

Travel tips: Commandments for drivers

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [August 21, 2007](#) issue

My first inclination after reading “The Vatican’s Ten Commandments for Drivers” (reported in CenturyMarks, July 10) was to wonder if there were not more urgent matters for the papacy to be pondering. But my next drive down Michigan Avenue reminded me of how relevant the commandments are: “The road shall be for you a means of communion between people. . . . Courtesy, uprightness and prudence will help you deal with unforeseen events. . . . Cars shall not be for you an expression of power and domination, an occasion of sin.”

Those commandments certainly apply to rush hour in downtown Chicago. Cabbies drive aggressively, sometimes dangerously, whipping in and out of lanes to get to a fare, while buses stop to load and unload, virtually eliminating one lane of traffic. Regular ambulance runs to Northwestern Hospital force everyone to stop. Meanwhile, the horse-drawn carriages for tourists further clog the traffic. Getting where you want to go, positioning yourself to turn where you want to turn, is not only a challenge but one that seems to require “an expression of power and domination.”

Not long ago I sat at a light in the center lane. The car beside me, in the curb lane, was a BMW, driven by a young woman talking on her cell phone (against the law in Chicago, by the way). I wanted to turn right at the next corner: I needed her lane. I looked her way, hoping to express my need, but she never saw me. I did what I had to do. I accelerated and cut her off. At the next light she pulled up beside me, now in the center lane, and gave me the familiar raised-middle-finger urban salute. I was about to return the salute when the small voice in my head warned me that she just might be a member of my church—in front of which we were now sitting. So I smiled and mouthed, “God loves you.”

Perhaps we need to add to the Vatican’s statement another set of commandments for air travelers. The airlines pack as many people as possible into each plane these

days. It is so tight in the back of the plane that a person of normal size can barely squeeze in. Those who sit in the window or center seat don't have enough room to hold a newspaper. The passenger in front of you is likely to plunk down and lower the seat back as far as it will go, invading the tiny, precious space that is yours. So Commandment No. 1: "Thou shalt not adjust your seat backward in the rear of the plane on domestic flights unless there is a compelling medical need for you to sleep."

When a plane lands, passengers sometimes step into the aisle, retrieve overhead luggage and proceed to the exit one row at a time. But inevitably someone violates the convention and pushes through the line to gain five seconds in the process of deplaning. Commandment No. 2: "Thou shalt take turns when exiting and not push ahead."

It's not uncommon to find yourself sitting beside a mother with a small child. Traveling by air with a child is a challenging proposition. When I'm seated next to a youngster I announce that I'm an experienced grandfather and am more than willing to help. Not long ago I found myself holding an infant in my arms. Not a bad way to travel. Commandment No. 3: "Thou shalt try to be helpful to your fellow passengers."