

A CARDINAL EVIL: GOD MY WEAPON, MY AGENT OF VIOLENCE, MY INSTRUMENT OF FEAR AND TERROR

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The least initial deviation from the truth is multiplied later a thousand fold. —ARISTOTLE

***Ipsissima Verba* of Jesus**

Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'You shall not swear falsely, but make good to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one (MT 5:33-37; JAS 5:12).

In his exegesis of the Gospel of according Matthew in *THE JEROME BIBLICAL COMMENTARY (Imprimatur, 1968)*, John L. McKenzie, S.J. writes in regard to MATTHEW 5:33-37, "*The oath is a reflection of the evil condition of man. It is intended to secure truthfulness. In the new ethic of Jesus truthfulness will be secured not by an oath but by the inner integrity of the person.*"

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"The gathered cardinals swore to keep secret the deliberations for the election of the future Pope, after which the Cardinal dean, Angelo Sodano, read the oath in Latin, everyone present reciting along with him. After that, each cardinal, according to his order of precedence came forward and took the oath before a Crucifix and with their hand on the Gospels. This process occupied a good portion of the meeting's time."

This is only the first of three oaths that must be sworn before a Cardinal is permitted to participate in the conclave in which he can be considered for the position of being the next infallible Vicar of Christ and/or of being an elector of the next infallible Vicar of Christ.

Means and Ends

The Vicar of Christ, then, is chosen by the most visible Catholic Prelates in the world via a process that directly defies the explicit teaching of Jesus and they all agree to a man to participate in it.

If the teaching of Jesus is the will of God for His followers, and what is the opposite of the will of God is evil, can evil means produce good ends?

Of course, if Jesus' unambiguous, unconditional, negative command, "*Do not swear at all,*" can be set aside by Cardinals when it serves their purposes, then what else that Jesus commanded cannot be cast aside? If a command—not a suggestion—spoken this clearly by God Incarnate can be so easily countermanded by Christians, then Jesus might just as well have said nothing about good and evil or anything else for that matter.

Deliberately refusing to follow a straightforward negative command of Jesus hardly seems the way to select the next Rock of Faith in Jesus as "*the Messiah,*

the Christ, the Son of the living God." This seems especially incoherent when you are choosing exclusively from among your own "I will not obey" group. It is contrary to reason and to the entire Judeo-Christian spiritual tradition to believe that such cavalier over-riding of the *ipsissima verba* of Christ-God will result in restoring to consonance the radical disharmony within the Church.

Oaths and the Soil They Grow From

An oath is either a statement of fact or a promise calling upon God as a witness to the binding nature of the promise or the truth of the statement of fact. WEBSTER'S UNABRIDGED DICTIONARY defines it as "a solemn appeal to the deity to witness one's determination to speak the truth, to keep a promise." THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH defines an oath in these words: "Taking an oath or swearing is to take God as a witness to what one affirms" (#2150). However, as precise as these definitions, and most others, are, they are incomplete in the context of the Old Testament and the uses of oaths by Christians. To illuminate this point I will quote directly from Rev. John P. Meier monumental and magisterial four-volume scholarly work on Jesus, *A MARGINAL JEW (Impri-matur, 2008)*. The excerpt is from his fifty-two page chapter on MATTHEW 5:33-37, titled, *The Prohibition of Oaths*:

"Interestingly none of these definitions mentions an element that was sometimes explicitly stated but was always implicitly present in the Old Testament understanding of oaths, i.e., that to take an oath was to invoke a curse upon oneself. The oath "worked" not only by calling on God as witness to the truth of one's assertion or promise but also by invoking upon oneself a curse that God would execute if the oath should be violated."

An oath in the Old Testament and in Christianity, then, calls upon God to witness to the truth of what a person is saying, with dire consequences at the hands of the Almighty for the oath-taker if he or she intentionally breaks the oath or lies. For example, in the procedures of U.S. courts a person puts his or her hand on a Bible and is asked by a court officer, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but

the truth, so help you God?" He or she then answers, "I do." The understanding behind this is that a person would not—and better not—lie to the court and thereby make Almighty God a participant in and witness to a lie masquerading as truth.

The person "better not" do this because the unspoken understanding of oath-taking is that God will harm the person if he or she now lies. Oath-taking is calling down a temporal and/or eternal curse from God on oneself, if one intentionally does not do what one has promised under the oath. This in turn requires that God be a God of violence. No wonder governments and religions employ it. It raises significantly the probability that they will get from the person what they want because the fear of God's violent wrath has been planted in him or her.

Perjury is the state crime of intentionally lying under oath. It carries with it the distinct possibility that pain will be inflicted on the person who lies after taking an oath. In this case, however, fellow human beings instead of God administer the violence, the pain. The state here acts as God supposedly acts, if a person lies under oath. The state in suggesting that it is imitating what God does, necessarily morally validates the pain those working for the state do to their fellow sons and daughters of the "Father of all." What God does cannot be evil. Case closed!

But What If?

"Case closed" that is, unless the premise on which all oaths depend for their validity and for their utility is false, a non-existent reality, an illusion. Specifically, if God is not a God of violence, if God is as proclaimed in the opening prayer of the Catholic Mass for Peace and Justice, "God of perfect peace, violence and cruelty can have no part with you," then taking an oath for a Christian is not even a rational act, let alone a moral one. If Holy Violence is a piece of humanly contrived self-deception, in an effort to make the Nonviolent God in the image of violent human beings instead of making violent men and women in the image of the Nonviolent God, then taking an oath is as meaningless and as much a false witness as giving a pinch of incense to Caesar as God. It is a

Christian calling on an idol, a non-existing being, as God, thereby communicating to other Christians and to all humanity that what is false is true.

Now in some people's view of reality Caesar is believed to be God, and in other people's view God is believed to be as violent as Caesar. But, neither belief is possible if a person is a believer in and a follower of Jesus as his or her Lord, God and Savior. Why? Because Jesus reveals to humanity by His words and deeds that God who actually IS God is a God of Nonviolent Love of all, at all times and forever—no exceptions. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God" (RM 8:39).

Jesus is Nonviolent Love Because God is Nonviolent Love

Jesus of the Gospels is a person of Nonviolent Love (*Agapé*) of friends and enemies because God is a God of Nonviolent Love of all. Jesus is the Word (*Logos*) of God "made flesh," the Incarnate Second Person of the Holy Trinity. This means He is consubstantial, one in Being, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Father and the Holy Spirit are Nonviolent since there are no contradictions in the One God, no contradictions among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

"The Father and I are one," "I come not to do my own will but the will of the Father," "The one who sees me sees the Father." These declarations by the Nonviolent Jesus of the Gospels and His life lived in Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies unto execution by crucifixion, completely invalidate for the Christian the "truth" of the presumption in which swearing oaths is rooted; namely, that God is a God of violence who will employ violence against people in holy wars, holy executions and holy torture for lying under oath.

False Witness or Glorify God

Christian oath-taking can easily give false witness to many Gospel truths simultaneously: that Jesus is God, that His teaching is true, that God is a God of nonviolent, suffering and forgiving Love towards all and for all—always. In short, the premises, presuppositions and dynamics behind and within oath-taking are the antithesis of what Jesus explicitly taught, NOT JUST BY ONE COMMAND BUT ALSO BY HIS ENTIRE LIFE GIVEN TO OBEY AND GLORIFY (MAGNIFY) the Father.

Oaths emerge from and are saturated in the spirit of fear, which is the antithesis of the Spirit of Love (1 JN 4:16-20). Or, to use the words Jesus employs in MATTHEW 5:33-37, oath taking is from "the evil one."

So Jesus command, "Do not swear at all," is not just a throwaway line, an irrelevant one-liner that has no relation to who He is or to anything He taught or did. On the contrary, it flows directly from and is an explicit witness to the heart and soul of the Gospel, namely, that "God is love (*agape*)," "Abba," "from whose love made visible in Christ Jesus, our Lord, nothing can separate us" (1 JN 4:8,16; RM 8:15; GAL 4:6-7; MK 14:36; RM 8:31-39).

***Ipsissima Verba* of Jesus?**

But perhaps, Jesus' teaching, "Do not swear at all," is not really His teaching but rather something Matthew or some subsequent scribe of the Gospel added. The best answer to that suggestion I can offer within this limits of this essay is from Rev. John Meier, who in his previously referred to 3000 page, four-volume *magnum opus*, A MARGINAL JEW, concludes that he must "award the palm of authenticity" as "*ipsissima verba Jesu*," to "swear not at all," "come, follow me," "let the dead bury the dead," "Whoever looses his life will save it," "you cannot serve God and Mammon," "what God has joined together let no one separate," "This is my body," and "Love your enemies."

Finally, Meier notes that there are Christians who endeavor to modify "the absolute prohibition of oaths by Jesus," by referring to Paul's use of oaths. Meier says they are "guilty of apologetic harmonizing...It would be much better to admit honestly and without apologetic explanations that Paul often uses oaths and curses invoking God (the Father), Christ, or the Holy Spirit...and that at times he falls short of the lofty Christian morality he himself inculcates (e.g., his polemical statements against his Christian adversaries in Galatians and 2 Corinthians which hardly measure up to Jesus' command to love and bless one's enemies)."

A Little Thing?

But, a Christian swearing an oath is such a little thing, compared to all the other big things going on

in the world, isn't it? What harm can it do? What's the big deal? But is not each human life within the immensity of time and space a little thing? Is not every act of every little life a very, very little thing? Is not a mustard seed, a grain of yeast or an atom a very little thing? Is it possible that the distinction between big and little acts, significant and insignificant acts, worthwhile and worthless acts, is not what culture, the state or the media foist upon human beings from the cradle onward?

"The greatest use of life," writes the philosopher-psychologist William James, *"is to spend it on something that will outlast us."* Fair enough, but *outlast us* for how long? A day? A generation? A thousand years? What, if all acts lead only in one direction, to eternal extinction? An act within a series of acts that ends in everlasting annihilation is ultimately intrinsically meaningless. It is neither big nor little. It is just the act of a poor player who struts and frets his time upon the stage, lights some way or another to a dusty death, and then is heard no more. Such an act is the sound and fury signifying nothing, regardless of cultural or media standing as big or little. The problem of the content of *"outlast us"* is illuminated less prosaically but far more forcefully by the unmatched poetic prowess of Shakespeare:

*Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.
Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

Returning to the prosaic, the acts of a person can be as "big" as those of Ozymandias and the legacy of a person can last as long as that of Ozymandias and be ultimately intrinsically worthless and meaningless. An act either has eternal significance or it has no significance. As a human being cannot bestow eternal

life on himself or herself (auto-salvation) or on their loved ones, so also a human being cannot bestow eternal significance on his or her acts or the acts of anyone else.

I AM the Way and the Truth

Only God can say, "I AM." I am, because God, through whom everything was created, including me, gave me existence. For what purpose did God give me existence? God gave me, and all His sons and daughters, existence in order to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him and to be happy with Him in this world and in the next. To that end, after the Fall—after human beings began to sin and suffer the innate, disordering consequences of sin and its generation to generation encrustation on the minds and hearts of people—the Father sent the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, His Word (*Logos*), to communicate to humanity how to fulfill the purposes for which life was given and to offer to human beings the power to do this—if in their freedom they choose to do so.

"If You Love Me," Then What—and Why?

Jesus makes it clear: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"* (JN 14:15, 14:21, 14:23; 1 JN 5:3; 2 JN 1:6). Equating love of Him with keeping His commandment is not an artificial, arbitrary test imposed on Christians by Jesus. Jesus in this overarching commandment is not selfishly setting-up a form of servile relationship to show He is the boss by demanding slavish obedience to His whims of vanity. This all-encompassing command is the proto-directive that points and leads to the center of that process that saves and liberates each and all from evil and death and their consequences forever. For, in loving Jesus by keeping His commandments, a person is living in unity with and in communion with God and the design of God for the salvation of all His infinitely loved and valued sons and daughters. It is loving the *Father of all* and the *Brother of all*, who are suffering because His sons and daughters and His brothers and sisters are suffering. By doing what must be done, the only effective thing that can be done—"keep my commandments"—to eliminate the source of the pain and suffering loved ones are enduring, a Christian is at the same time loving Jesus

and His Father. For, the person who cares for a suffering person, loves those who love the sufferer.

God is love. God and all His designs are love. To choose “to obey all that I have commanded you” (MT 28:20), to “keep my commandments,” in regard to the ways and means of the Plan of God for the salvation of all as revealed by Jesus, is to simultaneously and to authentically love God and neighbor, neighbor and God. Any thought, by any Christian of any rank, of loving God and/or neighbor by refusing to “keep my commandments,” is intrinsically self-contradictory—a moral absurdity and false witness.

Thus, the Christian believes that he or she lives in a moral universe where freely choosing to do the will of the Creator, once it is known, is the only way to live, is an imperative of human existence, because it is the only way that will allow each and all the fullness of life in time and in eternity. For, it is the Creator and only the Creator who knows the entire structure of existence. Therefore, what the Creator communicates as the way to do things is *The Way*. The distinction—between big acts and small acts, worthwhile acts and worthless acts, significant acts and insignificant acts—lies in their conformity

or non-conformity to *The Way* announced by Him “through whom all things were made.”

For the human creature to employ his or her Creator-given freedom and consciousness to defy the Creator is not only tragic, it is irrational. And, it is pain inducing beyond the scope of human comprehension, as the ripples of so-called “little” or so-called “big” infidelities, evils, expand indefinitely outward in all directions into the human community, present and future. It is the great deception of evil that, it persuades people to believe that once they have chosen it, they can know and control its consequences.

“The least initial deviation from the truth is multiplied later a thousand fold.”

Dominical Origin of the *Ipsissima Verba* of Jesus

“In the beginning was the Word (Logos), the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through Him and without Him nothing would have been made...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (JN 1:1FF). And, then He said, “Do not swear at all” (MT 5:33FF).



Cardinals taking the required oath before the Papal Conclave