

The Universal Forms of Love, IV

I have another prayer of Martin Franzmann to read as we begin class. This one is titled “In Democracy,” which I think is appropriate both in light of our subject matter today and where we are in our political calendar. Let us pray together.

“Almighty ruler of us all, You have made us to be both Caesar and Caesar’s subjects. You have given us, wrapped in the blessing of the free, this dual and difficult duty to fulfill. Give us the meekness of wisdom to know that the good laws we make are not our laws to simply do with as we please, but have upon them your hallowed instancy, your inviolable majesty, that when we make and honor bad laws we are flouting You, the righteous, and You will visit on us our unfaithfulness. Teach us to know that the men we have elected are Your instruments with Your sword in their hands. Teach us to bow before Your majesty hid in such deep disguise. In the name of Jesus, amen.”

We are continuing today a topic we began last time on the use of the moral law. We discussed classification and the excursus on the Ten Commandments in church history. This session’s topic is the secular use of the Decalogue. I want to introduce you to a German Calvinist, Johannes Althusius, as we get into this topic. He is not much remembered in our circles, although he is having something of a resurgence. He lived in the late 16th, early 17th century and wrote a book that is titled *Politica*, which was first published in 1603. It then went through two or three editions in which it was expanded. It is a treatise on political science (“politics” would be the way that it is translated). Politics was broader than the way in which we conceive of it today. It is political science, and he was a seminal thinker. He studied law and taught law at the Calvinist College, Harborne, which had an international student body. He was very influential in his time but we since lost track of him. He provides us with a good example of how to go about life in the civil community and it relates particularly to our topic on the secular use of the Ten Commandments.

There are four points about his system of political science that I would like to make briefly. If you want more detail about Althusius, check out the article in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy. That will give you the background and his place in the history of political science. He is a Calvinist. He is using Scripture, reason, and experience in order to develop this political science. He is the 17th Century equivalent of Abraham Kuyper. There is material in there that is still very useful in building a Christian approach to society.

The first point is his definition of politics or political science. “Politics is the science of linking human beings to each other for a social life.” He suggested a term for it that he thought would be better than “*politica*.” He wanted to call it “symbiotics” rather than “politics.” Well, that did not catch on, but it shows the positive direction of his thought. He is talking about the organization of human social life. Politics—or, as he would call it, symbiotics—is the science of linking human beings to each other for a social life. That is the definition. What is the goal?

The second point is that the end or goal of symbiotic man—man as a social being—is holy, just, comfortable, and happy symbiosis. He works that term in whenever he can. But he is talking about a life that is holy, just, comfortable, and happy—human beings living in community, the whole community. So it would lack nothing that is necessary or useful for a flourishing human life. He is talking about how we can organize society in order for human beings to flourish.

The third point is that part of his argument for the need for *politica* was that in this life, no one is self-sufficient. If we are going to have a useful, comfortable, happy social life, then the energies and activities of many are needed to supply these things. He is arguing that as long as we are isolated individuals, we cannot flourish as human beings. Human beings are social beings and they cannot live at all well without society.

The fourth point, then, is this mutual communication between human beings living in society—this common enterprise by which human beings flourish—involves three things: goods, services, and common rights. With these things, the needs of each and every person are supplied and the self-sufficient and mutuality of human society are achieved and social life established and conserved. He goes on and on, but the key point is that there are three things involved in the common enterprise, the common good of human beings living in community: goods, services, and common rights.

Here is where the secular use of the Decalogue comes in. It is within respect to common rights. He puts in the preface to his third edition that “the precepts of the Decalogue are included in political science to the extent that they infuse a vital spirit into this social life that we teach. They carry a torch. They prescribe and constitute a guiding star, a boundary for human society.” Notice the positive as well as the restraining aspect of the precepts: “They provide a guiding star, a boundary for human society. If anyone would take them out of politics, he would destroy it. Precepts of the Decalogue are integral to the social life of human beings living in community.” Notice he says, “the precepts of the Decalogue,” the principles that are there. He does distinguish the ecclesiastical from the secular, and so he divides the implications of the Decalogue corresponding to the ecclesiastical communion being religion and piety, which pertain to the welfare and eternal life of the soul. That is the church’s job. Corresponding to the latter, the secular use of the precepts of the Decalogue is justice that concerns this life rendering to each his due the second table of the Decalogue. So, he is primarily concerned that in the social life we recognize that there is this distribution of functions between the ecclesiastical side and what he calls the secular side, which is what we would refer to as the civil use of the law in society. This is a distinction between the first and second tables of the Law.

It is to be expected that after the history of the Ten Commandments in the church (which I discussed in the last session)—and the formative influence of them through all of those catechisms and so forth—that the Ten Commandments came to have a privileged place in the ordering of society. And Althusius’ position has had many followers. I am going to give you a couple of examples. Carl Henry wrote in his 1947 groundbreaking book, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, “The Ten Commandments disclose the only secured foundation for a society. All cultures cut loose from these principles have in them the vitiating leaven of decay. The Ten Commandments are the only secure foundation for society.” It is not just conservative evangelicals who write that way. That was Carl Henry in *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* when he issued that call, that Clarion call, to social involvement on the part of fundamentalist Christians who had basically withdrawn from political life and from the culture.

Two other books that are fairly recent that take that same position, the Althusian position we may call it, are Walter Harrelson’s *The Ten Commandments and Human Rights*, published in 1980 and Paul Layman’s *The Decalogue and a Human Future*, published in 1995. So, the recognition that the Decalogue is foundation for social life, and particularly the political life, is widespread, particularly as it has to do with the second table of the Law and the securing of human rights. We will make a brief characterization of how this works out. The first table of the Law, the first four commandments containing our duty toward God, call for the recognition on the part of others our right to worship and serve God above all things. If we are commanded in the first table of the Law to express love for the

Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, then that is a God-given right that has to be respected. The second table of the Law, the fifth commandment, “You shall honor your father and your mother,” establishes the right to exercise authority in God-given social structures. The command, “Honor your father and mother,” establishes the right of parents to train their children according to the education that is best fit for them. Parents are not only to provide for them, although that is implied also, but they are to bring them up as Christians in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The sixth commandment is obviously the right to life. The seventh commandment is the right to sexual integrity. The eighth commandment has to do with labor and its reward. “You shall not steal” means that there are things that I have as a consequence of my labor that are uniquely my personal property. The ninth commandment, “You shall not bear false witness,” is the right to one’s reputation or good name. And the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet,” gets right to the heart. I think that there is a right to be exempt from threats, serious threats, that harm the psyche. I think you can make a case for that. But certainly, each of these commands implies a corresponding right to be recognized and to be upheld in society. The Ten Commandments have been so useful in the development of Western society because they are a handy way of expressing what is also known by general revelation and by God’s common grace. Still, the Ten Commandments do organize this thought in a very profound way.

They have had a very profound effect on the development of American society as well as other Western societies. I will give you an example. Several years ago one of my sons was involved in a minor car accident. It was a hit-and-run. He was hit and the other guy ran. As a teenager, this was his first accident and it was on a rainy night. So he called me, and I went with him to the police department where we had to report the hit-and-run. We had to fill out a full report of everything that had happened. On the wall where the policemen write out their reports there was a list of numbers that went something like this: 101-premeditated murder; 102-assault with a deadly weapon; 103-some other sort of violence; 201-forcible rape; 202-sexual assault; 301-robbery; 302-breaking and entering. What has happened? Well, you are going down the list of the commandments and you are specifying particular crimes, the basis of which is the protection of human life. The Ten Commandments obviously have had a formative influence on the way in which we organize our criminal codes.

Remember, there is a distinction in Althusius between how the first table is applied (and who has the oversight of that) and the second table of the Law, which is the civil government. I think it is important to recognize that. We have moved away, in the Presbyterian Church in America, from the excessively paternalistic view of the civil government that was in the original Westminster Confession of Faith in which the civil magistrate was responsible for the extirpation of heresy. That put sound doctrine in the hands of the civil government. Well, depending on whether the civil government was Catholic or Protestant spelled persecution for either Protestants or Catholics. We finally realized that we might take another look at that in terms of how God wills His society and church to go forward in this age in which you do not root up the tares. You allow them to grow to the harvest and God will sort them out then so that freedom of conscience had to be established and that power of the state to enforce the first table of the Law reduced. The new form of the Westminster Confession that was drafted in 1788 has the responsibility of the civil government to protect the truth; that is, as an institution that God has ordained, it must be allowed to flourish. That is the role of government. But it uses a phrase that I think we could find better language for it. It calls the civil magistrate “nursing fathers.” That seems to me to be paternalistic to the point of being maternalistic. Is it really the way to think of a civil government as nurturing the church rather than protecting the church as a separate institution? Well, we will return to that in due course.

You would think that in light of our history and of this development that posting the Ten Commandments in public schools would not be problematic, but it is. It causes a firestorm every time

this issue comes up. In America in June 2005, the House of Representatives passed what is called “The Ten Commandments Defense Act.” It was an amendment to the Juvenile Crime Bill that was thought to be the appropriate way. What is behind that is the moral decay in our country and the fact that juveniles are involved in more and more crime. This came in the wake of the particularly violent episode at a high school and in the mood of “We need to do something about the moral decay in our society. Let us post the Ten Commandments!” The rationale was to permit display in schools and other public buildings “because these are the principles which we as a civil society need to live by to maintain order and decency and to preserve the American family.” (This is a direct quote from the bill.) You know, you get family values in there whenever you can, and you would think that that would not, in light of our history, be problematic. But it is questionable.

The ethical society does not have any disagreement with the principles of the second table. It affirms them. What it objects to is the religious context in which they are presented, and I think that you know that is the issue that we have to deal with. Does religious pluralism trump our historical roots? I think we need to be aware of the specifically religious context of the Ten Commandments. The reason for their desiring to post them is not just historical. The reason is really to recover the moral fabric of our society. If we post the Ten Commandments, maybe it will have some beneficial effect in terms of people adopting these or being reminded of them.

So there are basically two responses. One is of the ethical society, which resists the idea of posting them because of their religious context. The other one is from the “Reformed think tank,” which objects to them because it misses the issue of what education is. Education is religious, and we ought to have a different take on the public character of education distinguishing between government-sponsored education and ecclesial-sponsored education. Both serve public purposes and therefore the ecclesial-sponsored or private-sponsored ought to have the same benefit of the public support as does the government-sponsored schools. Well, this is one of the most contentious issues in our society. I support the idea of Christian education. I think that it is unjust that we cannot have full choice in terms of the education that people desire for their children. I will talk about that later. Our initial reaction is to be positively disposed toward posting the Ten Commandments. How could we be against that? That just seems so right and obvious that we almost fall into supporting that without thinking what its actual impact may be.

There is a different way to look at the Ten Commandments in the public schools that Stone versus Graham, the majority report, did actually affirm concerning the report. This is not a case in which the Ten Commandments are integrated into the school curriculum where the Bible may constitutionally be used in an appropriate study of history, civilization, ethics, comparative religion, or the like. I think a much better way is to take away that constitutionally-affirmed position. The place to teach the Ten Commandments is in history, social science, or political science, or any other subject if the purpose is the formative influence of the Ten Commandments and what they are. Or if raising the question of the source of moral obligation, then that certainly can be done, whereas the posting of the Ten Commandments aside from a specific purpose seems to me that you are taking something that appeared in a particular form to God’s people and making a secular use of what is a covenant with God’s people. The Ten Commandments include integrally the preface or prologue, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me.” Who is the author of The Ten Commandments? Well, it is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. You are taking the ten words that out of the whole Bible were spoken by God Himself and then inscribed by God Himself and using them for a secular purpose. I think that is an affront to people who are outside our tradition. And I think to be sensitive toward religious pluralism of our society, we ought to recognize that even though the commandments

embody universal moral norms (so their society must have these principles), the context in which they are given is particular. They were promulgated as the covenant way of life. So I think that we should distinguish between the civil use of the moral law that is known by general revelation and the secular use of the Decalogue. I think that we should study the Decalogue. In studying, we will show how it illumines what is known by general revelation. But the moral law known by general revelation is accessible to all. Posting the Decalogue imposes special revelation on some who do not recognize its authority and establishes the divine command of morality. I think you cannot get away from that because you cannot separate, in this form of the Decalogue, the principles from its religious context. You are making a secular use of a religious document. At the same time, I want to be careful to say that the principles, the precepts of the Decalogue, are the foundation of a society, and they can be shown to be bad. They need to be studied there without committing us to a particular view of society.

Arthur J. Dyke is a professor of social ethics at Harvard. He is a Christian who argues scripturally, and he has much to say that is good. I think his analysis of the contrast between the well-known American cartoon, Calvin and Hobbes, is very useful. He said, "Moral obligations are natural. They are expressions of our nature as social animals. Moral obligations are independent of governments. They are standards on which government should base their policies and by which these can be judged by everyone. Moral obligations are God's will and the image of God in everyone. Rulers and citizens are obligated by the same moral law. Moral obligations are universally known by human cognitive powers apart from any special revelation." So, the moral law is a universal standard. That is the part that I want to focus on. I would distinguish that from the question of the source of moral obligation. That is the next question. But the fact is that there is an overlapping consensus on common morality. I would put it this way: common morality, by virtue of general revelation and common grace, exists without a common ethical theory to back it up. I think that there is a weakness in not giving an account of our common morality. I think that there is an apologetic opening for us to present the divine command theory of moral obligation. But if we have to wait for common morality for us to have a common epistemology, we are not going to have it. There are disagreements even within those who accept a divine command theory of morality. In other words, you may have theoretical agreement without entire practical agreement, and you can have practical agreement without answering the theoretical questions.

I would say the common core of ethical beliefs from a theological point of view known by general revelation by God's common grace forms an overlapping consensus so that there is pre-theoretical agreement that we can build on. Pre-theoretical agreement is before we give a theory the ground and source of moral obligation. There are four basic moral principles of pre-theoretical agreement. These four general principles of common morality are reciprocity, consistency, non-maleficence, and beneficence. Reciprocity means to do unto others as you would have them to do unto you, which children can learn at a very early age. There was a psychologist on one of the news broadcasts this week who said, "Research has indicated that as early as three years of age a child can express empathy." In other words, children understand that they should not hurt someone because they know what it is to be hurt. It develops that early. By age six, there is a clear knowledge of right and wrong. The traditional age of the year of discretion, the traditional age of one's first communion in the Roman Catholic system or for one's confirmation, is age seven. It is at age seven that psychologists have determined that children can recognize symbolism so that they can understand the Lord's Supper and Communion and so forth. It is very early. And in these early ages, common morality needs to be taught. So, the first principle is reciprocity, do to others as you would have them to do unto you. The second principle is consistency. Children learn this very early. "It is not fair," they will say. You do not treat each of your children alike. You have to give a reason why one child gets more attention than another child, if that is the case. Well, "it is not fair," is one of the stages children learn. The third principle is what is technically known as non-maleficence (do not hurt people). The opposite of that is beneficence (do good to people), which is

the fourth principle. On those four principles there is an overlapping consensus. As children are instructed in the home, those are filled out. As they go to school, they find or should find that there is an overlapping consensus with instruction that they get in the school.

Well, that takes you a long way. That is what the character education movement in America has introduced. I am saying that there is a better way of going about our public education. I think that even if we do have a choice in terms of whether we will have a Christian education or a government education, there will always be a need for common, government-controlled schools. That is going to be with us for a long time. These are the seven models of moral education that are operative now. You will see that the character education model, which is taking the lead now, emphasizes content and universal virtues. They are the more general ones. Killing is wrong. Cheating is wrong. To children, the basic moral principles need to be communicated dogmatically. This is why the character education movement of the 1990s is so superior to the values clarification movement of the 1970s and 1980s that, in order to avoid imposing morality on others, dealt with the issue of whose morality we were going to impose. Students would discuss and clarify their own values, and a student could give a very clear account of why he cheated. He cheated because “that is the way to get ahead. This is that kind of a world, and it is worth the risk of cheating because success is not tied to intrinsic performance. It is tied to getting ahead. And if I can get ahead by cheating (adopted values from our society) then what is a teacher to say?” She can say, “Not in my classroom,” but that is imposing the teacher’s morality on the classroom. So the values clarification movement finally fizzled because it was thought that we cannot agree on objective values. The character education movement says, “We know what morality to teach! We have a common morality. We may not be able to agree on the theoretical basis for it, but we know that respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, civic responsibility, and fairness are all right. We know those. When we get into upper grades, we can talk about the details. We know that killing human beings is wrong. In the upper grades, we can talk about the morality of capital punishment—that is the taking of a human life.”

By the way, does capital punishment fall under the general commandment of not taking human life or is there some special consideration that makes it right? Well, that is an application of how that works out. Is euthanasia right? Involuntary euthanasia is taking somebody’s life for their own good, putting them out of their misery even though they have not asked for it. That seems to be less of a borderline than voluntary euthanasia where a person asks to be taken out of his misery or at least to be assisted by a physician in being taken out his misery. Infanticide seems fairly clear, although some question it. Abortion is the most debatable issue in our society or at least the most debated one in any case, and you have to make that case. Not everyone is immediately convinced that abortion is wrong. But you move from the special protection that you accord to human life as intrinsically right to the more borderline questions. But we know that human life must have special protection. The question is whether human life in the womb should have the same protection as human life outside the womb.

At the same time, these other models are still operative: a civics model, a philosophy model, and so forth. There are still those who adopt an anti-moral education stance that it is not the function of the school to teach morality and that this is respect for moral autonomy and avoidance of indoctrination. That was the position behind the values clarification movement. Public schools were very much critiqued for not teaching morality, and so values clarification was a way of recovering that particular influence. The character education model, which now is on the ascendancy, is something I think we should support. I think that it has its limitations, but it is a common morality and it is proving successful in the younger grades, which is largely where it is effective for children who have received minimal moral education in the home. It is providing an incentive to develop their character in structured ways that are based on universal principles. If we tracked them down, we could see the impact of the Ten Commandments, and Christianity in particular, on Western civilization.

The Didache is the earliest document we have. In expounding the protection of human life, the Didache condemns both infanticide and abortion. It was counter-cultural to do that, but Christians were a distinct minority. Hippocrates was a minority in the medical profession when he introduced his oath that you had to take in order to study medicine with him, that you would not perform abortion or use your medicine for euthanasia. You could not get this information unless you took an oath not to use it that way, which shows general revelation and common grace to a high degree of specificity as possible. Christian faith, as it spread, persuaded people on those issues. In the late 20th century there is an abandonment of that. It is an apostasy from a position that was originally seen widely to be an extrapolation of the sanctity of human life that is sort of protected by the sixth commandment. I would say that the precepts are still there, but they are not presented in the particular context. We need not think that in order to have these principles in society we necessarily have to post them in classrooms.

Another principle is that taking something that belongs to someone else is wrong. Children can learn that very early. It is not just a clarification of some subjective value. We all think that that is wrong. There is an interesting experiment that a professor at Stanford University uses when he is faced with skepticism about moral principles. He would tell his students, "Imagine that I am going to parachute you into a country somewhere in the world and you have no idea where it is. As soon as you get out of your parachute, I want you to walk up to the first person you see, take away whatever he or she is holding, and run away with it. Then see what happens. This is with the possible exception that you have landed in front of a Buddhist monk and taken away his begging bowl. And his only response is to sigh, 'karma.'" You will have run squarely into the universal concept of property right codified in the Western world through the commandment "Do not steal." You did not bring that commandment with you, but you ran into it. Travelers going from country to country can reasonably assume, without consulting law books, that most forms of theft and physical assault will be forbidden wherever they go. There may be some relativistic applications. And when we get to more complex issues—such as taxation and whether or not it is confiscation of personal property or a legitimate government function and whether it is legitimate in taxation to regard it as redistribution of wealth—there are implications that you get in the more borderline situations that provoke a lot of discussion and fault. But the basic principles, as they are embodied in the Decalogue, are known to human beings in a universal way. Relativism has gotten a big press, but actually we do not live that way. International agreements would be worthless if they were not based on some international understanding, a trans-cultural understanding of what a commitment to a treaty is.

I have been asked what I think about posting the Ten Commandments in schools verses posting them in public places. It is clear the Supreme Court in America did not exclude the teaching of the Ten Commandments in social science and so forth. As a matter of historical fact, this is the basis of our common law. You may teach them, and I think that we should. We should insist that part of the curriculum be the understanding of how Western law was formulated in light of these ten principles. We should compare them with other cultures in terms of what standards they used in order to organize their social life. It is clear in the curriculum of public schools that the Ten Commandments do have a place, and the Supreme Court itself has said there is a constitutional place for them. It is when you get into the posting of the Ten Commandments as a religious document that you run into difficulty. Even though atheists are a minority, we have learned that we still have to respect the public character of our government-sponsored education. Although government is based on a transcendent ground for moral obligation, that government should be neutral toward the particular formations of special revelation. I think that was an important principle that was established. It took the 18th century to get that principle straightened out. The last heretic executed in Scotland was in the 1690s. It was a man with the

improbable name of Thomas Aikenhead. I do not know why that sticks with me, but he was either a pain to somebody or somebody gave him a pain.

I think there is some difference in posting the Ten Commandments in public places. I think it is a kind of in-your-face move to post them even though there is a case to be made because, throughout all of history, they have the privileged place in terms of the formation of our code. They still are a religious document and the way they became a part of our code was not through imposition from above but from development through all these catechisms from below. And I think that is still the way we should go about it. The Decalogue should be taught by the church that it is the covenant way of life. But it has its impact on society as Christians live out and implement that view in society. It seems to me that there is a better way of achieving our goal of a more just society. Simply posting the Ten Commandments is not the way to do it. Besides, you have to look at the purpose of the Ten Commandments in Scripture. It is both to inform and to humble us. We run the risk of equating civic righteousness with the whole of morality by the secular use of the covenant document. We should at least be aware that we are posting the covenant in that.

I have been asked to explain oaths. To take an oath refers to the transcendent ground that you are taking. The reason the oath was taken that way is that it is common to take an oath by your supreme value or your ultimate reality, whatever that is for you. So, in general, it is God—it is a religious oath. But in America we allow for people to affirm. In the Anabaptist tradition, for those who say, “My word is my bond” and take an absolute position against oaths, we allow them to affirm. We take them for their word on that. The idea of an oath was that when there are perplexing circumstances and you are trying to decide between them, you made a person say, “As God as my witness, what I am about to give is the truth.” And the thought was that surely that solemn affirmation or oath with God as my witness would make a person tell the truth. The Westminster Confession has a profound phrase. It says, “An oath is to be taken, in the plain sense of the words, without equivocation or mental reservation.” Otherwise, an oath is not an oath. If you have to play with words or if people have to figure out what is in your mind, then an oath is worthless. It has to be given. This is why we have the oath “to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” I think we ought to add now, “the plain truth,” and not use words in equivocal ways with special meanings that nobody else has.

The question has been asked, “Do you think America was founded as a Christian nation?” I think that it is undeniable that biblical religion was one of the streams on which America was founded, but there was also the classic Republican stream and an individualistic stream. The three streams are represented by Benjamin Franklin (the individualistic stream), Thomas Jefferson (the classic Republican stream), and John Witherspoon (the biblical tradition). All three were signers of The Declaration of Independence. Those streams came together so we have always had a mixed foundation. But we have assumed that we were a Protestant nation, not just a Christian nation. With the immigration of Catholics, we began to have to realize that that is not true and I think that it is not accurate to history. In addition to that, you have to take into account where we are now with 10% of our population who give “no religion” as their religion. That is a significant part of the population. Remember, the purpose of political science is to allow the whole community to live together. If you erect these barriers, religious barriers of alienation, you tear the social fabric. We will work on this again when we come to the role of the civil government, but I am concerned that we recognize that it is the whole society that we have in mind, not a particular part of it. The society as a whole is not in covenant with God, although it is clear that Christian principles have heavily influenced our society and should.

Instead of arguing that America should be a Christian nation, I would say we want to be a just nation and fulfill the Preamble to the Constitution. It is actually quite adequate in terms of what ought to guide

us for our social philosophy. It states that we are to “establish justice, provide for the common defense, and promote the general welfare.” All those things are what we, the people of the United States, say we are about. And I think that we should acknowledge that. So I think that we ought not to make the Ten Commandments an icon or a totem as though just posting them is going to have the major effect. It is alienating. I am probably in a minority in terms of objecting to prayer in the public schools as well as the posting of the Ten Commandments, but I do so on grounds that we ought to maintain a distinction between government-authorized religion and the recognition that there is a transcendent ground that is above the government, which is the ground, sometimes, of civil disobedience because these laws are human laws that may or may not reflect the will of God for society.

There is one other topic that I would like to say something about. I have written on this in the book so it will not take us too long. I would say it could be titled, “The Source of Moral Obligation.” I do think you have to answer that question at some point. We have a common morality—that is a fact. What is the source of morality? What is the source of moral obligation? In the book, I call it the ground of moral law. I write, “If human beings are what the Bible says we are, created in the image of God, no account of morality will be adequate that stops short of its ground in the nature and will of the Creator.” You have to give an account of moral obligation. If we are created in the image of God, then we are not going to be able to give an adequate account without referring to the transcendent ground. I argue that we need to be aware of that position. Our position is technically called “The Divine Command Theory of Moral Obligations”—that on biblical presuppositions all morality is grounded in the character, the acts, the purposes, and the instructions of the God of revelation. So, all morality is grounded in the nature and will of God.

I went into some distinctions of that earlier. Some commandments derive directly from the nature of God and some derive from the way that He has created human beings. There is a way in which we can refer to natural law in the context. There is a way that God’s will is expressed in terms of the way He has made us in His image. Then there are other commands that are obeyed in particular settings because that is God’s purposes for His people at a particular time. One objection to The Divine Command Theory goes like this: if morality is what God commands, then in a world created by an omnipotent demon, the opposite of what we think of morality would be morality. People who raise that objection have the idea that your principle of morality, whatever it is, must hold for all possible universes and so they imagine a universe created by an omnipotent demon. And if you have a Divine Command Theory of Morality, the demonic would be moral. Well, you see, you can only think up a demonic category on the basis of the only universe there is. Then you judge this possible world that you thought up on the basis of the morality that derives from the real world that is created by a holy and loving God. We should never let folks get away with The Divine Command Theory without specifying the nature of God as a holy and loving God. That is the only God there is. There is not any other possible world. There is only this universe, and it is the creation of a holy and loving God. His commands—some of which are simply His will for us, some derive from the way He is created, and others reflect His nature—are all the commands of a loving God. Therefore, they cannot be cruel or have anything that would be alien to that fundamental nature of God.