Excerpts from *New Wineskins: A New Approach to Original Sin and the Redemption*
by Patrick J. Amer Chapter 7 Reflections on the Precepts of Jesus

The Precepts of Jesus Are Radically Opposed to the Antisocial Instincts
We return to the list of Antisocial Instincts:
Exclusion of the Stranger. Jesus expressed exactly the opposite when he said, "Love your enemies, and do good to those who hate you," and the other teachings listed above as the teachings of the first Precept. This teaching is summarized as *"Do not judge, blame, condemn, or exclude any person from your fellowship and love."*
Violence. Jesus said "Do not resist the evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also" and "Put your sword back into its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." This is a complete rejection of violence. This teaching is summarized as *"Do not do violence against any person, even in response to violence."*
Retributive Violence. Retributive violence usually arises as a result of a refusal to forgive a real or imaginary offense. The sayings of Jesus on violence apply here, and so do the sayings on forgiveness, as when Jesus said, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses." This teaching is summarized as: "*Forgive all who have offended you."*
Domination: Jesus said "The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted." This teaching is summarized as *"Act as a humble servant toward all others."*
*Greed: Jesus said, "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven," a complete rejection of avarice. This teaching is summarized as "*Detach yourselves from possessions*."

This is a remarkable result. Jesus could have preached about any number of ethical issues, and he could have advocated for any number of virtuous habits, most of which would have had nothing to do with the Antisocial Instincts. But, instead, we find that *all* of his principal ethical teachings are directed at the Antisocial Instincts, both in individual persons and as Social Sins in human societies and institutions. Jesus could have directed his attention to a few of these behaviors. Instead, he spoke to *all* of the Antisocial instincts and Social Sins identified in Chapters 1 and 2 and studied by contemporary evolutionary psychologists.

He could have proposed compromises with these behaviors, of the sort which one finds in the American Christian tradition—just war theory, the importance of patriotism and defending the nation against its "enemies'; family values, such as patriarchy; and the less said about acquisitiveness, the happier the congregation will be—but he didn't. He advocated the most radical opposition to these behaviors, radical in the sense of digging them out by the roots. Indeed, there has been a long-lasting dispute in the Christian tradition about whether these teachings are simply very difficult, or whether they are impossible to a Christian living in the world (rather than in a monastery or convent) and cannot be applied to the public sphere at all!

Jesus did not know the Darwinian theory of evolution. He did not know of Mendel's discovery of the genetics or of Watson and Crick's discovery of the double helix of DNA. He did not know the work of contemporary evolutionary psychologists. How did he identify the Antisocial Instincts and the Social Sins of humanity, and how and why did he select them as the objects of his principal ethical teachings? However he did it, the Precepts of Jesus constitute a profound anthropological observation or reflection. Jesus clearly thought, and in his five Precepts said, that the fundamental problems of humanity are the Antisocial Instincts against which the Precepts of Jesus are directed, and the Social Sins have arisen from their absorption into the culture of human societies and institutions.

The Mission of Jesus

Amer proposes that Jesus did not come to offer himself as a sacrifice to himself, or to God the Father, nor to take on the sins of the world. He came to teach a group of ethical principles which directly oppose all the Antisocial instincts which humankind inherited from our animal forbears, and which will redeem societies and institutions which have absorbed and internalized the antisocial instincts. As Jesus said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose." (Luke 4:43) He acquired a large audience with his teachings, and he established a small group of followers who had the responsibility to begin and nourish the growth of a community of his followers. His plan, which is God's plan, was and is that all humans should participate in converting to and acting in accordance with the Precepts of Jesus, thus participating in his redemptive action.

We know, as the Christian churches did not for nearly all of their existence so far, that the Antisocial Instincts are genetically based and found in every human being, and that they have evolutionary stability. God's plan addresses the fact that all humanity needs special help in opposing and reversing the influence of the Antisocial Instincts in our personal lives, in resisting our social sins, and in redeeming human societies and institutions from their absorption of these instincts. God responded to this need for special help by inspiring Jesus to teach and preach the antidotes to the Antisocial Instincts and Social Sins in a way which would involve all human beings in opposing their effects, and thus participating in the redemption of humanity. What the death of Jesus shows is the power of human institutions to resist this challenge to their Social Sins. His death and resurrection show approval by God of Jesus's message. It does not show that the death of Jesus was a sacrifice to appease an angry God.

You may ask, if this is true, why it has not been prominent in the teachings of the Christian churches for their first 2000 years. The teachings of Jesus which constitute the Precepts of Jesus have been generally ignored by the Christian churches. There are a number of reasons for this neglect. First, in the early Christian churches the then accepted way of worshipping God, of any god, was to offer a sacrifice to the god. So, the central worship service of Christians has often been referred to as "The Sacrifice of the Mass," although the psalmist stated, addressing God, "Sacrifice and offering you do not desire." (Ps 40:6) Second, the existence and operation of the Antisocial Instincts in animals, and their presence in humans and by cultural absorption into human societies was not discovered until fewer than two centuries ago, and the work of evolutionary psychologists has occurred only in the last few generations. Until the Antisocial Instincts had been identified by biological science, the teachings of Jesus opposing them could not have been stated as such.

Reflections on the Practice of Daily Living by the Precepts of Jesus

The precepts of Jesus are hard to practice. They are much more difficult to live by than the "second tablet" commandments of Moses (those which include and follow "Honor your father and mother"), for two reasons: First, nearly all human societies have adopted the rules found in these commandments of Moses (and in the foundational documents of many other religions and cultures) as part of their civil or religious law.

A human society can't survive or function without laws requiring filial piety and forbidding murder, stealing, adultery, and giving false witness. In contrast, human societies do not in general respect and support nonjudging, nonviolence, forgiveness, humble service, or detachment from possessions. And second, each of the Precepts of Jesus directs us to resist and act against a primal, ingrained, and genetically based inclination, an Antisocial Instinct, in each of us. But take heart. With practice the Precepts will become easier and will make us free.

Each of the precepts of Jesus applies not only to our own personal lives and conduct but also to our communal or group conduct. The command not to judge forbids inter-ethnic, inter-national, and inter-religious condemnations, hatreds and fears not only between individuals but also between communities, societies, and nations. The command to avoid violence speaks not only against private violence but also against the communal violence of war and of our criminal justice systems and shows what is required to attain and preserve peace between individuals and among nations. The injunction to forgive shows how we are to deal both individually and as a society with real offenses from others. The rules of humble service and detachment from possessions speak not only to our personal lives but also against the injustices in our economic and property systems.

The precepts of Jesus are closely interrelated. For example, nonjudging and forgiveness are necessary preconditions to the practice of nonviolence, and so are the attitudes of humble service and detachment from possessions. It is only with humility that we can approach and understand the duty not to judge. This close relationship of the Precepts of Jesus shows that they form an integrated "System of Morality."