

Introduction - The Ten Commandments

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It is no secret that we live in remarkable times. On the one hand, the advances in technology dazzle us daily with ever smaller and faster computers. There is much to be thankful for in these achievements as they enhance and advance our ability to communicate, to treat those in medical need, and to apply such technology to a myriad of other uses. On the other hand, there is increasing evidence that such advances do not result in more knowledgeable or virtuous people. Despite the multiplication of degrees, there is growing data which suggests that the majority of our population is more rather than less ignorant concerning basic grammar, great literature, world history, and fundamental mathematics.

More critical than any measurement of simple knowledge is the growing awareness that there seems no longer to be a consensus in many circles about basic questions of what is right and what is wrong. The killing of the unborn and the elderly ... the casual abandonment of marriage vows and parental responsibility ... the more public embrace by leaders in business, government and entertainment of lifestyles previously regarded as immoral: these developments jolt that part of our population with memories of a different and more sensitive culture.

What is the church to do in such a setting? While we might be tempted to be discouraged, there are unique opportunities to serve Christ in such a dark epoch. First, of course, is the call to hold up the Scriptural vision with fidelity and clarity. How radically critical the Scriptures are of human pride and pomposity as they empty human life of its significance before the Triune God! How redemptive is the Gospel when contrasted with the tottering toys that our culture bows down before! Secondly, we are called to engage in a rigorous analysis of the sometimes subtle and sometimes blatant assumptions that undergird our culture's thinking.

Concordia Theological Seminary is devoted to both tasks—to a faithful confession of Christ as He is portrayed in the Sacred Scriptures and to critical reflection about what forms the minds and habits of human beings at the threshold of the third millennium. In this latter effort, the words of H. Richard Niebuhr in his classic *Christ and Culture* (1951, p. 131) are still poignant, "The Christian—and any man—must answer the question about what he ought to do by asking and answering a previous question, 'What is my purpose, my end?'" Increasingly people assume that they have no purpose and that death is the end. Period. How tragic!

When the church capitulates to cultural trends at the expense of fidelity to Christ, the tragedy is compounded. This meltdown in Christian truth and confession is movingly chronicled by Thomas C. Oden in *Requiem* (1995), which describes his own personal pilgrimage back to Christ's culture.

What a privilege and high calling the seminary has to serve a church which treasures the Scriptural truth and seeks to share the light and life of Christ in this dark and dying epoch! Our baptism into Christ's life, our nurture in His Word of life, and our participation in His life at the altar all define us as people who have abundant life now and eternal life in Christ. Our purpose and our end are simply to live in and for Christ until we rest in Him.

May this ancient prayer define your days, your life, and your end.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,

Christ to comfort and restore me;
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.
(St. Patrick's Breastplate)

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