

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*I am not a perfect man, less so a perfect priest. My affections are divided. God and His ways are not always first in my immediate thinking.*

*For this reason, I present myself to Him every day in ACTS: adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication, since He, Divine Providence, can right the ship of my soul and guide it to the port of heaven.*

*With God, I hide nothing. I expose to Him my weaknesses, sins, wounds. Rather than pour salt into them, He salves them with forgiveness, mercy, and counsel, love.*

*It is hard to live in a world where people play by the rules of self interest, especially in the church.*

*When Father Malachi Martin, SJ, published his book of historical fiction, Windswept House, exposing corruption in the church and among high ranking clerics, a companion sheet was given to me with someone's interpretations and identification of the characters. This companion text confirmed my natural suspicions, to my shame, of the supposed identities and proposed to me the identity of others not so easily discernible to me.*

*It is hard to try to live uprightly when those rewarded with so much power thwart the scripture, tradition, prayer, worship, doctrine. It is doubly hard to see so many priests who do try to live these things taken from ministry through the misuse of the promise of obedience by those with authority who will not clearly teach and guide as Jesus taught.*

*Since it comes to mind without deliberation, I feel ashamed of myself for ascribing to certain churchmen that their own self interest overrules the love of Jesus that has been entrusted to them for the care of souls.*

*It redirects me to God in prayer that He help me to abandon my own self interest in order to teach, guide, and sanctify, knowing that like so many other priests, this power might be suspended at any time in today's church.*

*All of us are subject to the corruption of the culture in which we abide. The grace of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit must be clung to in order to live for Jesus and not "to thine own self [interest] be true."*

*What good to gain the world and lose one's soul? What does it take to climb the ladder of power, possessions, prestige in the church today? If living a holy life is not the avenue, then fidelity, moderation, and obscurity in the world is joyful for me, just as long as Jesus continue to meet me each day when I come to Him in prayer, in order that He love me just the way I am, but much too much to let me stay that way.*



# The Wisdom of the World & the Wisdom of God

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By Mitchell Kalpakgian | November 2009

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**The wisdom of the world poses as realism, as the sure way to succeed, prosper, and win. It disguises itself as irrefutable logic and gives the impression of level-headedness. It regards itself as the antidote to quixotic fantasies and naïve religious ideals that do not correspond to the hard truths of the world.** Polonius's famous advice to his son Laertes in *Hamlet* illustrates one form of this worldly wisdom: "Give thy thoughts no tongue," "Be thou familiar,

but by no means vulgar,” “But do not dull thy palm with entertainment” (hospitality), “Beware of entrance to a quarrel,” “Give every man thy ear but few thy voice,” “Neither a borrower nor lender be.” Polonius’s politic advice consists of precautions against speaking the truth, being generous in the treatment of others, revealing passionate convictions, and forming close relationships. Rather, Polonius encourages his son to be on guard, trust no one, and hide what he thinks. When Polonius advises, **“To thine own self be true,” he does not counsel self-knowledge or the courage of conviction, but the rule of self-interest.**

**Worldly wisdom dictates neutrality or “moderation” — being lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. Life is a chess game, and therefore one must always be more cunning and calculating than the opposition. Exaggerating man’s foreknowledge and discounting the mystery of Divine Providence, worldly wisdom holds that man alone determines the outcome of events.** Worldly wisdom, despite all its claims to higher knowledge of the dark secrets that lead to victory, amounts to false prudence, as Polonius’s example testifies.

In The Prince Machiavelli likewise looks to **worldly wisdom as the source of political power, arguing that only the appearance of goodness — not real moral integrity — is required for the success of rulers:**

**It is good to appear merciful, truthful, humane, sincere, and religious; it is good to be so**

**in reality. But you must keep your mind so disposed that, in case of need, you can turn to the exact contrary.** This has to be understood: a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot possibly exercise all those virtues for which men are called “good.” **To preserve the state, he often has to do things against his word, against charity, against humanity, against religion.**

As Machiavelli explains, **public image matters more than moral character because “the masses are always impressed by the superficial appearance of things.”** Thus, cleverness in deceiving others and artfulness in concealing one’s intentions become the “virtues” instilled by worldly wisdom. Moral absolutes, religious norms, and noble ideals play no part in the way of the world. For Machiavellian politicians, goodness is all form and no substance. Man is the measure of all things, the one who determines right and wrong according to the standards of expediency and utilitarianism. If victory is achieved and the prince gains power, then the end justifies the means. Because Hannibal’s “inhuman cruelty” prevented the rebellion of his forces and Scipio’s “excessive leniency” led to the revolt of his armies in Spain, Machiavelli equates the moral way with naïve folly, and the worldly way with practical wisdom.

**The guiles of worldly wisdom continue to lure modern man in many subtle ways.** To run for president in the U.S., political expediency dictates that a candidate **equivocate in the wily manner**

recommended by Polonius, or deceive the masses with superficial appearances posing as absolute truth. As Machiavelli would say, it is good to decry abortion, war, and high taxes, but to win elections one may have to abandon moral principles and make concessions to the political lobbies that provide the greatest contributions. Regardless of how extreme, radical, or immoral the positions politicians espouse, they must appear good, moderate, or tolerant to the masses and to the media — that is, politically correct. Thus, Catholic politicians who compromise the moral teachings of the Church about the intrinsic evils of artificial contraception, abortion, embryonic stem-cell research, and same-sex marriage follow the counsel of Polonius and Machiavelli. **Guided by the motives of self-interest, safety, security, and re-election, they pronounce no moral convictions and assume the lame, neutral position of “I am personally opposed, but,” or “If I had known then what I know now” — the essence of Polonius’s circumspect advice.**

**Worldly wisdom gives no credence to the first principle of Christian wisdom: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Mt. 6:33).**

Polonius would advise a prolife Democrat to keep his thoughts to himself (“Give thy thoughts no tongue”), and Machiavelli would counsel a Republican opposed to the Iraq war to abandon his scruples: A prince “should not depart from the good if he can hold to it, but he should be ready to enter on evil if he has to.” **Worldly wisdom is**

**the art of changing course and varying one's political and moral views to suit the spirit of the times, to pander to the masses, or to gain political advantages for the sake of self-interest. As Machiavelli explains, a prince "has to have a mind ready to shift as the winds of fortune and the varying circumstances of life may dictate."**

In the realm of family life, worldly wisdom encourages two incomes and a small family as the risk-free normative Western way of life. Because Polonius's watchword is "Beware," his philosophy inhibits the generosity of love, the nobility of friendship, the romance of adventure, and chivalric liberality. **The purposes of self-interest and economic prosperity ("To thine own self be true") demand extreme carefulness, not abandonment to Divine Providence.** Riddled with anxiety and trepidation, worldly wisdom advocates contraception and abortion as necessary forms of man-made control to eliminate the chance of undesirable or unpredictable births. Caution, fear, and prevention — the precepts of Polonius, who exhorts his son always to be wary and guarded — govern the policies of worldly wisdom.

**Devious and roundabout, worldly wisdom does not honor sacred oaths or uphold indissoluble vows, imagining that winning at all costs dictates sacrificing moral principles to accomplish self-serving purposes.** Abortion and no-fault divorce laws follow the indirect, crooked path to an end that Machiavelli prescribed, the twisted notion that one can do evil to achieve good. They violate the sense of

the sacred or the sanctity of a vow — dishonoring the dignity of human life or denigrating the honor of a promise. These new mores correspond to Machiavelli's mockery of simplistic idealism: "Any man who tries to be good all the time is bound to come to ruin among the great number who are not good."

In the field of education, worldly wisdom perpetuates the myths of "diversity" and "tolerance" as the epitome of moral excellence; public education panders to the lowest common denominator and appeals to the "masses" identified by Machiavelli. Secular public education offers students a version of the philosophy of Polonius: Follow the crowd, blend in, stay neutral, be politically correct, act trendy, do not be judgmental. The worldly wisdom that prevails in modern education teaches that right and wrong are cultural and variable and have no universal meaning. No noble cause inspires a passionate love of goodness, and no unspeakable evil evokes a sense of loathing at the ugliness of sin. **Worldly wisdom counsels political correctness, the obsession with never offending anyone with moral objections, of censuring behavior that might be construed as "hate speech."** In the typical atmosphere of many colleges, one must walk a tightrope and literally, in the words of Polonius, "Give thy thoughts no tongue" and "Beware of entrance to a quarrel," lest one suffer accusations of sexism, racism, Eurocentrism, anti-Semitism, or homophobia.

Whether it is being "safe" by way of contraception and abortion-on-demand or "politically correct" by way of

silence and intimidation, worldly wisdom operates by means of cowardice and fearfulness, and is dominated by a compulsion for security. **Moral neutrality, self-interest, artful duplicity, and circumspect wariness are the traits of worldly wisdom.** In Hans Christian Andersen's "The Emperor's New Clothes," no members of the court dared to tell the king he was naked because they feared losing their privileged position, the many perquisites of royal favor, and the image of respectability; they all lacked the child's spontaneous truthfulness in uttering the simple truth: "He's nothing on!"

**Christian wisdom, on the other hand, does not require clever deviousness, elaborate pretending, or labyrinthine scheming.** The teaching, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well," surpasses Polonius's negative warnings about being careful, cautious, skeptical, and suspicious. **Christian wisdom distinguishes between what C.S. Lewis calls "first things" and "second things."** Explaining that a woman who makes a dog the first priority in her life "loses, in the end, not only her human usefulness and dignity but even the proper pleasure of dog-keeping," and that a man who equates the whole meaning of the universe to his passion for one woman also loses the full experience of human love, Lewis clarifies this basic truth of Christian moral wisdom:

Every preference of a small good to a great, or a partial good to a total good, involves the loss of the small or partial good for which the sacrifice was made. If Esau

really got his mess of pottage in return for his birthright, then Esau was a lucky exception. **You can't get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first.**

If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, if the first of the Ten Commandments is "I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange gods before me," and if the first of the two great commandments is "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength," then Christian wisdom puts first things first. If God enjoins, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:22), and Christ says of divorce, "It was not so from the beginning" (Mt. 19:8), then these holy words bind the human conscience more than all the feminist propaganda of "freedom" and "reproductive rights." If the invasion of Iraq fails to satisfy all the conditions for a just war, then truth and justice supersede loyalty to neoconservative ideology. If the Church teaches that homosexuality is disordered and homosexual acts are sinful, then the moral law surpasses the policies of the United Nations and the decisions of courts that legalize sodomy and allow same-sex "marriage." If Christ teaches, "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul" (Mk. 8:36), then no amount of wealth, pleasure, fame, or power can compensate for a guilty conscience and an immoral life.

By putting first things first and second things second, Christian wisdom escapes the lies and delusions of worldly wisdom that promise everything but deliver nothing. The Iraq war has not delivered an oppressed people or spread

democracy but provoked civil war and increased terrorism. The contraceptive mentality has not relieved the conflicts of marriage or produced the emancipation of women but has increased divorce, spread sexually transmitted diseases, and produced the childlessness that Patrick Buchanan called “the death of the West.” Christian wisdom begins when man heeds the words of Mary to the servants at the marriage of Cana: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn. 2:5) — not what peer pressure, political correctness, wealth, or security tell you.

To inherit the Kingdom of God, man must imitate a child in his candor and reject guile in all its subtle forms: “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 18:3). Like the child in “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” men must not be intimidated by popular public opinion fashioned by weavers who spin lies for their own gain. Christian wisdom teaches the purity of truthfulness and shuns the artfulness and cunning of worldly wisdom. As Christ enjoined His disciples, “Let your answer be ‘yes, yes, no, no’” (Mt. 5:37). **While worldly wisdom thrives on sophistry, euphemism, and verbal engineering, Christian wisdom speaks in the eloquence of the simple truth.**

**Christian wisdom clarifies moral truths with a perfect luminosity that dispels all doubts and ambiguities:** The beatitude “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt. 5:8) honors those with clear minds, clean consciences, and truthful words who never equivocate. Christian wisdom does not pretend that

the king looks resplendent even though the weavers, the ministers of government, court officials, and the populace all flatter the king with compliments. Christian wisdom does not counsel the paranoid fear and excessive caution of Polonius or the wiliness that Machiavelli recommends. It teaches confidence in God, trust in Divine Providence, and belief in the Father's love. The Sermon on the Mount exhorts us, "Do not be anxious about your life" (Mt. 6:25), and discourages useless worry about the future. Reminding the world of the Divine Providence of God, Christ explains, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Lk. 12:24). When the disciples saw Christ walking on the water and felt terrified as they imagined a ghost, again they learned the foolishness of irrational fear: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear" (Mt. 14:27). Peter too was reprimanded when he walked on the water but lost courage when he heard the wind: "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Mt. 14:31).

The hysteria about overpopulation publicized in the 1970s in books like Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*, and the nervousness about unexpected pregnancies that haunts families such that they contraceptively limit family size, illustrates worldly wisdom governed by fear and lack of faith. The mentality of panic aroused by mention of elusive weapons of mass destruction or an illusory "axis of evil" that provokes preventive wars and aggressive invasions also proceeds from the same state of anxiety that trusts only human cunning and political calculation. Christian wisdom, on the other hand, teaches the cardinal

virtue of prudence — foresight on behalf of others and future generations — rather than shrewd calculation or political craftiness for the sake of self-interest.

In making prudent choices, Christian wisdom avoids what Joseph Pieper in *The Four Cardinal Virtues* calls **“desperate self-preservation, overriding concern for confirmation and security,”** and **“the insidiousness, guile, craft, and concupiscence...of small-minded and small-souled persons.”** Christian wisdom is bold and adventurous, not cowardly or calculating. The Beatitudes, a summary of Christian wisdom, teach noble action and moral heroism. Being meek and merciful, peacemaking, and suffering persecution for righteousness’s sake demands more moral valor than being careful, reserved, and circumspect. As Pieper explains, true prudence reveals “the clear-eyed virtue of magnanimity” and “the constant readiness to ignore the self.”

In its love of power, money, pleasure, and self, **worldly wisdom gains the world but loses the soul.** Worldly wisdom, then, is not prudence but folly because it produces the miseries of war, the sterility of contraception, and the absurdity of same-sex marriage — the Culture of Death. **Christian wisdom, putting first things first, saying “yes, yes” and “no, no” without equivocation, and, trusting in God’s Providence with faith and confidence, leads to truth, justice, peace, charity, and the Church — the highest things.**