

Abraham Malpan Lecture 2017

Means Justifying the Ends: What should the Christian Approach be?

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Synopsis

There is a growing tendency everywhere to sacrifice good Means to achieve Ends. It is disturbing that such tendencies are becoming more and more prevalent in the Christian Churches. There are many Schools of Ethics that approach this problem with their particular philosophical standpoints. But what would entitle a Christian position in the “Means and Ends debate”? In the temptation narratives, Jesus takes an unambiguous stand by not bowing to Satan’s prescription to win over the world. Throughout his life his actions were guided by God’s will which dictated the means he chose. Hence the Christian approach is engendered upon the conception of the ideas of the character of God, God’s Law and Providence of God.

1. God is good, holy, just and merciful and righteous and those who bear his name should reflect his character. For the Christian whose nature has been transformed by Christ, there is no justifying immoral behaviour, no matter the motivation for it or the outcome of it.
2. This Holy and perfect God has granted us the law which clearly reflects his attributes. The laws make clear that evil is unacceptable before him and that there is no ‘escape clause’. There is no room for situational ethics in God’s law. From God’s perspective there are no Ends that justify the means of breaking the Law.
3. God’s providence is revealed through the fact that God has a plan and purpose for mankind which he has been bringing to pass through the centuries. God is intimately involved in and is in control of his creation. He works all things together for good of those who love him and are called to his purpose.

From these considerations four practical guidelines that are in consonance with the Christian approach towards Means and Ends could be proposed.

1. Means adopted should not be illegal or unlawful.
2. Means adopted should not violate the dignity or human rights of any person.
3. Means adopted should not offend prevalent social values and sensibilities.
4. Means adopted should not adversely affect the most vulnerable among those affected by our actions.