

# **CURB YOUR TONGUE!**

*The Eighth Commandment and the  
Precepts of the Church*

*By*

REV. GERALD C. TREACY, S.J.



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## THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

The Eighth Commandment is:

*“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”*

**B**Y this commandment lying testimony regarding another is explicitly forbidden. Implicitly all lying is forbidden by this commandment, all unjust injury by word or deed of another's reputation and honor, all rash judgments, and every unjust revelation of secrets.

The virtue of truthfulness is enjoined by this commandment. When our Lord was on trial before Pilate, He was asked about His Kingdom. The men who brought Him to trial accused Him of conspiracy against the Roman State. They said He was establishing a kingdom in opposition to Caesar's empire. That was a lie. And our Saviour stamped it as a lie, when in answering Pilate He declared: “You are right. I am a King. For this was I born and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the *truth*. Everyone that is of the truth hears My voice.” The follower of Christ, the Christian, belongs to the kingdom of truth. He shows his sincerity by his love for truth. He hates a lie.

God is Truth. Satan is the father of lies. And the virtue of truthfulness is an image of Divine Truth. It means saying exactly what is in my mind. We express to others what we think and what we are by external signs, according to St. Thomas. These may be words or deeds. Deeds speak as well as words. In fact they speak more forcefully. If we falsify the thought in our minds, we lie. The real evil of lying consists in the *abuse* of the power of speech. God gives me the power of speech to reveal the thought in

my mind. When I lie, I frustrate the power in the very act of using it.

Even if lying were not forbidden by God's command, it would be wrong. For it would be against the Law of Nature. To frustrate any power that belongs to my nature as a man is against the Law of Nature. God in creating man gave him reason. By that power man is able to put two and two together. That is reasoning. And by that reasoning power man can know that God exists. He also can know that God rewards good and punishes evil. And by his reason he can know that truth is good, and lying is evil. His conclusion is inevitable. It is this: "I must tell the truth if I am to behave according to the nature God has given me, for that is why God has given me the power of speech." Everyone can conclude that by using his reason. That is why St. Paul condemned the ancient Romans. They failed to act as men. They thought they were clever. St. Paul told them they were not. "For professing themselves to be wise they became fools. . . . Because when they knew God they have not glorified Him as God, or given thanks, but became vain in their thoughts and their foolish heart was darkened. . . . Who changed the truth of God into a lie and worshiped and served the creature instead of the Creator" (Rom. i. 21-25).

But God in His mercy did not leave man to figure out by his reason alone what was right and what was wrong. He spoke to man through the commandments and through the Voice of His Divine Son, and continues to speak through His infallible Church. And our blessed Lord Who called Himself the Truth, promised those who followed Him that they should find truth and that truth would make them free. And if we glance into His life whom do we find ever His enemies? The Pharisees. And how did He, the

ever-gentle and the ever-kind lover of all men, characterize these enemies of His love? Liars and hypocrites, like their father the devil who was a liar from the beginning. These were Christ's words.

Common sense shows us what results would follow if man could not rely on the word of his fellow-man. Society would be disrupted. There could be no such thing as human faith. And the world really moves on human faith, the faith that man has in the word of man. Whenever truth is violated disaster follows. Needless to say we are speaking of the serious violation of truth, when a serious injury is done, not of the jocose or humorous life. It is the grievous lie that St. Paul speaks of when he tells his congregation at Ephesus: "Put away lying and speak truth every man with his neighbor" (Ephes. iv. 25). And it is the serious lie that St. John means when he says: "All liars shall have their portion in the pool burning with fire and brimstone" (Apoc. xxi. 8).

A lie is not justified in an endeavor to withhold information that should not be given. For no matter what the motive may be it is never right to abuse the power of speech. What may be done then by one who is bound to withhold information and yet must speak, or his very silence will betray his trust? An answer may be given that is capable of a two-fold meaning. The speaker employs words that express the truth that is in his mind. The hearer could get the meaning as the speaker has it in his mind. The expression may be understood in two senses. Ordinary convention shows this in the commonplace expression in answer to an inquirer trying to see a busy executive: "He is out." The accepted meaning is: "He is out to you. He is too busy or he does not wish to see you." The person in question need not be a busy executive either. The fact that he does not

wish to see a caller justifies him in declaring: "I am out." The little girl who came running down stairs and burst upon her mother's caller with the announcement: "Mother told sister to tell you she was out, but I got down stairs first," was upsetting a convention by expressing literally what was in her mother's mind.

This expression "out" or "not at home" is an example of what is called broad mental restriction. It is restricting the words to a meaning which they can really have. For the words can express two thoughts. The speaker restricts the meaning to one of the thoughts, and is justified in so doing. He does not lie in so doing. He may deceive. It is surely lawful to deceive another who is seeking information to which he has no right. So Father Davis says: "When a secret has to be kept, some form of words may be employed that express the veiled truth, and at the same time occasion the deception of the hearer. . . . For the legitimate use of broad mental restriction two conditions must be fulfilled, namely, there must be a sufficiently good reason for its employment and for the permitted deception of the hearer, and secondly the hearer should have no right to the information which he seeks." (*Moral and Pastoral Theology*, Vol. 2, p. 415.)

St. Thomas with his usual clarity, when speaking of what a man is bound to tell in a court of justice, declares: "It is one thing to withhold the truth and another to utter a falsehood. The former is lawful sometimes, for a man is not bound to divulge all truth, but only such as the judge can and must require of him according to the order of justice. . . . On the other hand it is never lawful to make a false declaration. . . . Accordingly it is lawful for the accused to defend himself by withholding the truth that he is not bound to avow. . . . But it is unlawful for

him either to utter a falsehood or to withhold a truth that he is bound to avow, or to employ guile or fraud, because guile or fraud have the force of a lie" (2a 2ae Q. 69, Art. 2).

## **Detraction and Calumny**

Detraction and calumny are forbidden by this commandment. Detraction means revealing a true but unknown sin or fault of another. It destroys the good esteem of another. Good esteem may refer to physical, moral, or intellectual qualities. Every man has a right to this. To invade that right is to commit an injustice. The fact that I know another's weakness does not justify me in broadcasting that weakness. Not only has the individual the right to good esteem but that right belongs to every group, a business group, a social organization, a city, a nation. Detraction is a serious sin if the harm done is serious. And even though the fault revealed may be slight, because of other circumstances the sin may be serious. For example a child's reverence for its mother may be hurt by the revelation of a fault that is considered a slight fault by grownups. That fault registers big in the trusting mind of the child. To reveal that fault to the innocent child is a serious offense against this commandment. Detraction is a grievous sin if the injury done is serious. This is a principle that governs all sins against justice. Calumny which is the assertion of a false statement about another adds the sin of lying to detraction. To be contrite for these sins the one guilty must do all in his power to make up for the injury he has done. Restitution which is a necessary condition in repentance for the sin of theft is likewise necessary in repentance for the sins of detraction or calumny.

Are there any circumstances in which the

revelation of the fault of another is justifiable? Yes. In defense of oneself or another to whom an injustice has been done I am justified in revealing another's fault. The revelation, however, must be made to one who is entitled to the knowledge. For example if I come to the knowledge of a vicious habit that a child in my neighborhood is guilty of, my right is to inform the parents of the child, but not the neighbors. For the purpose of the revelation is the correction of the fault. So it is to be revealed to those who are in a position to correct. Our blessed Lord taught this very clearly when in speaking of correction, He said we were to correct the erring if we were in a position to correct, and then if that were unavailing to speak to those who had the duty and power to correct. "If thy brother shall offend against thee, go and rebuke him between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee thou shalt gain thy brother. And if he will not hear thee take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may stand. And if he will not hear them, tell the Church. And if he will not hear the Church let him be to thee as the heathen and publican" (Matt. xviii. 15-17).

## **Rash Judgment and Contumely**

Rash judgment is a sin against justice. It consists in condemning another without sufficient grounds for condemnation. Others have a right to retain the good esteem we have of them until they forfeit this right by actions unmistakably bad. Rash judgment is really based on contempt. "Who art thou that judgest thy neighbor?" (St. James iv. 13.) "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" (Rom. xiv. 4.) When serious injustice is done the neighbor by rash judgment, the sin is serious.



Contumely consists in unjustly violating the honor due another. The history of our Lord's sacred Passion is one long tale of contumely. By God's command we are obliged to esteem others and give them their due honor: "Render to all their dues . . . honor to whom honor is due" (Rom. xiii. 7). As honor consists in the outward recognition of another's excellence and this recognition is due to another, contumely which violates this honor is a sin against justice and charity. The obligation of restitution applies here.

## Keeping Secrets

A secret is hidden knowledge that cannot be revealed without violating justice and charity. Secrets are ordinarily divided into three classes, the natural secret, the promised secret and the entrusted secret. The natural secret is so named because the duty of secrecy comes immediately from the Law of Nature. In such cases where secrecy is a duty, the nature of human relationships demands it. There need not be any agreement or promise to safeguard the secret. Its very nature does that. For the knowledge acquired is such that it cannot be revealed without injuring the person who has communicated the knowledge and damaging his character. The natural secret obliges under serious sin if the revelation of the knowledge would do serious injury. It always obliges in charity and sometimes in justice. Is there ever a reason for revealing such a secret? Yes. Moralists agree that such a secret even though binding in justice, may be revealed if he who holds the secret would be harmed by silence, or a third innocent person would suffer injury, or the common good would suffer. If the secret binds only in charity, the serious inconvenience of the one holding it, is a reason that justifies its revelation.

Once the secret has become public there is no further duty of silence.

A promised secret explains itself. On gaining knowledge of a secret a man promises not to reveal it. This is considered a promise of fidelity not of justice. However, a man receiving such a secret and binding himself under a serious obligation because he considers the matter in question of great importance, assumes by that fact a serious responsibility to observe silence. It must be remembered that no one can make any promise to keep a secret that is a violation of God's Law. It is both sinful to make such a promise and sinful to keep it.

An entrusted secret is one in which there arises the obligation of secrecy from an agreement made before the communication of the secret. "If you tell me what you know about this individual's character I will not reveal the knowledge." That is a spoken agreement. The agreement may be tacit as in the relation between doctor and patient, lawyer and client. We call these professional secrets. Every Catholic knows of course that the most sacred secret of all is that of the confessional. The civil courts of New York have upheld the sacredness of the confessional secret. Under no circumstances may this ever be revealed.

## **The Secret of the Confessional and American Law**

The court decision safeguarding the secret of the confessional centers around the name of Father Anthony Kohlmann, S.J., the first Vicar-General of New York. Father Kohlmann was summoned into court under the following circumstances. Restitution had been made of some stolen goods to a man named John Keating through Father Kohl-

mann. Keating stated this fact in court. The court summoned Father Kohlmann and called upon him to name the person or persons from whom he had received the stolen property. He refused to do this. The knowledge asked of him was gained under the seal of confession, and no court had the right to that secret. The case went to the Grand Jury and Father Kohlmann was subpoenaed to appear. He answered the summons but again refused to testify. As the trial went on, he was brought to the witness stand a third time, and again refused to give testimony. With consent of counsel the question was put off for some time and finally on Tuesday, June 8, 1813, it was brought on for argument before a court composed of De Witt Clinton, Mayor of the city; Josiah Hoffman, recorder; Isaac Douglas and Richard Cunningham, aldermen.

When Father Kohlmann was called to the witness stand he asked to be excused and stated: "Were I summoned to give evidence as a private individual (in which capacity I declare most solemnly I know nothing relative to the case before the courts), and to testify from those ordinary sources of information from which the witnesses present have derived theirs, I should not for a moment hesitate, and should even deem it a duty of conscience to declare whatever knowledge I might have. . . . But if called upon to testify in quality of minister of a sacrament, in which my God Himself has enjoined on me a perpetual and inviolable secrecy, I must declare to this honorable court that I cannot, I must not answer any question that has a bearing on the restitution in question; and that it would be my duty to prefer instantaneous death or any temporal misfortune, rather than disclose the name of the penitent in question. For were I to act otherwise, I should become a traitor to my Church, to my sacred ministry, and to my God. In fine I

should render myself guilty of eternal damnation. . . . The question now before the court is this: Whether a Roman Catholic priest can in any case be justified in revealing the secrets of sacramental confession? I say he cannot; the reason whereof must be obvious to everyone acquainted with the tenets of the Catholic Church respecting the sacraments. Father Kohlmann then proceeded to explain the teachings of the Church, and showed to what disabilities a violation of its laws would subject him.

The decision was given by De Witt Clinton. Briefly he stated: "We speak of this question not in a theological sense but in its legal and constitutional bearings. Although we differ from the witness and his brethren in our religious creed, yet we have no reason to question the purity of their motives, or to impeach their good conduct as citizens. They are protected by the laws and constitution of this country in the full and free exercise of their religion, and this court can never countenance or authorize the application of insult to their faith or of torture to their consciences." At the suggestion of De Witt Clinton, when he became Governor of New York State, this important decision was incorporated into the Revised Statutes, as part of the written law of the State.

It was a fortunate thing for the early Church in America that a man of Father Kohlmann's type was called upon to make a public defense of the doctrine of Confession and the inviolability of the seal. In *The Life and Times of John Carroll*, Dr. Peter Guilday says of him: "The most remarkable of the Jesuits sent from Europe by the General was Father Anthony Kohlmann, whose career in America and in Europe as a teacher and missionary, places him above all who belonged to the American Province during his time here. . . . Born in Alsace, June 13, 1771,

he entered the Society of Jesus in Russia in 1803, and the following year came to America to take part in the restoration of the Society in this country. He was one of the most distinguished members of the restored Society, and when Bishop Carroll sent him to New York in October, 1808 . . . he organized the New York Literary Institute, a classical school for boys, on the present site of St. Patrick's Cathedral. . . . Father Kohlmann was far-sighted enough to realize, more keenly perhaps than the Americans themselves, that the future of the United States lay no longer with the South and that it was in New York that the nation would find its greatest center of population. . . . In a letter written to his Superior, April 24, 1815, he declared: 'the State of New York is of greater importance to the Society than all the other States together.' . . . As pastor of St. Peter's Church and vicar-general and administrator of the diocese in the absence of Bishop Concanen, Father Kohlmann was virtually the founder of the New York Archdiocese. . . . In 1815 Father Kohlmann returned to Georgetown and became Master of Novices. Two years later he was appointed Superior, and in 1824 when the Gregorian University was reopened in Rome, he was recalled to take the chair of dogmatic theology. One of his pupils was Joachim Pecci, later Leo XIII. He died in Rome on April 11, 1836." (*The Life and Times of John Carroll*, pp. 556-636.)

If the matter of the entrusted secret is of sufficient moment the obligation of preserving that secret is a serious obligation binding under serious sin. This obligation is one of justice and if we are considering a professional secret, the obligation also derives from the need of upholding the common good. Such secrets may be revealed, however, when consent to reveal on the part of the giver of the secret may be presumed. For example

if continued secrecy would work harm to the one who had entrusted the secret. Again if continued secrecy would harm a third innocent person, the secret may be revealed. For the simple reason that an innocent person has the right to be defended against unjust aggression, and no entrusted secret may prevail against such a right. The same holds true when revelation is necessary in the interest of the public good.

The Catechism of the Council of Trent in treating of this commandment states that it forbids all sins of the tongue. As St. James says: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, he is able also with a bridle to lead about the whole body. We put bits in the mouths of horses that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body. Even so the tongue is indeed a little member, and boasts great things. Behold how small a fire kindles a great wood" (St. James iii. 2, 3, 5). From this the Catechism declares we learn two truths. "The first is that sins of the tongue are very prevalent. . . . The other truth is that the tongue is the source of innumerable evils. Through the fault of the evil speaker are often lost the property, the reputation, the life and the salvation of the injured person, or of him who inflicts the injury. The injured person unable to bear patiently the contumely avenges it without restraint. The offender on the other hand, deterred by a perverse shame and a false idea of what is called honor, cannot be induced to make reparation to him whom he has offended."

And who is the neighbor against whom we are forbidden to bear false witness? The Catechism answers: "Our neighbor is he who needs our assistance whether bound to us by ties of kindred or not, whether a fellow-citizen or a stranger, a friend or an enemy. It is wrong to think that anyone may give

false evidence against an enemy since by the command of God and our Lord we are bound to love him. Moreover as every man is bound to love himself, and is thus in some sense his own neighbor, it is unlawful for anyone to bear false witness against himself. He who does so, brands himself with infamy and disgrace, and injures both himself and the Church of which he is a member, much as the suicide by his act, does a wrong to the State. . . . This precept then prohibits deceit, lying, and perjury on the part of witnesses. It extends also to plaintiffs, defendants, promoters, representatives and advocates; in a word, to all who take any part in lawsuits."

## Sins of the Tongue

This commandment explicitly forbids false testimony given under oath in a court of justice. It moreover prohibits whatever is falsely affirmed by anyone in a public court or elsewhere, in his own interest or against his interest. By our neighbor is meant anyone who needs our help. It includes ourselves as St. Augustine explains: "Let no one who bears false testimony against himself think that he has not violated this commandment, for the standard of loving our neighbor is the love which we cherish toward ourselves." Lying, deception, perjury violate this commandment. Detraction is likewise forbidden, which the Catechism of the Council of Trent calls "a pestilence which is the source of innumerable and calamitous evils." Reputation is injured not only by calumniating the character of another but also by exaggerating another's faults. To reveal the secret sin of any man to one who has no right to the knowledge is to be guilty of detraction. Willingly to listen to detraction or to give encouragement to the detractor is to share in

the sin. Those who foment dissensions and promote quarrels, who flatter and fawn upon people of influence for self-gain are all guilty of evil speech forbidden by this commandment. For such are hypocrites who were constantly rebuked by our blessed Lord.

Viewing the eighth commandment from a positive angle, it calls for the conduct of trials on the plane of strict justice and according to law. It calls for sentence to be pronounced only after full knowledge of the case is possessed by the judge. It requires the acquittal of the innocent and the punishment of the guilty, and that judicial decisions be rendered without fear or favor. As this commandment chiefly concerns witnesses, it not only forbids false testimony but enjoins the truth, "the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." St. Augustine in this matter pithily remarks: "He who conceals the truth and he who utters falsehood are both guilty; the one because he is unwilling to render a service; the other because he has the will to do an injury." However, we are not *always* obliged to disclose the truth. Attorneys and counselors, plaintiffs and prosecutors are mentioned specifically by the Catechism of the Council of Trent: "The two former should not refuse to contribute their services and legal assistance when the needs of others call for their aid. They should deal generously with the poor. They should not defend an unjust cause, prolong lawsuits by trickery, nor encourage them for the sake of gain. As for remuneration for their services, let them be guided by the principles of justice and equity. Plaintiffs and prosecutors on their side are not to be led by the influence of love or hatred or any other motive into exposing anyone to danger through unjust charges. . . . To all is addressed the divine command that in every conversation they should speak the truth at all times from the sincerity of their



hearts; that they should utter nothing injurious to the reputation of another, not even of those by whom they have been injured and persecuted."

## Gossip and Gossipers

Gossip is the most common of all sins of the tongue. It takes many forms. There is the much-mentioned gossip of the bridge-table. There is the gossip of the men's club. It is often called harmless. It is in fact rarely so. For gossip hits at character. And a blow at character if not always a mortal wound, is always a wound. A wound bleeds. Surely it may heal. But there is always a scar left after the gossip-wound.

Character is what we are. God knows that best. And we know it, too, but not as well as God knows it.

Reputation is what people say we are. And they say it because they think it. "What do you think of John Jones?" Your answer is the REPUTATION you give him. His reputation is the picture of his character.

We speak about revealing character. That means lifting up the veil and showing what is within. Character is the shrine within the temple. Reputation is the outside picture of the inside treasure.

You reveal your character and establish your reputation by the way you speak and act. You reveal another's character by the way you speak of another and act toward another. Gossip is drawing a wrong picture. Or it is drawing a picture I have no RIGHT to draw.

How is it drawing a wrong picture? In this way. Sergeant Brown knows that Captain Smith enjoys a game of cards. Around the mess table one night he suddenly announces: "Our captain is a heavy gambler." That is gossip. What is its effect? A heavy

gambler has a very special meaning. A man who is a heavy gambler thinks of nothing but gambling. It is his life. It has become a master-passion. In the case of Captain Smith it is a picture of an officer who puts gambling ahead of his military duties, his family, his religion. The young soldier hearing this opinion of Captain Smith, at once loses respect for him. He cannot look up to him as he used to. Why this man is going to lead him into battle. What if his thoughts are on the card table when he is handling the lives of many men? Every soldier who hears that remark reacts in the same way. What has happened? Sergeant Brown's careless gossip has lost a good officer to the country's service. Captain Smith is through.

May careless gossip be tossed off lightly? God does not toss it off lightly for God's command is: "Thou shalt not bear false witness." And drawing a false picture is bearing false witness.

"Well, I'm sorry for my careless gossip," says the gossip. That does not forgive the sin. For that is not contrition. Contrition is proving that I am sorry. How do I prove my sorrow? By making up to the best of my ability for the harm I have done. If I take a man's money from him, I do not prove my contrition until I have paid it all back. So if I take away a man's reputation from him, I am obliged to restore that reputation.

Sergeant Brown is obliged to retract what he said, if he wants forgiveness for his sin of detraction. For what is wrongly called careless gossip means detraction. He is bound to go to every soldier who heard him make his remarks, and take back the statement he made.

Gossip however may give the right picture. Then how is it gossip? It is gossip because it is drawn for those who have no right to see it. For example Miss Blue knows that

Miss Black is a heavy drinker. There is no mistake about it.. There is no exaggerating the fact. But Miss Blue is the only one of all Miss Black's friends who knows this. Instead of trying to help Miss Black overcome her passion for drink, Miss Blue does nothing about it. She should have used her friendship to help her friend. She should have urged her friend to go to Holy Communion frequently, even daily. For Miss Blue is a good Catholic and knows that God has given us His Body and Blood to enable us to control our passions.

What does she do? She breezes up to the bridge table and announces to her three friends who know nothing about Miss Black's weakness, all the details of a sad sin, as she has seen them in the case of Miss Black. There are a great many kind and unkind remarks passed. The game is over and each one of the three returns home, and relays the choice bit of gossip to three families.

Is not the fact true? Certainly. But it is wrong to say something that damages the reputation of another, even though the fact stated is true. It is wrong because God gives each one a right to his and her reputation.

## **Propaganda Lies**

The modern word propaganda has become identified with lying. This is too bad for propaganda can be truth and should be truth. Propaganda means advertising or giving publicity to facts. If it broadcasts falsehoods or half-truths it is lying.

Every real educator is a propagandist in the good sense of the word, so is every salesman. Everyone interested in an idea or a plan who tries to sell that idea or plan is a propagandist. Our Lord's Apostles were the greatest propagandists that ever lived. They believed in Christ's Truth and they spent

their lives in spreading that Truth throughout the world, even at the cost of their lives. "Going therefore teach all nations" is a propaganda message. The Catholic Church has been propagating that message down through the centuries.

But when we hear the word propaganda today we rarely identify it with truth. We are chary of propaganda. We should be, because we have learned that certain groups in this country and in other countries have admitted after the fact, that they did not hesitate to issue false statements to further the interests of their groups. It is not a sin peculiar to one nation. It is not only a political trick. It is found among groups that are not political either in the national or international sense.

Sad to say it has always been. If it is more prevalent today that is because the means of sending out information are more extensive today than ever before in the world's history. The press, the radio, the movie, the theatre are all means of sending out information or misinformation. The obligation of obeying God's commandment—Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness—is just as binding on all groups as it is on all individuals. In fact those who hold responsible positions, who reach a great many people through their control of sources of information, and the means of spreading information, are capable of doing greater harm, than the individual propagandist who only reaches a few.

Every modern government has its propaganda agencies. This is not merely a war-time situation. Long before the war this was true. What is the obligation of government in this matter? The same as the obligation of the individual. A government is not OBLIGED to tell *all* the government knows. Neither is the individual. But government is OBLIGED by God's Law not to bear false

witness to the truth, not to garble the truth, not to proclaim false facts as true facts.

Before the war, Edward Knoblaugh, an Associated Press foreign correspondent had this to say about some European governments in their policies toward the men of the press:

“I have had to submit to all kinds of censorship and I have had to pass on to millions of readers stuff that was so smelly, that I felt sure its odor must be detected. . . . Yet I have later heard many of these fabulous propaganda untruths solemnly relayed as gospel. . . . During the ten years I covered foreign happenings, I made myself so obnoxious in one country that I was blackballed out of it, and I got out of another just ahead of a firing squad. In both cases I committed the unpardonable offense of daring to write what I saw and knew to be the truth.”

## Summary

To sum up the teaching of the Eighth Commandment. Everyone is forbidden to lie. On all occasions and under all circumstances everyone is not bound to speak the truth, for everyone is not bound to speak on all occasions and under all circumstances. There are times when a man is bound to secrecy. But I am not allowed by God's commandment to keep a secret, by lying.

Everyone is entitled to his reputation. Although I know a person's reputation is undeserved, it is not my right to proclaim this fact. If I have harmed the good name of another, I must make amends for the harm, if I want God's forgiveness. Detraction, calumny, rash judgment, contumely, gossip are forbidden by this commandment. Truth is enjoined.

The word is the picture of the thought. Truth means the right picture. The way of Truth must be the way of life, for the God

of Truth is the God of life. I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE.

## THE PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH

God makes His Law known through the commandments, through the teaching of His Divine Son, and through the teaching of His Church. Christ established the Church to lead men to their true destiny. He made it a real society with a definite end and definite means to reach that end. In His mercy He did not leave men to flounder around, to spend their lives in guessing whether this was God's Will or something else was God's Will. No. God's Will is found in the fulfillment of His Law, and to His Church He committed that Law.

We know from the first commandment that our duty is to worship God. But how are we to worship God? The Church tells us that. Christ founded His Church to tell us that. His Church then would be a strange society if it possessed no laws. In fact it would be no society at all for there can be no society without law. God's worship is the whole reason of life. It is the supremely important thing in life. Is it surprising then that the Church should formulate laws to make that worship as humanly perfect as it can be?

Unless we realize that this is the reason back of Church Law, we miss everything. If we fancy that the Church gives us a law for some ordinary human purpose we are wrong. The Church's purpose is divine. And every law of the Church has in view this divine purpose. Church Laws are commonly divided into liturgical and disciplinary. By liturgical is meant that which pertains to the official worship of the Church. For example everything that has to do with the service of the altar is regulated. Holy Mass

is offered at certain times, in a definite manner, in a prescribed form. All these observances fall under liturgical law. An example of a disciplinary law would be the obligation to fast from midnight before receiving Holy Communion. A moment's reflection however shows us that disciplinary laws are not merely for the sake of discipline. They are all for the purpose of making man's worship of God more dignified, more proper, more worthy. God is All-Perfect, man so imperfect that all care should be taken that man's worship of God be as free from defect as possible.

With these ideas clear, we can understand better what are called the precepts of the Church. There are six precepts or commandments of the Church:

1. To hear Mass on Sundays and holydays of obligation.
2. To fast and abstain on the days appointed.
3. To go to confession at least once a year.
4. To receive the Holy Eucharist during Easter time.
5. To contribute to the support of our pastors.
6. Not to marry within certain degrees of kindred, nor to solemnize marriage during the forbidden times.

## **The First Precept of the Church**

In the first commandment of the Church we are told how to fulfill the third commandment of God. "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day" was the command of God given to the people of the Old Law by Moses on Mount Sinai. When the Old Law ceased, the obligation of honoring God on a special day did not cease. Why should it? The New Law which issued in the Life of

Grace would indeed look strange if it did not contain a special day set aside for the honor of God, the Author of Grace. Our Lord said: "*I have not come to destroy but to fulfill the Law.*" The Old Law was a type of the more perfect Law to come. The Old Law was the shadow. The New Law is the substance of God's love. Whatever beauty was in the Old Law was to be intensified in the New. Love was to supersede fear. The most perfect expression of love is sacrifice. The most perfect Sacrifice is the Sacrifice of Calvary renewed on the Altar. And so the Church commands us to honor God by sharing in the Great Sacrifice on Sundays and holydays.

*It is the Mass that Matters.* So we are bidden to honor God and bring blessings on ourselves through the Mass. And by hearing Mass we mean not merely being present at Mass but really offering the Mass. It is true that the priest is the chief minister of the Mass. But that does not mean that he is the only one to offer it. It is a common or communal action. The action of the love and the prayer of many. And the priest is ordained to offer the Holy Sacrifice not for himself alone or by himself alone but for himself and his people. "Pray my brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may find favor with Almighty God," is what he says at the *Orate Fratres*. This is the real fulfillment of the first precept of the Church, namely, the body of the faithful united with the priest, praying with each other and for each other, and with the whole Church and for the whole Church. It means a union with Christ and with each other. We are joined in the most perfect act of worship which gives more honor and glory to God than all other prayers could give Him, even though welling up in the hearts of His saints or pouring forth from his angelic hosts.



The Church then as the guardian of God's Law and the Voice of Christ bids us honor God in this very special way on Sundays and holydays. *He who hears you, hears Me.* We do not pray the Mass because we feel like honoring God in this way. We pray the Mass because God speaking through His Church tells us plainly: "This is the way to honor Me as I would have you honor Me." In the treatise on the Third Commandment, the details of God's Law pertaining to the worship due to Him are fully explained.

The holydays of the Church are days set apart as Sunday is set apart for divine worship. Their number has varied in the long history of the Church. In this country there are three in honor of Christ: namely, Christmas in honor of His birth, New Year's Day, when we commemorate His circumcision, and Ascension Thursday when we celebrate His entrance into heaven. There are two holydays in honor of our Blessed Mother, namely, the Assumption, August 15th, when we pay tribute to her remarkable privilege of entering heaven after her death, with her body as well as her soul glorified, and the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8th, when we honor her unique gift of being conceived without original sin. There is one holyday in honor of all the saints which is on November 1st, and is called All Saints' Day or All Hallows.

## **The Second Precept of the Church**

This precept obliges us to fast and abstinence on the days appointed by the Church. An easy way to remember the difference between fasting and abstinence is this: Fasting limits the quantity of food, abstinence deals with the quality of food. The Lenten Regulations published each year explain the obligation and nature of fasting and abstinence.

The weekly notices read in our churches remind us of our obligation of fast and abstinence on days other than Fridays. All Fridays of the year are observed as days of abstinence in this country. When a holyday occurs on Friday abstinence is not observed. Although usually the day preceding the holyday is a day of abstinence. The other abstinence days are the Wednesdays of Lent, Holy Saturday morning, and the ember days, as well as the vigils of Pentecost, the Assumption, All Saints and Christmas. When a national holiday occurs on a day of abstinence, the Bishop of the diocese may dispense from the law. The law of abstinence obliges all who have completed their seventh year. The sick, the convalescent, the needy who cannot afford to purchase the prescribed foods are exempt from abstinence. Pastors and confessors have the dispensing power in individual cases.

The law of fasting prescribes that only one complete meal may be taken in a day. Other food is allowed as explained in the diocesan regulations. The fast days in this country are all the days of Lent, except Sundays, the ember days, the vigils of Pentecost, the Assumption, All Saints and Christmas. All are bound to fast from the age of twenty-one to fifty-nine years. Exemption or dispensation from this law is granted as in the case of abstinence to those who have lawful reasons excusing them. In this instance diocesan regulations are our guide.

Every Catholic should realize that the Church in prescribing fast and abstinence is considering above all things our spiritual health. As a matter of fact bodily health is benefitted by fast and abstinence as the science of modern dietetics proves conclusively. This, however, is not the spiritual ideal. The spiritual ideal of fasting and abstinence is penance. We fast and abstain as a penance

for our sins. And even if for good reasons we are exempt or dispensed from fasting and abstinence, we are not thereby excused from all penitential practice. "Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish," are our Saviour's words (Luke xiii. 3). The real Catholic who cannot abstain or fast will do some other form of penance. The Church moreover in prescribing days and seasons of fast and abstinence is ever giving us a *reminder*. The season of Lent reminds us of our Lord's fast of forty days in the desert; the ember days remind us to sanctify the four seasons of the year; and the vigils remind us to prepare spiritually for the worthy celebration of the feast day that follows. The Friday abstinence throughout the year, is a weekly reminder of our Saviour's death on the cross on Good Friday.

## **The Third and Fourth Precepts of the Church**

These two precepts have to do with annual confession and the reception of the Holy Eucharist during the Easter season. Canon Law (Canon 906) declares that every Catholic who has reached the age of reason is obliged to confess his sins at least once a year. While no special time is mentioned for the yearly confession it is usually made in preparation for the Easter Communion. The time prescribed for the Easter Communion begins with the first Sunday of Lent and ends on Trinity Sunday, and every Catholic who has attained the age of reason is under a serious obligation of fulfilling this precept. It is plain that these precepts have for their object the restoration and preservation of grace in the soul. It is just as plain that these precepts lay down the minimum for Catholic life. The true ideal of Catholic life is fre-

quent confession, and more and more frequent reception of the Holy Eucharist. The Church of the present century since the pontificate of Pius X, the Pope of the Eucharist, has learned that Catholic life means Eucharistic life or it means nothing. The great Pope whose clarion call to all Catholics was "*Pray the Mass*," instituted the Eucharistic Crusade which has meant so much for the life of the modern Church. His successors on Peter's Throne have handed on the torch that is the Light of the world. *The peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ*, which alone can save the muddled modern world begins and ends with the Tabernacle. "Except you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you shall not have life in you" (John vi. 54).

## **The Fifth and Sixth Precepts of the Church**

"The Lord ordained that they who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel," are St. Paul's words (1 Cor. ix. 14). And again in the same letter he said: "Know you not that those who work in the holy place, eat the things that are of the holy place; and they that serve the altar, partake with the altar." The fifth precept of the Church commands us to support our pastors. Just as in the Old Law there was special provision made by God for the support of the priests and the Temple, so does God command in the New Law that His ministers be supported by those to whom they minister. The common method of Church support in this country is by free will offerings. Sometimes this does not suffice and other means have to be found to supply the needs of the parish. The point is that every Catholic is obliged in keeping with his income to contribute to Church sup-

port. When he does so he is not doing a favor to those whom he may like or dislike. He is fulfilling a duty that God has put upon him.

The last precept of the Church obliges us to observe the laws that the Church prescribes for marriage. These laws are given in detail in the treatise on the Sacrament of Matrimony. Among the most important is the law that obliges Catholics to be married in the presence of a priest and two witnesses. Unless this law is fulfilled there is no marriage. It must be remembered in considering the marriage laws of the Church that the Church is commissioned by God to safeguard the sacrament and prescribe the conditions for its valid and licit reception. As a sacrament instituted by Christ, it is not merely a human or civil contract. So no matter what State law may say regarding the contract, the sacred character of the marriage bond is in the safekeeping of the Church and not the State. The State has the right to legislate in this matter for the good of its citizens as individuals and as members of a social unit. But it has no right to infringe on the rights of the Church whose task is not merely to look after the human welfare of its children, but much more their eternal welfare. The fact is that the more the State conforms in its marriage legislation to the legislation of the Church, the better for the citizens and for the State.

This precept forbids the solemnization of marriage during the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent. That does not mean that marriage cannot be contracted during these times. It means that the pomp and ceremony usually attendant on marriage are forbidden. The reason is evident. As these times are set apart for penitential observance, it is out of keeping with the spirit of the Church to sound the note of joy when the heart of the Church is in sorrow.

While these precepts or laws of the Church are taught to every Catholic, the Church has many other laws that are contained in its Body of Laws, or Corpus Juris. This group of laws is known as Canon Law. Just as the body of laws in the State is known as Civil Law.

## Canon Law

Canon Law (*Jus Canonicum*) meaning norm or rule, from the Greek *kainown*, and the Latin *jus*, meaning law either in the singular or plural is the technical term used for Church Law since the twelfth century. So we may say that Canon Law is "the complex of rules which direct the external order of the Church, the whole Church is meant, not some particular part of it. The purpose of Canon Law, as of all true law, is the establishment and maintenance of external order. As the Church is a society, a body that is visible, her laws are mainly concerned with public or external order. Of course as the end of the Church is spiritual, it is clear that Canon Law must be aware of the spiritual. By reason of its origin Canon Law is either divine or human. That part of it is divine that owes its origin to Christ or to the Apostles in so far as the Apostles enacted laws under divine inspiration. That part of it is human which owes its origin to human authority, such as decrees passed by councils, popes and bishops. If, however, these decrees are declarations of divine or natural law, they belong to the class of divine laws.

Canon Law then is as old as the Church is old. However, during the centuries that have marked the life of the Church, there have appeared from time to time new arrangements of the Law of the Church. So we speak today of the New Code of Canon Law. This new code became effective on

May 19, 1918 (Pentecost Sunday), by decree of Pope Benedict XV. In this Decree, entitled *Proventissima*, the pontiff explains very clearly, that "the Church, most provident of mothers, enriched by her Divine Founder with all the characteristics befitting a perfect society, from the very beginning of her existence . . . undertook to regulate and safeguard the discipline of the clergy and the Christian people by definite laws. . . . However, owing to changes in the circumstances of the times and the needs of men, Canon Law no longer achieved its end with sufficient speed. For in the passing of centuries a great many laws were issued. Some were abrogated by the supreme authority of the Church or fell into desuetude. Others proved too difficult to enforce as times changed, or ceased to be useful for the common good. And the laws had so increased in number and were so separated and scattered that many of them were unknown not only to the people but to the most learned scholars as well." This is why the New Code was issued. And so the Holy Father concludes his decree by stating: "Therefore having invoked the aid of divine grace and relying on the authority of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, or Our own accord and with certain knowledge, and in the fullness of the Apostolic Power with which We are invested, by this Our Constitution, which We wish to be valid for all time, We promulgate, decree and order that the present Code, just as it is compiled, shall have from this time forth the power of law for the Universal Church . . ."

This decree was issued on Pentecost Sunday, 1917, and went into effect one year later on Pentecost Sunday, 1918.







