

# **The Corruption of Parenthood: Consequences of Protestant Tampering with the Ten Commandments**



by [Friedrich Hansen](#) (January 2022)

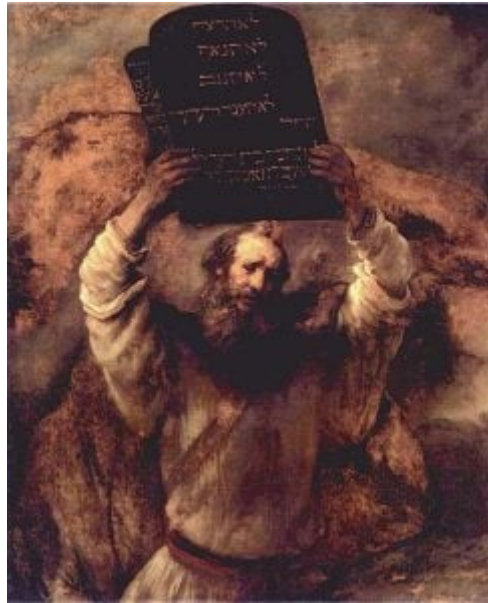
Rembrandt van Rijn, who lived from 1606-1669 in Leiden and

Amsterdam, identified himself with the Counter-Reformation. He can probably be taken as a forerunner of family resilience and an opponent of state interventionism *avant la lettre*. At the time he was reacting to the Dutch reform of the fifth commandment predated by the even more radical German national revolution. The Reformation of Martin Luther had basically handed over personal conscience to the state as it was codified after the Thirty Year War. The state where you happened to live, determined how you would have to worship. This is the political context which prompted Dutch Reformers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to downgrade the obligation to honour your parents from the duties toward the divine which are codified in the first half of the ten commandments.

The original Jewish fifth commandment stressed a firm connection between tradition and freedom as it can only be preserved in the family. It also refers to the importance of personal choices following Moses' option for life/law over death/impulse. Importantly the fifth commandment, as codified in the Torah, is the only one that comes with a reward: a long life in the Promised Land. For the land Israel contains the fruits of God's creation needed to feed his creatures. Yet in order to live sustainably these resources have to be used carefully which in turn demands experience transmitted over many generations. Hence only children informed by their parents' prudence can make good choices. After all if children and adolescents are left to their own devices they will take lots of unnecessary risks.[\[1\]](#)

Unfortunately the Reformation would not have any of this. It is for this reason that it cancelled the primacy of ritual and deed which had sustained Judaism over many millennia. The reformers obscured them with the internalization of Jesus Christ. But as the British say: you cannot eat your cake and have it too. The source of divine bliss cannot be devoured as Protestantism claimed. It has to remain external if it is to be sustainable and permanent. This Jewish principle had been

abandoned by universal Catholicity which is why its condition remains precarious today. Even worse is the situation of Western Protestantism thanks to the abandonment of traditional liturgy and rituals in the Reformation.



Rembrandt: "Moses Breaking the Tablets of the Law," 1659

Thanks to its inward turn, instead of looking after your neighbour and honouring your parents, looking after themselves became the Protestant *raison d'être* – enhanced by the indulgence of music. Rather than charitable deeds, faith was the important thing: "sola fide" as Martin Luther would put it. Since piety became invisible when it was turned "inward", outward awe against one's parents became invisible too and would eventually fade away. In the long process of secularisation, stretching over five centuries, it would be substituted by the liberal and self-referential virtues of "honesty and sincerity" in the phrase of Lionel Trilling.

Following the inward turn the Reformers not only disentangled the rewards for piety but also the objective criteria for religious observance. The beneficial subordination to parental experience vanished and a culture of immediate gratification of instincts was encouraged, putting the West on the path of a smorgasbord of addictions. The denial of external and intangible divine blessing and ritual would rebound with the

dependency from ritualized external tangible substances. Soon after the Reformation alcohol consumption reached an average of four litres of met/vine a day, as we learned from a recent German exhibition on the Thirty Years War. It is for this reason that modern emancipation from "religious superstition" and parental authority would pave the way for modern additions to identity, including sexual identity which keep undermine common sense, good will and Western constitutionalism. Even the latest awakening of the undying Protestant indulgence in self-righteousness, wokism, points to a Puritan legitimacy gap reaching back to the European break of generational continuity reflected in the Protestant Reformation.

As they arrogated themselves the Jewish claims to "God's chosen people," Protestants in fact turned themselves into its very opposite: the proverbial "self made man." As a result they would gradually forget about the duty of honouring traditions and devotion ot parenthood. Another way of looking at this while presupposing that the Reformation involved a process of "internalization" is that Christ took the place previously inhabited by one's parents. This gendered Christian succession of Judaism is the most likely candidate for driving the feminist craving for justice. This would be perhaps the most detrimental result of the Reformation.

All this illustrates the importance of the downgrading of the Jewish fifth commandment from "duties against the divine" toward mere duties against the neighbour, which make up the second half of the ten commandments. This crude intervention removed the divine aura of parenthood from the Christian creed and also ruined the privileged role of the family as the pillar of nationhood. By levelling divine with human duties the Reformation set Europe on the road toward secularisation.

Rembrandt was one of the first to recognize the danger of these changes and with his Moses painting he reminded everyone to the original Jewish rendering of the fifth commandment. He would have certainly supported today's homeschooling which has

sprang up again fairly recently in the Anglosphere. Only in Germany still dominated by Lutheran doctrines it is still forbidden, in keeping with legislation created by the state-centred Nazis. This Protestant blunder with the sanctity of the family follows the prior Catholic blunder with regard to the Jewish egalitarian gender dyad by creating a male representative of God in the netherworld. The Torah fashioned the gender dyad in the particularist Mosaic synthesis of monotheism with monogamy as the marriage of complementarity and unity between the natural sexes.

This delicate institutional frame was destroyed by the universalist and emancipatory "passio Christi" of Pauline Theology. Originally serving as a symbolic mitigation of the Greek same-sex dyad Pauline principles were reflecting the existential alienation between the sexes in Athens. That male-male affinity stretched loyalty beyond the family into peer groups and polytheism. The effect was to flatten out the vertical of authority which in antiquity used to inform many generations of the family under monotheism. Drawing on the culture of Hellenism one of the leading effects of the Reformation was upending the biblical male-female relationship of transcendent unity.

After the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem Jesus Christ had substituted the Jewish biblical dyad of the sexes with a male-centred theology which inspired the dreadful crusades in the medieval world of knights. Its misogynic Christian undertones were rooted in Paul's famous letter to the Corinthians. Thus the centripetal orientation of the Jewish family was lost very early on. In auditive Judaism the centripetal family is maintaining the precarious balance between love and justice. Under Christian Hellenism this balance has been inverted into centrifugal peer relations depending on the visual sense, centred on power and envy.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians is still the most influential example for transcending the family nexus of generations based

on oral parental transmittance of divine revelation. This is encapsulated in the unique particularist and centripetal setting of the Jewish "auditive paradigm" representing the proximity of family bonds. Pauline quasi-horizontal universalism aimed at replacing this vertical setting of the family, its particularism of oral transmittance of divine revelation as the glue of the generations. All this speaks to the similarity between divine and parental authority which is wedded to the auditive paradigm. The religious image ban protects parental authority by the prohibition to see one's parents naked. By contrast the Pauline attempt to remove divine revelation from the family context was prone to transgress the natural reach of the spoken word. Inevitably and predictably it is from the Pauline universalist ambitions that the need for visual proofs of divinity emerges. Hence Christ stands for the transgression of the family bounds by which the female connotation of the Jewish God, named *shekinah*, gets lost. Spatial Pauline expansion and the reach for universal immanence instead betray the substitution of family love with church power which emerged from Mediterranean Hellenism associated with the male gender. It is for this reason that the imagery mobilized with Jesus Christ in the netherworld was bound to unravel the concept of transcendental authority which was rooted in the divine imprimatur of Hebrew's aversion to written vowels.

Seen from a different angle, Christ's incarnation made it difficult to keep the monotheist "image ban" in place. For Christ has relativized the sanctification of time over space given the enchanted biographical places of Jesus. The attachment to places and corporeality condemned Christians to wait for gratification and punishment in the afterlife making it difficult to learn from mistakes in this life. Michael Wyschogrod noted astutely that the notions of divine eternity and Jewish hope had been compromised by the fact that Christ had already made an appearance on earth once. The proxy saviour literally disrupted the natural order of the family

with an androgynous mixed character, a *tertium comparationis* inserted between male and female roles, which to this day confuses natural gender complementarity. In no uncertain terms Christ emerged as a metaphysical projection into visibility of the transcendent, i.e. exclusively audible, Jewish God. Visibility was meant to provide certainty through tangible proof in the universal imagery of Christ. But the price to be paid for this was abandoning the particularistic Jewish family and love of life which seems to be tied to the limited range of the human voice.



Michelangelo Pieta 1498/99, St Peter Basilica Rome

### *Particularism and Piety*

Universalism disrupts the natural bond of proximity between hearing and obeisance constituting the divinary family. In its Greek visual rendition the word "divining" means foresight tied to the gods. This was a setback against the Jewish concept of divination on the level of the auditive sense internalized as "promise," subject to the personally kept word. The Christian disruption of this concept occurred first with Paul, would then be deepened by Augustine only to be made irreversible with Luther and Calvin during the Reformation. This brings us back to the changes of the ten commandments, initiated by the Dutch reformers, to which Rembrandt took offence.

In its Jewish version it obliged the pious person to honour one's parents as the image of the divine following the pious obligation of *imitatio dei*. It teaches us to let go



of appetites, postpone desires and sacrifice personal will for the sake of peace in the family. This attachment to divinity is consoling parents who by nature are called first to make sacrifices when raising children. The sacrifices of parents for their children are derivative to the Rabbinic internalization of the animal sacrifice in late antiquity, sacrifices which were at the heart of traditional Jewish Temple service. This is of course a complicated matter. Suffice it to say that these parental sacrifices are as far from the Oedipus-complex as it goes in particular concerning any supposed rivalry or envy between parents and children or fathers and sons.

The significance of Moses is this: only thanks to him the monotheism of Abraham advanced beyond the polygamous arrangements of the Old Testament and embraced the world of monogamy revealed at Sinai. Only in the monogamous family human envy is mitigated through internalization and by this refined to jealousy. While envy works through power, jealousy works through love. Unapologetic divine jealousy was penetrating the patriarchal order and its visual shame culture but would be contained within the family upon the emergence of mosaic guilt culture at Sinai.

All this is said to help understand the order of the ten commandments. Primacy of the auditive paradigm in Judaism means that within the family children are subject to jealousy and guilt while envy is reserved for non-animated matter, things and typologies of shame. This crucial distinction informs the separation of the divinely first half of the commandments (one through five) from the neighbourly second part (six through ten).

Which brings us back to the ambitious operation of the Protestant North concerned with political control of the "wild" mediterranean Renaissance brimming with individualism. For this end Luther and Calvin would shift personal conscience to the state. They accomplished this by lowering conscience

from the transcendent auditive to the metaphysical visual paradigm which in turn necessitated the lowering of the fifth commandment from the divine to merely civilian human, conducive to the birth of the republican spirit of cooperation. Yet the Reformers not only profaned parenthood but they almost ruined the concept of the immortality of the soul – something that concerned Counter-Reformers like Rembrandt. For they knew this would endanger the divinely ordered continuity of family names and the flow of property between the generations.

Inevitably schools would take over the parental role of oral transmittance of biblical revelation toward the next generation. Yet to listening to your parents as a child deserving of love is entirely a different matter than learning in school, let alone the consequences of the state seizing control of the conscience of its citizens. We cannot go into this further, suffice it to say that the disenfranchisement of religious conscience was of fundamental importance because it undermined parental authority and the biblical foundations of the family. Which brings us back to Rembrandt von Rijn. His rendering of Moses, descending from mount Horeb, has his face radiating. What is shining through here is the divine countenance and the unique power of the family to contain the fear of death. By contrast the “radiating” Moses carved out of stone by Michelangelo a century earlier, shows him with horns and made him look like the devil.

Now Rembrandt’s painting of “Moses” shows not the whole man but only a close-up. It exhibits an emphasis on the tablets, Moses hands, and his face, with the rest executed rather hastily. The Hebrew letters of the fifth commandment are rendered in meticulous detail in order to expose the Jewish version of the ten commandments as opposed to the reformed version. Looked at from the edge of family life the ten commandments reflect the tension of a bridge over the hiatus of the sexes which are spread between the two poles of divine

jealousy and human envy. As already mentioned, jealousy dominates the first half of the ten commandments and envy the second. Now if you cut the fifth commandment from the jealousy section, as the Dutch Reformers did, and shift it to the envy section, the divine blessing of the gender dyad is being corrupted. As a result family life is made difficult because it loses the centripetal pull of divine love. Jealousy turns out to be the carrier (chariot) of the centripetal pull of the Jewish family. The Christian lowering of the divine to the visual paradigm reverses the centripetal pull into the universal and centrifugal Pauline Jesus. For jealousy and love are the preserve of the transcendent God and the family partakes in it through parenthood by conveying its focus on love of life, procreation and transmittance of Torah. Now the first half of the commandments, the inner jealousy section, addresses the transcendent realm reserved for obeisance to God. In this vein the auditive paradigm protects the vertical authority of traditions and intergenerational continuity. Outward human envy rules the second half of the commandments and the netherworld of property while the first half with the gender dyad puts up a fence toward reification and profanation.

Rembrandt knows how to engage us with this fence against reification. Following the trend of his time he uses for this purpose the motive of the night. In the iconography of nocturnal scenery animated human features such as faces are enhanced and non-animated things are hidden under drapery or fading away. This is meant to evoke the charisma of the Orient, the home of monotheism. In the Semitic cultures the day begins in the evening and ends in the morning and the night is the natural refuge of love. It seems safe to suggest that dark backgrounds in Renaissance paintings refer to the Eastern legacy of occidental monotheism which persists in the magic of the night. Rembrandt is dwelling on the secret religious affinity of nightlife if read literally as the realm of divine invisibility under the auditive paradigm. What

Rembrandt's Orientalism reveals to us, it would appear, is that limits and morals emerged from Jewish separations such as the distinction between night and day which transferred to the West may elicit a unique fascination. Rembrandt also seems to suggest that the control of instincts is not a given in the absence of tradition. This has to do with our limited intelligence, compensated as it is only by sharing the wisdom of others, namely our ancestors, ultimately resulting in tradition and common sense.

### *Immortality or Identity*

The fifth commandment ties parenthood to divine authority derived from eternity by creating the notion of an immortal soul, carried as it is by family names through the generations. Thus fear of death is contained by neutralizing or eclipsing the fact of individual mortality. In the monotheist tradition the human body partakes only in the netherworld while the human soul is considered part of infinity. But Christ as internalized by the Reformation spoiled this precious consolation by obscuring the difference between human finitude and divine infinitude. As a result of this our obligation to listen to our parents and the commandments gave way to visual imitation and the Lutheran infatuation with the senses, namely music. This gradually diminished the sanctifying charisma of parenthood and oral transmission of tradition by delivering education from the family context. Equally obsolete became the immortality of the soul and its role in the coherence of generations of families. While this seems more true for Christianity, in Judaism the same happened with assimilation. This set off after the dissolution of Jewish ghettos in the wake of the French Revolution. The latter is sometimes labelled as the Second Reformation suggesting that it brought the disruptions of Christian visualisation to Judaism.

With the enlightenment, the West developed an awareness of the ontological gap between hearing and viewing but it also

eclipsed the idea of the inner religious self. Ever since antiquity the inner self has been associated with divinity, eternity, unchangeable human nature in contrast to volatile scientific truths. Rembrandt's scriptural topos of the radiating Moses allows us a glimpse into the inner workings of charisma informed by divine transcendence. It is irreducibly tied to oral revelation and the auditive paradigm.

Rembrandt's rendering of Moses with the tables, arranged in the old order of two parts – duties towards God vs duties toward humans – is apt to maintain some measure of the monotheist image ban. It protects both, divine and parental authority, which belong naturally to the realm of hearing and its mental representation to which I have been referring as the auditive paradigm. Rembrandt raises the voice of the moral inner Self defending the auditive paradigm as well as the primacy of ritual. It includes the Jewish preference of deeds over cognition and of binding promises over lofty Protestant confessions.

In conclusion, for good reasons it is often said that Jews only listen to their God but never see him. As a result of this auditive Jewish particularism family love is able to redeem tangible envy into intangible jealousy. Just as the monotheist God by virtue of transcendence is void of any attributes, so are monogamous parents utterly selfless at least ideally. Based on the latter the family sustains the auditive and intangible guilt culture, which ultimately depends on oral transmission of revelation. Moses' revelation of monogamy replaces irreconcilable envy of the old patriarchal and polygamous shame culture.

The Christian church, however, shifted the focus away from the particularist family towards the individuality of Christ understood as universal proxy redeemer and represented by the oblate in the Christian supper service. Which is why according to the novelist Umberto Eco, the church imagines its clients as individuals "fallen from heaven" – in Latin *ex coeli*

*oblatus* – as if existing askance of family bounds. The Christian oblate has an entirely different purpose than Jewish Manna. It survived in the notion of human “thrown-ness” (into this world) defined as the ontological principle of the Nazi-philosopher Martin Heidegger, which is hostile to the family.

By contrast Rembrandt in his rendering of Moses’ “radiating face” to the patriarchal display of the iconic divine face of Eastern Christianity. Much closer to Judaism than the Western churches with regard to the image ban, Eastern Orthodoxy preserved the Rabbinic mix of priest and family man. This brings us back to Michelangelo’s sculpture above for it represents the transition from medieval patriarchy to the matriarchate of the Renaissance. In Michelangelo’s “Pieta” the mother is holding a creature in her arms that looks like a hybrid between child and husband. In the first millennium the Christian evening lands had been represented by the male Jesus, but the second millennium belonged to Mary. This attempt to counter the gender bias of the Christian gospel continues in political feminism, which sells out immortality and family for volatile sexual identity.

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[1] <https://www.city-journal.org/conservatism-populism-peter-b-erkowitz>.

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