

The ancient people lived in a world that differed by far from ours, and so did their world view and concerns. In the Bible, we encounter certain traditional practices that do not fit our understanding and practice: the observance of the ritual cleanliness is one.

The writer of Mark identifies to his readers that the practice of washing hands, the produce from the market, and the cups, pots, and kettles, are the practice of the Pharisees and all the Jews. By the fact that this commentary was necessitated for the readers, we can deduce that the predominant readership of the Gospel according to Mark was the Gentile Christians, to whom this ritual practice was quite foreign.

Nowadays, we know about the microbes, so we understand how important it is to wash our hands, food, and pots and pans. It would be wrong for us to assume, however, that the ancient Hebrews understood the microbial infections, and practiced the similar degree of

personal hygiene as we understand it. It was more of a ritual cleansing, not the actual disinfecting or sanitizing; it could have been no more than merely getting one's hands wet in the same bowl of what could be classified as stagnant water by the modern standards.

Today, we the modern people are more concerned with things such as: "How many calories does this drink have?" "Is this healthy to eat?" "Is this car less polluting?" "Does this dress make me look fat?" "Does this shirt make me look young or old?" "Do we have enough cat food?" "Is this the right time to buy a house?" "Which vacation is the better deal, Italy, or Hawaii?" Granted, the ancients probably were concerned with the similar subjects, but they had one more pressing concern. The ancients were preoccupied with: "Will it defile me or sanctify me?"

True, they were also concerned with whether one being the Hebrew or the Gentile, but such a

distinction of race or religion has been present in every culture, as long as there have been distinctions in the races and cultures. The modern people are rarely concerned, however, whether what they are about to do would defile them or sanctify them.

To be frank, which one of us is concerned about the ritual cleanliness? Do we care, if eating bacon and sausage for breakfast and spareribs for dinner would defile us? Do we wash our hands, because we wanted to sanctify or purify ourselves? Do we care, this way or that way, what Jesus explained to his detractors?

The fact is that we rarely look at our lives from the perspective of defilement/sanctification. We modern people tend to look at things through the perspective of making a profit, or of the legal or moral boundary. How different the world would be, if we all began to look at life from the perspective of defilement/sanctification?

Instead of asking whether it is legal, how about asking if it is also sanctifying? How many things have been made legal, and those legalized things have legally disenfranchised and defrauded and degraded and dehumanized people?

Your house was foreclosed, and the sheriffs threw you and your stuffs out into the street; it surely was done legally. Would it make you feel defiled or sanctified?

Your insurance company refused to cover your sick child who died in your arms next week. It sure was done legally. Would that make you feel defiled or sanctified?

You were dismissed from your job, and found out the newbie you trained filled your position with the bigger pay and the larger office. Would it make you feel defiled or sanctified?

You were taken from your homes and businesses, and sent to live in a compound surrounded by barbed wire, because the nation

believed you might pose the security threat to the country. How defiled or sanctified would you feel?

Would you feel justified having done that to others, because it was all done legally? Being legal does not necessarily mean it is sanctified. Things could be legal, moral, and defiling at once.

If we focus on the ancient ways of determining what defiles a person—that is, avoiding pork, etc.—we may not find anything useful to us. If we pay attention to the subject that defiles a person, as Jesus explained it, however, we may find that it still has an important lesson for the modern life.

According to Mark, Jesus picked 12 examples of what defiles a person:

"Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile. "For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come:

fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

These 12 things just about cover everything that makes human life juicy and fancy. Without these, T.V and movies would not be attracting the viewers. Most of them are actually what regular people do, cherish, or enjoy. One might say that they are what make soap operas and reality shows worth watching, boost their ratings, and attract the lucrative advertisement sponsorship.

If we focus on what Jesus said, the source of everything that defiles a person is not outside the person, or something that enters the person by ingestion. The source of what defiles a person is from the human heart, that is, the human intention. All the evil in this world, everything that defiles God's creation, came from the human mind. Even though God created the human being good,

the human mind now is capable of what is sinful and defiling. That is so, because, as the old story tells it, sin entered the human mind. The human being has fallen from the grace of God, and sinned. Once sin entered, the human mind is capable of producing the evil intention, and it implements the evil intention into action. It is the evil intention, even though it is yet to be implemented into action, that already defiles.

If we accept the teaching of Jesus, and look at the issues of life from the perspective of defilement/sanctification, the first thing that must be called into question is the notion that the end justifies the means. Instead, we need to look at the source of the intention that produced the means and the end.

Can you imagine that God intended evil, but the end happened to come out good, when God created the Universe? Can you also imagine that a war can end all wars—that one more bomb bigger than the enemy's

will end further violence? We would be lying, if we said we do all that, because we are concerned with the sanctity of the human life. In truth, we do all that out of the necessity and expediency. You cannot keep the sanctity of human life by killing.

The means which we employ, in order to reach our desired end, is justified only in our own eyes. In the eyes of the victims of such means we employed, it will serve only to motivate them further to reverse or revenge the end which we have just imposed upon them. Our choice and application of the particular means gives the moral ground to the others to employ whatever the means they so determine. It is simply the game of tit for tat.

It is an unending cycle of defilement after defilement. As Senator Feinstein stated on May 20th, this year, the two most effective tools used to recruit the terrorists are Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. These are the means that we employed that

carry serious meanings for the Muslim world. You just know we will be paying dearly for those pictures and stories in the near future.

If we follow Jesus' teachings, our intention must be sanctified. The means which we employ to implement that intention must also be sanctified. Only then, the end that we desire may come out sanctified.

The human intention as the source of all defilement, as Jesus pointed out, is an important clue. Take, for an example, what people do, when a hurricane strikes. People all go out and hoard the goods. They all have the good intention of staying well. But its collective end result is drying up the supply, so that there are people who cannot have anything to ride out the storm. What works for an individual does not work for a group of people. The good intention of an individual people somehow was turned into a folly—an evil outcome. And folly defiles the person.

I understand that the intention must be sanctified, and the means must be sanctified, if the end goal is to remain sanctified. But aside from it, why is it so difficult for Americans to establish functioning national healthcare, when other smaller, poorer nations successfully run their own programs?

Why has our great nation failed, since the Nixon administration, to establish a functioning national healthcare for its citizens? Why is God's blessing absent, when the national healthcare is concerned? Who and what are standing in the way of God's blessing? Who and what continue to defile this land?

I see this debate that is taking place in regards to the national health care. I believe that its intention is good: everyone deserves the timely access to a competent health care. Who can argue against it? It is a noble cause.

Should you have to wait for the cancer to reach the advance stage,

in order to access the healthcare? Wouldn't it be far more humane, healthy, expedient, and economical, to focus on the preventive medicine? It would allow everyone to have the access to the quality healthcare, if we distribute the resources wisely. The fact is that the vast number of people is not able to gain that access today.

If we apply Jesus' teaching to this "life and death" issue of national healthcare, we can ask this question: are the intention and the action that follow this national healthcare sanctified? We might want to question what might be the intentions of the insurers, healthcare providers, and the pharmaceutical companies, and of those lawmakers who take significant contributions from them.

And the people who support or oppose the national healthcare—are their intentions also sanctified? Or, is their mentality similar to the hoarding mentality—the best medicine for me, the best doctor for me, the

best treatment and facility for me, all the time and any time I want? Or are they just so scared and angry at the thought of losing what they have now that they cannot think coherently?

The simple intention of staying well seems good enough on the individual level, but for a society as a whole, it is not a wholesome intention. The selfish profit motivation serves only the few. We need a different set of intentions, imaginations, and plans, when we consider the welfare of a great number of people, for our great nation as a whole.

Our means to achieve that greater end must also be distinct from those means to which we, as individuals, have been accustomed: our self-serving mentality cannot serve the nation as a whole. The end product achieved through such an individualistic means will only serve the well-to-do and the powerful. It will not be suitable for the welfare of the great

number of regular people,
including the poor and the weak.

As Christian disciples, we need to ask the similar questions that Jesus also asked: What actually defiles a person? Apostle Paul also raised the similar concern in I Corinthians 6:12:

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful.

Indeed, all things maybe legal and moral, but not all legal and moral things sanctify. In order to stand upright before God, the Christian disciples must ask one more question: Do my intention and my action defile me or sanctify me?

As long as we ask this question, and remember what actually defiles a person, we will stand a very good chance to enter into eternal life.