

Decalogue of Earthly Delights: Our New, Improved Commandments

The Rev Peter Mullen 26 6 2018

In the face of such a multiplicity of spiritual choices – a veritable supermarket of all the faiths – it proves difficult to take the religious temperature of the nation. But don't imagine for a minute that we live in a society which has abandoned the Ten Commandments. We have done much better than that and improved them by thoroughly modernising them. The original Ten Commandments were obviously a no-no for our enlightened secularised consumerism. We have ingeniously kept the Commandments but inverted their teaching. The old Commandments were about the glory of God, but now God is dead – thank God, so to speak - and our aim is the happiness and wellbeing of man. (Forgive the lapse: I know I shouldn't use the word *man*, but old habits die hard.)

Before he died, stuffy old God said, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Such exclusivity will never do today, so we have rewritten this in accordance with the precepts of diversity to say that there are many gods: the Muslim god, Hindu gods, the god of Mormonism, of Seventh Day Adventism, Jehovah's Witness, Scientology, and the Jedi. Our new enlightened theology is radically ecumenical and so we have declared it a basic human right for anyone – especially the inmates of our prisons – to worship Satan. Say what you like about Satan, but he was never a killjoy – unlike the mean old bloke who used to be up there in heaven.

God said, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." This prohibition was something belonging to primitive savagery. But the fact is that our secular society is more beguiled and enthralled by *image* – and rightly so - than any ancient tribesperson: film stars, footballers and politicians spend millions in the hire of professionals to hone and polish their image. Our new philosophers have abolished the old and restrictive opposition between appearance and reality. You *are* your appearance now, and To Be Is To Be Seen When Reality Is A Screen. It helps the economy too. And it sells TV advertising space and the colour supplements. God said, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Now emancipated from this superstitious convention, we have installed the exclamations *God* and *Christ* as the casual blasphemies of our daily speech. Without such utterances, how could we hope adequately to express our irritation when someone gets ahead of us at the traffic lights or in the queue for a Big Mac?

God said, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Quaint and ridiculous! Rather, shop till you drop and go boozing and clubbing 24/7. You owe it to yourself. Remember to reward yourself with little treats.

God said, "Honour thy father and thy mother." What those old fogeys? We've simply inverted this to, "Parents obey your children" Failure to provide for their every desire – really the word I'm looking for is *demand* – is nothing less than child-abuse. As for our fathers and mothers, they should make speed and shuffle off this mortal coil when their existence becomes simply too inconvenient for us. On no account must the wrinklies be allowed scope to interfere with our *lifestyle*. They've had their day, the miserable old sods. Why don't they just do the decent thing and sod off? Of course nowadays we can give them a bit of help to do just that.

God said, "Thou shalt not kill." What a spoilsport the old God was! We *like* killing. All those cheerful stabbings in our towns and cities. And there were more people killed

in the wars, purges and genocides of our thoroughly progressed 20th century than were slaughtered in all the previous centuries put together.

God said, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” How puritanical can you get? Nowadays we all know how repressive restraint and abstinence can be. If you don’t want to end up screwed up and neurotic, put yourself around a bit. You have a right to a happy and fulfilled sex life and don’t let anyone else tell you otherwise.

God said, “Thou shalt not steal.” Of course we don’t take that seriously these days. Neither do the police and we applaud the good example they set in never trying to catch any burglars.

God said, “Thou shalt not bear false witness.” It’s not really lying as such, is it? Let’s call it *spin*. We all need spin in order to boost our image – see previous paragraphs – and self-esteem

God said, “Thou shalt not covet.” The old God knew bugger all about economics, didn’t he? Without greed, envy and our everlasting craving for more and bigger, the credit card companies would be out of business; the travel agents and manufacturers of motor cars and mobile phones would go to the wall. The whole splendid glitz that is the advertising industry would collapse if we stopped being such greedy bastards. So go ahead and Spend. Spend, Spend – even if you don’t have the cash.

As George Bernanos wrote, “Europe is living under the sun of Satan.” And a fine warm sun it is too! Such an improvement on the everlasting winter prescribed by the old Commandments.