

Chapter 23: Life in Christ 1

“Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism, whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be ‘tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine,’ seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one’s own ego and desires.” (*Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Homily for the Mass for the Election of the Supreme Pontiff, St. Peter’s Basilica, April 18, 2005*)

Pg 310 Free will: the freedom to interfere with one another’s lives – the freedom to hurt one another and the opportunity to *be* hurt (from *The Creed in Slow Motion*, Mgr Ronald Knox)

“Breaking Bad” – our darker impulses

Pg 311 Freedom – not just the ability to make a choice – the freedom to be able to do what we ought.

- * Duress (‘shotgun wedding’)
- * Fear (threats to oneself/family)
- * Psychological

The Understanding of Moral Acts - intrinsically evil acts

Pg 312 “We can never do something wrong or evil in order to bring about a good.”

- * Example: cannot kill an abortion doctor to stop abortions

“Morality is ultimately a matter of personal opinion. It is wrong to render moral judgments of the moral beliefs and behaviors of other people – unless they directly harm you ... Everyone should tolerate everyone else, take care of their own business, and hopefully get along.” (Christian Smith, *Lost in Translation: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*)

* We are called to SO much more than just “tolerating” one another - Jesus didn’t say “Tolerate one another...”

“At the same time, these ‘emerging adults’ have not been taught well how to differentiate between strong moral and religious claims that should be tolerated and those that should be refuted, rejected, and opposed. Very few have been given the reasoning tools and skills to discern such important differences. As a result, many emerging adults simply end up trying to completely avoid making any strong moral claims themselves, as well as avoiding criticizing the moral views of others. But what few of them seem to realize is that such a position makes it impossible to rationally evaluate any moral wrong, including the horrific destruction and violence that helped drive them to this ‘tolerant’ position in the first place.” (Christian Smith, *Lost in Translation: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*)

- * Holocaust (1940’s)
- * Rwandan genocide (1994)
- * 9/11 (2001)
- * 21 Coptic Christian massacre (2015)

The Reality of Sin

Current morality – we recognize past sins as not sin anymore

There is one institution that still calls sin “sin” – the Church – and She has the unenviable task of teaching about sin in a relativistic world that doesn’t believe in sin anymore, or God for that matter... the Church, which is full of sinners...

* “Is sin outdated? Just the opposite ... sin is the only Christian dogma that can be proved just by reading the newspapers.” (*Making Choices, Peter Kreeft*)

People are not able to discern right or wrong – everything is ‘relative’ – there is no absolute truth. BUT: to say there is absolutely no truth is itself an absolute truth! Relativism enables us to do what we want without feeling bad.

Pg. 313 Pride – I will “eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil” and I will be like God.

Venial sins: “Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin (CCC 1863). Frequent confession is necessary, even if you don’t think you have any sins.

- * First Commandment, for example...

Pg. 317 Cardinal Virtues (our human nature)

- * Prudence * Justice * Fortitude * Temperance

Theological Virtues (towards God)

- * Faith * Hope * Charity

Pg. 318 Rules & Law...

“Rules” are how most people view moral law – random rules from religion – controlling, out of touch with modern man. Not understanding the ‘why’ behind God’s law can sometimes lead us to resent or even disregard His moral law – and when that happens, we miss out on a great gift from our loving Father.

The moral law flows out of God’s love for us, and the entire purpose of the law is to ensure our happiness by showing us how to live life the way God created us to live (remember St. Augustine?). The law isn’t there to control us, it’s there to protect us. The consequences aren’t vindictive punishments dealt by a God who is angry at being disobeyed. The consequences are the natural results of trying to live in a way contrary to how God created us to live.

“In our permissive culture...” Love = ‘luv’ - why thousands of dollars are spent on weddings that don’t last ... still paying the bills long after the divorce.

When I finally realize how much I am loved by God, then I start to respond to others the same way - because they are made in His image...

Chapter 24: Life in Christ 2

Pg. 324 Moral law = “The Golden Rule”

- * Luke 6:31 – “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”
- * Tobit 4:15 – “And what you hate, do not do to another.”

Pg. 326 Civil laws can partially help, but the government cannot legislate thought.

Pg. 327 Examples in the book: slavery/racism and human trafficking

* Other examples: redefinition of marriage, adultery, abortion, euthanasia, contraception, embryonic stem cell research, immigration, poverty, environment/stewardship, war, political corruption

Pg. 334 Precepts of the Church - the bare minimum

The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5)

- * You shall NOT! Rules! Rules! Rules!

Genesis: Creation – Adam & Eve – Cain & Abel – Noah’s Ark – Tower of Babel – Abram/Abraham - Sodom & Gomorrah – descendants down to Joseph (of the ‘Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat’) – he was sold into slavery by his brothers – Joseph (and the rest of the Israelites) ended up in Egypt.

Exodus: After 430 years, the Israelites finally escaped Pharaoh/slavery – but on the way to the Promised Land, they were constantly complaining and looking back towards Egypt.

- * Manna and quail - “Would that we had died at the LORD’s hand in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread! But you had to lead us into this desert to make the whole community die of famine! (Ex. 16)

- * Water from the Rock – “Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children and our livestock?” (Ex. 17)

- * Bronze serpent – “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food!” (Num 21)

The Ten Commandments were given to them to ‘take the Egypt out of Israel’

- * The Golden Calf (Ex. 32)

The Ten Commandments are given to us because it’s where we find our minimal duties towards God and neighbor set forth in clear terms.

“Breaking Bad” and Evil

By Patrick Beeman

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Evil is at once everywhere and nowhere. But as Chesterton once remarked, the ubiquity of evil makes original sin (the idea that human nature is morally wounded) a Christian doctrine that is empirically verifiable.

At the same time, our familiarity with evil desensitizes us to it. Generation after generation, people lose the ability to be shocked by their own actions. Doing evil can become as natural as breathing. So unless you’re clubbing kittens or running a gulag, the concept of evil is as invisible as oxygen – and to many people as outdated as denim overalls.

I don’t watch much television. It irks me that, in our culture, daily conversations center on the happenings of the past week’s *The Bachelor* or some tired iteration of the public singing competitions that glut primetime. It makes me miss those college days when sharing one too many beers led to passionate disagreements about the merits of philosophical systems like Thomism versus phenomenology, not whether Juan Pablo should pick the blonde or the brunette.

I confess that intellectual snobbery has kept me from television for many years. But occasionally we can thank God for good peer pressure, which finally convinced me to try the hit series *Breaking Bad*. The show just won several Emmys Monday night – and deserved to.

Breaking Bad’s five seasons began in 2008 (it’s now available in its entirety on Netflix). The story concerns the newly diagnosed cancer patient and high-school chemistry teacher, Walter White, whose financial problems and anxieties about his mortality lead him to turn his knowledge of the “central science” toward the production of an ultra-pure and world-class methamphetamine. In other words, he becomes a meth cook. His motives are honorable enough: to provide for his family after his death. But Walter’s actions in pursuit of this goal quickly show the insidious nature of moral consequentialism.

The didactic value of *Breaking Bad* lies in the way it follows the “ends justify the means” morality to its inevitable conclusion, namely that little sins and small compromises eventually lead to the annihilation of conscience and the destruction of a person’s character.

Early in the series, Walter confronts a dilemma: whether to let a thug to live who knows his secret, or to kill him. In a particularly poignant scene, he makes a list of pros and cons. On one side, “Judeo-Christian values” and “it’s the right thing to do” argue against murder; on the other side, threats to his family and the possibility of getting caught support offing the guy. This is the last time we see Walter’s internal struggle played out so explicitly. (You can guess what happens to the drug dealer).

Thenceforth, no action that would secure Walter’s family is off-limits. Walter quickly abandons his basic bourgeois decency and, by the end of the series, has become so thoroughly evil that his

character resembles something closer to Adolf Hitler than Bill Nye the Science Guy. It makes you shudder. It makes you think about the “banality of evil” (Hannah Arendt’s phrase) and its omnipresence. Evil, real evil, is everywhere.

Nevertheless, say the word “evil” in public (i.e., to the kind of people who watch *The Bachelor*) and maybe you will conjure up images of awful things like genocide and sex trafficking – but distant things that don’t involve us. The concept of evil has become so archaic that, short of something like Nazism, we’re oblivious to the tiny, constant, morally questionable actions in the everyday lives of those around us – and of the person in the mirror. For us, evil is somewhere else, essentially nowhere.

Still, the capacity to do great evil smolders like an ember in each of our hearts. To become evil begins with a small compromise here, or a cheating-on-the-taxes there; not confronting one’s flirtatious buddy on the brink of an affair (“it’s none of my business,”), or failing to speak out against some injustice at the office or in society at large out of fear or embarrassment.

There’s a tiny Mother Theresa inside us all. But there’s also a tiny Adolf with maniacal delusions of grandeur – and the potential to let them loose if conditions make it possible. Which is why we have to stay vigilant about our everyday choices. This requires a hefty dose of grace and reliance on something (Someone) higher and stronger than our own willpower.

We are what we repeatedly do. Evil is everywhere: in the marrow and neurons; in the daily decisions. The unchecked thoughts. The undone kindness. The neglected duty. The failure to love. The small betrayal. Things with no immediately perceptible consequences. As Solzhenitsyn famously said: the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.

Do good things, and you strengthen your character. Do bad things, and you become Walter White – a regular middle-class guy on the outside, but a devil within.

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10 Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

1. Dignity of the Human Person

Belief in the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all Catholic social teaching. Human life is sacred, and the dignity of the human person is the starting point for a moral vision for society. This principle is grounded in the idea that the person is made in the image of God. The person is the clearest reflection of God among us.

2. Common Good and Community

The human person is both sacred and social. We realize our dignity and rights in relationship with others, in community. Human beings grow and achieve fulfillment in community. Human dignity can only be realized and protected in the context of relationships with the wider society.

How we organize our society -- in economics and politics, in law and policy -- directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The obligation to "love our neighbor" has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social commitment. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole society, to the common good.

3. Option for the Poor

The moral test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. The poor have the most urgent moral claim on the conscience of the nation. We are called to look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor. The "option for the poor," is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another. Rather it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community.

The option for the poor is an essential part of society's effort to achieve the common good. A healthy community can be achieved only if its members give special attention to those with special needs, to those who are poor and on the margins of society.

4. Rights and Responsibilities

Human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency -- starting with food, shelter and clothing, employment, health care, and education. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities -- to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

5. Role of Government and Subsidiarity

The state has a positive moral function. It is an instrument to promote human dignity, protect human rights, and build the common good. All people have a right and a responsibility to participate in political institutions so that government can achieve its proper goals.

The principle of subsidiarity holds that the functions of government should be performed at the lowest level possible, as long as they can be performed adequately. When the needs in question cannot adequately be met at the lower level, then it is not only necessary, but imperative that higher levels of government intervene.

6. Economic Justice

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. All workers have a right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, and to safe working conditions. They also have a fundamental right to organize and join unions. People have a right to economic initiative and private property, but these rights have limits. No one is allowed to amass excessive wealth when others lack the basic necessities of life.

Catholic teaching opposes collectivist and statist economic approaches. But it also rejects the notion that a free market automatically produces justice. Distributive justice, for example, cannot be achieved by relying entirely on free market forces. Competition and free markets are useful elements of economic systems. However, markets must be kept within limits, because there are many needs and goods that cannot be satisfied by the market system. It is the task of the state and of all society to intervene and ensure that these needs are met.

7. Stewardship of God's Creation

The goods of the earth are gifts from God, and they are intended by God for the benefit of everyone. There is a "social mortgage" that guides our use of the world's goods, and we have a responsibility to care for these goods as stewards and trustees, not as mere consumers and users. How we treat the environment is a measure of our stewardship, a sign of our respect for the Creator.

8. Promotion of Peace and Disarmament

Catholic teaching promotes peace as a positive, action-oriented concept. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "Peace is not just the absence of war. It involves mutual respect and confidence between peoples and nations. It involves collaboration and binding agreements." There is a close relationship in Catholic teaching between peace and justice. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among human beings.

9. Participation

All people have a right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. It is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity that all people be assured a minimum level of participation in the community. It is wrong for a person or a group to be excluded unfairly or to be unable to participate in society.

10. Global Solidarity and Development

We are one human family. Our responsibilities to each other cross national, racial, economic and ideological differences. We are called to work globally for justice. Authentic development must be full human development. It must respect and promote personal, social, economic, and political rights, including the rights of nations and of peoples. It must avoid the extremists of underdevelopment on the one hand, and "superdevelopment" on the other. Accumulating material goods, and technical resources will be unsatisfactory and debasing if there is no respect for the moral, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of the person.

Men don't believe in a devil now
As their fathers used to do.
They reject one creed because it's old
For another because it's new.

There's not a print of his cloven foot
Nor a fiery dart from his bow,
To be found in the earth or air today.
At least—they declare it is so!

But who is it mixes the fatal draught
That palsies heart and brain,
And loads the bier of each passing year
With its hundred thousand slain.

Who blights the bloom of the land today
With the fiery breath of hell?
If it isn't the devil that does the work,
Who does? Won't somebody tell?

Who dogs the steps of the toiling saint
and digs the pit for his feet?
Who sows the tares in the field of time,
wherever God sows His wheat?

The devil is voted not to be,
And of course, the thing is true,
But who is doing the kind of work
The devil alone should do?

We are told he does not go
About as a roaring lion now.
But whom shall we hold responsible
For the everlasting row

To be heard in home, in church, in state,
To the earth's remotest bound,
If the devil by a unanimous vote
Is nowhere to be found?

Won't somebody step to the front forthwith,
And make his bow and show
How the frauds and crimes of the day spring up
For surely we want to know.

The devil was fairly voted out,
And of course, the devil is gone.
But simple people would like to know,
Who carries his business on?

(attributed to Alfred J. Hough or Herbert Trench, late 1800's)

Gas Station Angel

I was driving home from a meeting this evening about 5, stuck in traffic on Colorado Blvd., and the car started to choke and splutter and die - I barely managed to coast, cursing, into a gas station, glad only that I would not be blocking traffic and would have a somewhat warm spot to wait for the tow truck. It wouldn't even turn over. Before I could make the call, I saw a woman walking out of the "quickie mart" building, and it looked like she slipped on some ice and fell into a gas pump, so I got out to see if she was okay. When I got there, it looked more like she had been overcome by sobs than that she had fallen; she was a young woman who looked really haggard with dark circles under her eyes. She dropped something as I helped her up, and I picked it up to give it to her. It was a nickel. At that moment, everything came into focus for me: the crying woman, the ancient Suburban crammed full of stuff with 3 kids in the back (1 in a car seat), and the gas pump reading \$4.95. I asked her if she was okay and if she needed help, and she just kept saying "I don't want my kids to see me crying," so we stood on the other side of the pump from her car. She said she was driving to California and that things were very hard for her right now. So I asked, "And you were praying?" That made her back away from me a little, but I assured her I was not a crazy person and said, "He heard you, and He sent me." I took out my card and swiped it through the card reader on the pump so she could fill up her car completely, and while it was fueling walked to the next door McDonald's and bought 2 big bags of food, some gift certificates for later, and a big cup of coffee. She gave the food to the kids in the car who attacked it like wolves, and we stood by the pump eating fries and talking a little. She told me her name and that she lived in Kansas City. Her boyfriend left 2 months ago and she had not been able to make ends meet. She knew she wouldn't have money to pay rent Jan 1 and finally in desperation had finally called her parents, with whom she had not spoken in about 5 years. They lived in California and said she could come live with them and try to get on her feet there. So she packed up everything she owned in the car. She told the kids they were going to California for Christmas but not that they were going to live there. I gave her my gloves, a little hug, and said a quick prayer with her for safety on the road. As I was walking over to my car, she said, "So, are you like an angel or something?" This definitely made me cry. I said, "Sweetie, at this time of year angels are really busy, so sometimes God uses regular people." It was so incredible to be a part of someone else's miracle. And of course, you guessed it, when I got in my car, it started right away and got me home with no problem. I'll put it in the shop tomorrow to check, but I suspect the mechanic won't find anything wrong... (author unknown)