approach the work-life question differently” according to a famous article in the November-December 1998 *Harvard Business Review*.

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<sup>21</sup>Keynote address May 2003 at LifeCare Inc. Life Event Management Conference, Westport CT. <http://www.lifecare.com/news/archives/2003conference.html>.

They operate under the assumption that work and personal life are not competing priorities but complementary ones. They have adopted a win-win philosophy. And it appears that they are right: in the cases we have studied, the new approach has yielded tangible payoffs both for organizations and for individual employees.<sup>22</sup>

#### KARL MARX, FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE DECALOGUE

In summary then, the Ten Commandment in their basic biblical presentation are an expression of ten (“the” ten) basic movements of both love and justice toward God. These are the ten conditions of living out the relational covenant: “I will be your God and you shall be my people.” The relationship flourishes with their observance; it withers with their neglect or violation. But if all human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, it may be that human relationships thrive or wither under the same or very similar conditions. Hence we derived and proposed basic ethical guidelines and principles for the business world and for the outlines of a globally relevant ethic from what initially we encountered as the guidelines for a redeemed people of faith in a relationship with God: a fourth use of the Law.

But let’s push the argument one step further. Suppose an atheist like Karl Marx was invited to critique this theologically-inspired ethic, dependent as it is on the assertion that people are created in the image and likeness of God? In his 1844 “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” Marx famously wrote the following: “the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism.” “Man...has found only the *reflection* of himself in the fantastic reality of heaven.” “Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man.” Religion is an “Inverted consciousness of the world” because we live in “an inverted world.” “It is the fantastic realization of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality.” “*Religious* suffering is, at one and the same time, the *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.”

So there is a correspondence between religion and human reality, Marx argues, but it is an “inverted consciousness.” It is the “expression” of something real. It is a “reflection of himself” but in the fantastic reality of heaven. So a Marxist/atheist critique of the Decalogue would go something like this:

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<sup>22</sup>Stewart D. Friedman, Perry Christensen, and Jessica DeGroot, “Work and Life: The End of the Zero-Sum Game,” in *Harvard Business Review on Work and Life Balance* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000), 3.

- 1) Sorry, but there is no God who demands and desires to be treated as the “only God” with uniqueness, value and respect (cf. “No other gods before me”) – no, that is YOU speaking, you crying out to be recognized as a valuable, unique, irreplaceable being.
- 2) There is no God who demands to be encountered in his living, growing reality without images, stereotypes and limitation (cf. “No images or idols”) – no, that is YOU wanting to escape the humiliation and slavery of people treating you through stereotypes.
- 3) It is YOU who want to be spoken to by name with respect.
- 4) It is YOU who cries out for quality rest and time off as well as meaningful creative daily work every week!

But since the economic/material system and infrastructure is in the hands of powerful oppressors, you, with their complicity, have invented a God in heaven who demands to be loved and respected in these ways. It is a false expression of a true consciousness, an illusion that masks your lived reality. You project these values and aspirations on to a God – instead of throwing off your chains and demanding to be treated this way now. This way of thinking is a fantasy and serves as an opiate to dull your pain.

But think about this carefully: aren't both sides actually in final agreement about these core ethical principles? Aren't they agreeing, in the end, that these are in fact the desires and even the rights of all men and women? The agreement seems obvious and unqualified. The disagreement is not about the *content* of the ethics but about its *origins* – and here they are poles apart. The faith perspective is that there is a God who created man and woman in his own image and likeness and this “likeness” explains our universal human desire and right to be treated this way. The atheist perspective rejects any immaterial, “spiritual” reality as mere superstructure and asserts that these values are no more or less than the natural characteristics of authentic historical humankind. But the disagreement about origins need not stand in the way of fully collaborating in the meantime in treating people with respect, supporting their growth, speaking to them with respect, working for them, and then hanging out with them.

## **Appendix A**

### **Ten Principles of Highly Ethical Leaders & Organizations**

*How do you and your organization treat your colleagues, employees, investors, customers, business partners, journalists, government officials, and neighbors? What are the core principles and guidelines that guide such relationships for you and your company? Here is a list that pretty well covers all the bases and could lift your leadership effectiveness to a whole new level.*

**1. Treat all people as unique, valuable individuals**

*Never treat anyone as worthless, dispensable, or “just a number.”*

**2. Support the freedom and growth of others**

*Never view anyone through stereotypes and images, or as fixed and unchangeable*

**3. Communicate to others by name with respect**

*Never ignore people – or use demeaning, trivializing, or derogatory names/labels*

**4. Model and encourage a balanced life of good work and rest**

*Never adopt policies or make demands on others that undermine balanced lives*

**5. Honor and respect the families and friends of others**

*Never undervalue the significance of families and friends of employees*

**6. Protect the life, safety, and health of others**

*Never harm or jeopardize the physical well-being of anyone*

**7. Keep commitments & agreements in a trustworthy, reliable manner**

*Never betray your relational commitments or undermine those made by others*

**8. Promote fairness in matters of money and property**

*Never tolerate unfair wages, prices, or financial practices*

**9. Communicate truthfully and constructively**

*Never mischaracterize people, products, services, or facts*

**10. Cultivate a positive and generous attitude**

*Never give in to negativity, anger, greed, or envy*