



INTRODUCTION TO CATHOLICISM

Chapter 19

The First Commandment

True worship belongs only to the Lord.

Chapter 19

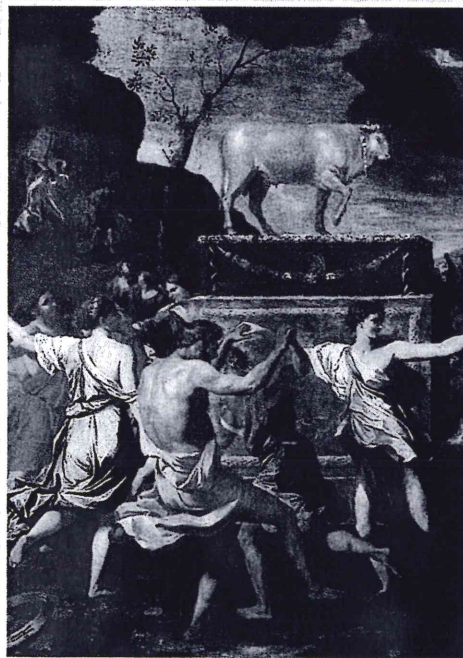
The First Commandment

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron, and said to him, "Up, make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." And Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made a molten calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" (Ex 32:1-4)

When we read the story of Moses and the golden calf, there's a tendency to laugh and say, "Well, that's a good one. Can you imagine people worshipping something they made with their own hands? How dumb could they have been?"

It's so easy to view the act of worship as nothing more or less than bowing down in front of an object, so we have a picture in our minds of this large group bowing in front of the golden calf. How ridiculous.

Viewing idol worship in this way is missing the point entirely. Worship involves giving the highest form of honor, and it becomes idolatry when what is worshipped is not God. In the current culture, there is a strong tendency to do exactly this. When someone uses drugs, alcohol, or sex improperly, it is a form of idol worship. When a sin is committed, it is a matter of honoring a set of personal moral rules rather than those God has given to us. This is exactly what Adam did when he ate the apple. Remember the promise of the devil, "You will be as gods knowing both good and evil." Another way to say this is, "You will get to play God when you make up your own moral rules."



THE FIRST COMMANDMENT AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them. (Ex 20: 2-5)

When Moses was given the Ten Commandments, the Jewish people had just been freed from the slavery of the Egyptians. They were freed because God led them and protected them. He inflicted plagues on the Egyptians until the Egyptian pharaoh released the Jews. He sent a pillar of fire and smoke to stand between the Jewish people and the Egyptians who were pursuing them. This prevented the Egyptians from reenslaving the Jews. God parted the Red Sea when Moses and his people needed to cross and closed it again over the army of pharaoh, ending the chase.

Because of all that God has done for them, the Jews owe much to the Lord. First and foremost, they owe him worship. God is owed this worship because of his power and goodness—a power and goodness that can readily be seen by looking at the help God gave Moses and his people.

It is not only the Jews, though, who owe God worship, but all people, throughout all time.

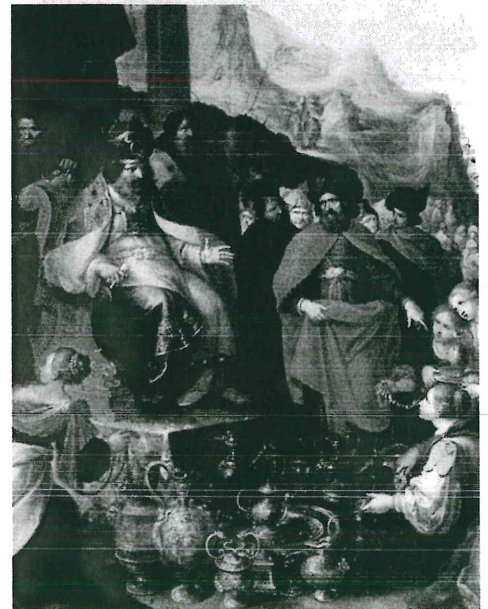
God created everything that exists; he created each and every one of us out of nothing, and if he ever stopped thinking about us, even for the shortest moment, we would no longer exist. Because of his power, goodness, and the love he has for all things, God continues to care for us, and we shall not stop living, stop existing. We owe him our existence, so we should worship the one, true God.

In the days of the Old Testament, the first commandment's *literal* interpretation held much greater meaning than it does today. The first commandment prohibits both polytheism, the worship of more than one god, and idolatry, the worship of idols (false gods).

The first commandment condemns *polytheism*. It requires man neither to believe in, nor to venerate, other divinities than the one true God. Scripture constantly recalls this rejection of “idols, [of] silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.” These empty idols make their worshippers empty: “Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them.”¹ God, however, is the “living God”² who gives life and intervenes in history. (CCC 2112)

The need to reject the idols of silver and gold was a genuine challenge for the Jewish people in the Old Testament. Men of that era fashioned idols out of precious metals and worshipped these idols as gods. These idols were not thought of as images, pictures of gods; rather, these figures of metal were seen as the *gods themselves*. This fact sheds new light on the term “living God.” The God of the Jews is indeed alive, is really God, unlike the “gods” made by men, which are just lifeless pieces of metal or wood.

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The First Commandment

The commandment not to worship idols was indeed a task for the Jewish people—one they fell short of on several occasions. For instance, the Ten Commandments are first revealed to the people in the twentieth chapter of Exodus. By the thirty-second chapter, the people who had received the Ten Commandments have created a golden calf and are worshipping it as the god who brought them out of slavery in Egypt. In such a short time, they have already abandoned the true God.

Similarly, polytheism (from the Greek words *polys*, “many,” and *theos*, “god”) was practiced during that time. Except for the Jewish people, all other peoples had religious systems that believed in the existence of many gods. Egypt, for example, the land from which the Jews had just escaped, worshipped a god of death, a god of the sun, and many more. The first commandment makes it clear that these other gods are not gods at all, and that true worship belongs only to the Lord.

Also forbidden are idolatry, superstition, and divination. Idolatry is the elevation of other realities to the state of gods, thereby making them take the place of the real God. Superstition is any belief or practice that renders false worship to God. Superstition is any belief or practice that renders false worship to God, or attributes supernatural or magical powers to certain objects or ritual actions. Divination is the prediction of the future or the revelation of the unknown through so-called paranormal means.

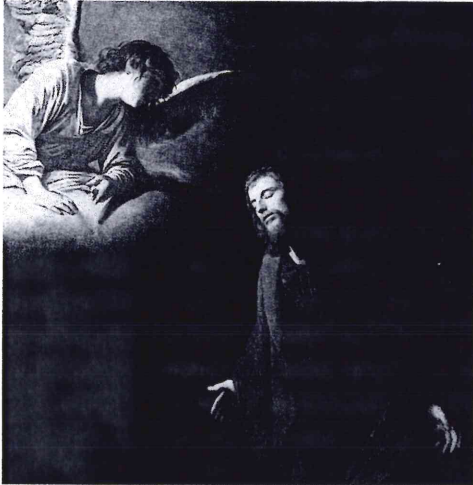
The first commandment lays out the most basic requirement for the Israelites, as well as for all people: the worship of the one, true, living God. Worship of other gods is a sin because it places the worship of a thing before the true God who brought the Jewish people (our spiritual forefathers, the first to hear God’s word) out of Egypt.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.” (Mt 22: 35-38)

One of the most memorable facts about Jesus is *that he simply asks* people to follow him. He wishes to be followed out of love, not fear of the law. Jesus wants people to follow the spirit of the law, not the letter of the law. Of course, what is written in the commandments should be followed—it is the minimum asked of a person who desires to save his soul. But, following only what is clearly stated in the law is too limited and can cut off the true meaning of the law. This was the practice of the scribes and Pharisees, who followed only the letter of the law. This led them to mis-understand Jesus and his teachings.

Rather, Christ’s teachings show us how to live according to the spirit of the law—what is ultimately motivating the commandments. “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets,” Jesus said. “I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Mt 5:17). From this, it is clear that Jesus wants us to follow the Ten Commandments, but he also



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The First Commandment

wants us to do more—to live according to love, which is the basis for all the commandments.

In the case of the first commandment, “doing more” means loving God completely and fully. Each and every person is supposed to love God with his whole soul, whole heart, and whole mind. In short, God should be the most important being in the world for us. We should love God more than anything or anyone else.

THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

Faith, hope, and charity are the theological virtues. These three virtues are bound up in the first commandment. Since there is only one God, this commandment, as a matter of justice, calls us to practice the theological virtues by having faith in him, hoping in him, and loving him above all else.

“The first commandment embraces faith, hope, and charity. When we say ‘God,’ we confess a constant and unchangeable being, always the same, faithful and just, without any evil. It follows that we must necessarily accept his words and have complete faith in him and acknowledge his authority. He is almighty, merciful, and infinitely beneficent.... Who could not place all hope in him? Who could not love him when contemplating the treasures of goodness and love he has poured out on us? Hence the formula God employs in the Scripture at the beginning and end of his commandments: ‘I am the Lord.’”³ (CCC 2086)

The theological virtues are great and complex gifts. To understand more about them, we need to examine the word theological, which is derived from Greek and pertains to thought or teaching about God. These virtues come directly from God and put us directly in touch with God. They are, in fact, “infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life” (CCC 1813).

We receive the theological virtues from the Lord at Baptism, and because the theological virtues come directly from the Lord, we must cooperate with his grace in order to make good use of them. Through prayer, the sacraments, and virtuous practice, the theological virtues will grow in us.

FAITH

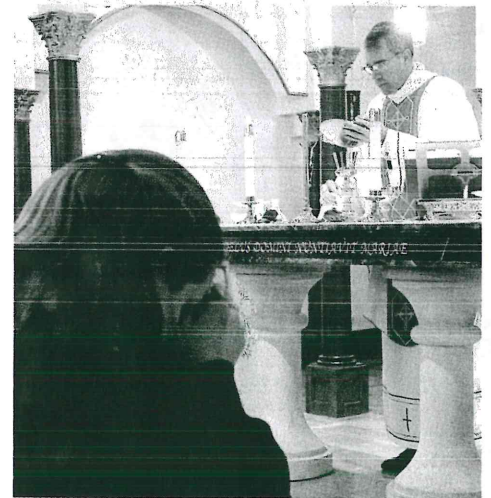
Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that the Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. (CCC 1814)

Faith is belief in God and acceptance of those things revealed by God without proof. It enables us to accept the truths God has revealed through his Church.

Faith is a great gift from God that is given to all who ask for it, not only in words, but with their behavior, but it can easily be lost if it is neglected. Many young persons, however, do not put forth much effort to understand Jesus or his teachings. During their teen years, many students begin to have questions about God’s existence and religion in general. This time of searching for answers is a grace from God that calls the questioner to seek him out. Religion class offers the opportunity to have

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The First Commandment

It is wise to have someone who can advise us when we have questions about books, movies, or activities that might harm the faith.



Allegory of Faith

The inscription on the band of the bouquet reads: *IVSTUS EX FIDE VIVIT* (The just lives with faith).

these questions answered. For faith to survive, it must be considered honestly.

To increase our faith, we must live the faith. Studying the truths that the Church proposes and praying can accomplish this. Another simple yet pivotal way to care for one's faith is through leading a good life. If a person lives according to rules of faith, he will receive the grace to continue living and believing in God and his Church.

The care that we give to faith requires us to reject everything that opposes it. This means that we must avoid books, movies, and activities that would place our faith at risk. Many would argue that they have a right to read and view whatever they wish. But can there be a right to risk losing one's belief in God? Is it sensible to read or watch things that can lead us away from God? In fact, it would be foolish for someone to take that risk.

It is wise to have someone who can advise us when we have questions about books, movies, or activities that might harm the faith. Such an adviser might be one of your parents, a teacher, or a counselor.

Faith requires more from us than just caring for it within ourselves. "The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live in it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it" (CCC 1816).

We are called not only to believe in Christ but also to spread the faith to others. This calling to evangelize other people is a serious and demanding task. To be able to spread the faith to others, we must first know it ourselves. Secondly, we must pray to understand it. Finally, and most importantly for evangelization, we must bear witness to our beliefs.

Once we understand our faith better, we shall discover that many opportunities present themselves for us to demonstrate what we believe about Jesus. Remember, since we are made in God's "image and likeness," we are to act in his "image and likeness" (cf. Gn 1:26).

SINS AGAINST FAITH

Since faith is precious, we must treat it with great care. Despite faith's great value, sometimes people directly and willfully commit sins that can damage and even destroy their faith.

Attendance at non-Catholic services is not a sin. However, a Catholic sins against faith when he receives "communion" in non-Catholic worship services (this bread which has not been consecrated by a priest is *NOT* the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ) or replaces Mass with such services. When a person participates in such a service, it can be a danger to his faith and can give the *false* impression that all beliefs are of equal value. For this reason, Catholics should usually avoid attending non-Catholic worship services.

This prohibition does not include attending ecumenical prayer services, which are just and holy things and which often have the unity of Christians, which is God's will, as an object of prayer. One may participate in these services and formal religious services, as long as there is a serious reason for doing so and participation does not cause scandal. It is only formal religious services of other faiths in which a Catholic may not participate.

Voluntary doubt is also a sin against faith. It is disregard for or refusal to hold as true what God has revealed and the Church proposes for our belief. It is also willful hesitation to overcome difficulties regarding belief. Someone who doubts voluntarily does not *want* to believe or does not believe *by choice*. Obviously, intentionally refusing to believe closes the door to faith.

Incredulity is also a sin against faith. Incredulity is the neglect of or willful refusal to accept truths of the faith. There are three types of incredulity:

- ◆ *Heresy*, which is the determined post-baptismal denial or obstinate doubt of some truth that must be believed with divine and Catholic faith. An example of a heresy is the denial by a baptized person of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, or the false belief that the Virgin Mary was born with original sin;
- ◆ *Apostasy*, which is the total repudiation of the Christian faith by a baptized person. A baptized person who does not accept Christianity as the truth, or who converts to a non-Christian religion, has committed apostasy;
- ◆ *Schism*, which is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with churches associated with him. When Henry VIII of England stated that he, not the pope, was the head of the Church in England, this was an act of schism.

Prayer for Faith

O, my God, I firmly believe you are one God in three divine persons. I believe your divine Son became man and died for our sins. I believe these and all the truths that the Church teaches because you have revealed them who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

HOPE

Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. (CCC 1817)

Hope is the confident expectation that God will give us the capacity to return his love.

We cannot respond to God's call through our own power or strength. We are too weak to follow the Lord without his help. We must expect that God, not because of anything we do, but out of his goodness, will give us the necessary knowledge and graces to love him so we can act in conformity with his wishes, thereby attaining eternal life. This confident expectation is called hope. The virtue of hope makes possible the belief that God will give the grace to return his love, to expect his blessing, to joyfully anticipate the beatific vision with him, and to overcome temptations to offend him or reject his love.

Through hope, we can expect that God will supply all graces necessary to save our souls.



Allegory of Hope

The youthful Hope flies upward to receive the crown that awaits her.

*Through hope,
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The First Commandment

*One who despairs
rejects God's power,
mercy, and love.*



*The very reason
we were created
is to love and to be
loved by God.*

“For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.”
(1 Tm, 4: 10)

Hope, like the other theological virtues, must be nurtured. We can foster hope in ourselves through prayer, which both increases hope and helps us follow God's will, helping us realize the object of hope: salvation. We can nurture hope in others by reminding them of God's providence and love and by praying to God to give them hope in difficult situations.

SINS AGAINST HOPE

There are two primary sins against hope. One of them is the sin of despair. We are guilty of despair if we deliberately and willfully abandon hope in God and the possibility of salvation. One who despairs rejects God's power, mercy, and love.

Despair is the most serious sin against hope. If someone despairs, he does not think that God will aid him or love him. The most obvious and most common example of despair is a person who commits suicide. When a person kills himself, he does not think God will take care of him and finds a drastic and terrible way to end his suffering in life. It is important to keep this in mind and to help someone who is going through difficult times. This requires that you support your friends, *and* you should inform a responsible adult if a friend or acquaintance mentions that he or she is considering suicide.

It should be noted that some who commit suicide are suffering from a seriously diminished ability to make correct moral choices as a direct result of eroding psychological difficulties, which would reduce or eliminate personal responsibility.

Presumption is the other sin against hope and is basically the opposite of despair. It takes two forms, both of which are offensive to God.

One form is the expectation that you can save your soul without God's assistance. This is offensive to God because it denies the fact that we *need God's help*.

The other form of presumption is the expectation that God will save you without effort on your part. This view is an affront to God because it implies that you think you deserve grace and salvation, instead of recognizing your own unworthiness.

Presumption is a sin against hope because there is a serious lack of humility in the presumptive person. In some way, he considers himself worthy of or even equal to God.

Prayer for Hope

O, my God, relying on your infinite promises, I hope to obtain pardon for my sins, life everlasting through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer.

CHARITY

Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. (CCC 1822)

God loves us freely, without any conditions or requirements. It is only just and right, then, that we love God, who is all goodness in return. The love of God requires that we return his love. Charity is a virtue that enables us to love God above all things.

As a consequence of original sin, the call to love God as he deserves is difficult. Often, we do what we know is wrong; we ignore what we know we should do. These sins cause us to drift away from the Lord. As we have already seen, humans are too weak and sinful to do this alone, but with God's help it is possible for us to love him. Charity is the virtue that makes this possible. With the grace of charity, we are able to return God's love and love our neighbor. However, God's love for us is so great that he does not ask us to love him without the assistance of his grace, which adds a supernatural power to our love. God makes his grace available to us in the virtue of charity.

To love God, it is helpful to recall his goodness. God has called us into existence, has given us life. Even more, he freely loves us and calls us to love him in return. The very reason we were created, in fact, was to love and to be loved by God. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 Jn 3:1).

Charity also allows us to love our fellow men for God's sake. In other words, it allows us to love others because we recognize that God loves them.

This call to active love of neighbor should not be confused with feelings of love. Love of neighbor is not a feeling. Rather, it is a sincere resolution to render goodness to others. This desire will motivate us to give of ourselves freely to others—a gift that betters both the giver and the recipient.

For someone to love God properly, he must, in fact, love his neighbor; it is ridiculous to try and separate the two. God is love, and in choosing not to love another person, we are in effect choosing to deny God. The beauty of the virtue of charity is that it enables us to want the best for those we find unlovable, for when we love our neighbor we are basing our love on God's wishes rather than our own. The key, then, to every relationship—both human and divine—is charity.

SINS AGAINST CHARITY

St. Paul, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, writes one of the most well-known and beautifully written passages of the Bible. This treatise on charity concludes with the words, "So faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Even though love is the greatest virtue, some people reject it through sins against charity:

- ◆ *Indifference* is refusing to reflect on the existence of divine goodness and the power of God's love.

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The First Commandment



The four purposes of prayer—adoration, atonement, petition, and thanksgiving—are, in fact, the specific acts of the virtue of religion.

- ◆ *Acedia* is refusing to accept the joy that comes from God or being repelled by God's goodness. Basically, the person guilty of spiritual sloth is too lazy to return God's love.
- ◆ *Lukewarmness* is hesitation or neglect to respond to God's love. "So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth" (Rv 3: 16).
- ◆ *Hatred of God* is another sin against charity. It is denying God's love out of pride and cursing God for forbidding sin and inflicting punishment. This is obviously a sin against charity, and one that will damn a person who fails to repent.
- ◆ *Ingratitude* is the failure to acknowledge God's love and return it. When you receive a gift from someone, there is an obligation to thank the person who gave it. The sin of ingratitude is greater when it involves the person of God. The person guilty of ingratitude receives the gift of God's love, but acts as though he has received nothing.

Prayer for Charity

O, my God, I love you above all else, for you are all good and worthy of all my love. I love my neighbor as myself to secure your love. I forgive all who have injured me and ask pardon of all whom I have injured.

THE VIRTUE OF RELIGION

The virtue of religion requires us to give to God the worship, honor, devotion, and service he deserves. We fulfill this virtue when we do those things formally directed to worshipping God.

Worship of God must be fulfilled in both an interior and exterior manner, for both our bodies and our souls belong to God. Interior worship is accomplished when we adore God inwardly, with acts of the heart and mind such as contemplating God's goodness or meditating on all he has done for us. Worship is exterior when we accompany interior worship with outward acts, such as making the sign of the cross or praying vocally.

The four purposes of prayer—adoration, atonement, petition, and thanksgiving—are, in fact, the specific acts of the virtue of religion. All of these are accomplished most perfectly in the sacrifice of the Mass. This sacrifice is explained in detail in the chapter on the Eucharist, but know without a doubt that participating in the Mass is most pleasing to God.

The virtue of religion also includes rendering honor to Mary and the saints, as well as venerating sacred images. This latter practice is based on the mystery of Jesus' Incarnation. Because Jesus had a true body, a physical presence in the world as real as that of any other person, it is acceptable to venerate sacred images that are physical representations of the one being venerated. Such veneration leads one to a greater love for the one being represented; it is not an act of worshipping the image itself. When we pray in front of a statue of Jesus, we are praying not to the statue but to the one the statue represents. This image simply helps us to focus our thoughts on Christ.

SINS AGAINST THE VIRTUE OF RELIGION

Sinny against the virtue of religion is a blatant act against the Lord. It is directly acting against the honor and love we know God deserves. These sins are a departure from the worship owed to God.

These sins against religion are:

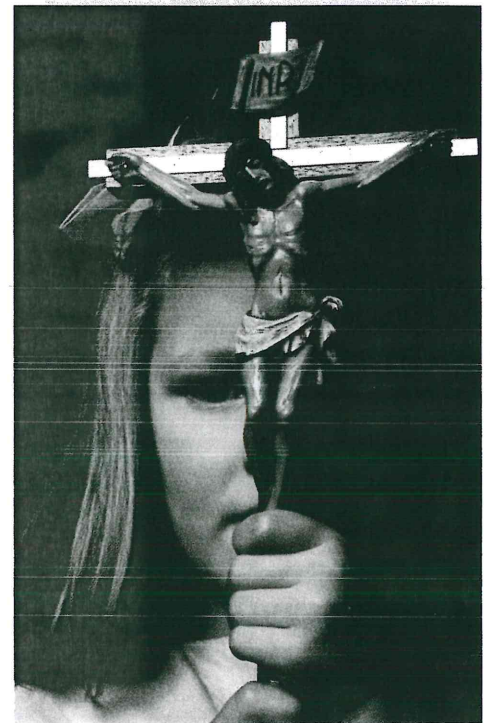
- ◆ *Idolatry* – putting a thing or person in the place of God. Idolatry includes honoring Satan, pleasure, power, money, the state, or drugs in place of God;
- ◆ *Superstition* – attributing magical power to certain created things or practices. It includes belief in and use of so-called “good luck charms,” such as rabbits’ feet, chain letter prayers that claim to bind God to an answer, and similar practices;
- ◆ *Divination* – the attempt to predict the future based on the assistance of Satan or the dead. It also includes belief in the power of horoscopes, fortunetellers, astrology, ouija boards, and omens. These are false attempts to control one’s future and deny the power of God to care for us directly;
- ◆ *Magic* – the desire to know and control demonic powers in order to place them at one’s service. Attempting to make a deal with the devil or asking his help in order to place a curse on someone are examples. Though sometimes called magic, slight-of-hand tricks do not apply here;
- ◆ *Irreligion* – direct disrespect for God or sacred things. Examples are:
 - Testing God in word or deed, for example, asking God to damn a person;
 - Sacrilege, which is disrespect for sacred persons, places, or things. This includes disrespect for Mary, the saints, sacred images, and places of worship;
- ◆ *Simony* – the buying or selling of spiritual powers or offices. The very first person to be cast out of the church was Simon the magician, who tried to buy from Peter the power to call upon the Holy Spirit;
- ◆ *Atheism* – the denial or rejection of the existence of God.

A person involved in these irreligious practices is engaged in false forms of worship. He has lost a true sense of the nature of the relationship between God and man. Man should love and honor God above all else. Someone guilty of these sins is openly doing the opposite of this.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

There is an incorrect modern idea that man has an absolute right to believe whatever he wishes about God’s existence. The right to believe whatever one wishes is a false concept—for it allows us to believe anything instead of seeking the truth regarding important questions. Human beings do not have this right to believe whatever they wish, but rather are required to seek what is true. This search may lead people down different paths to the truth, but truth must always be the goal.

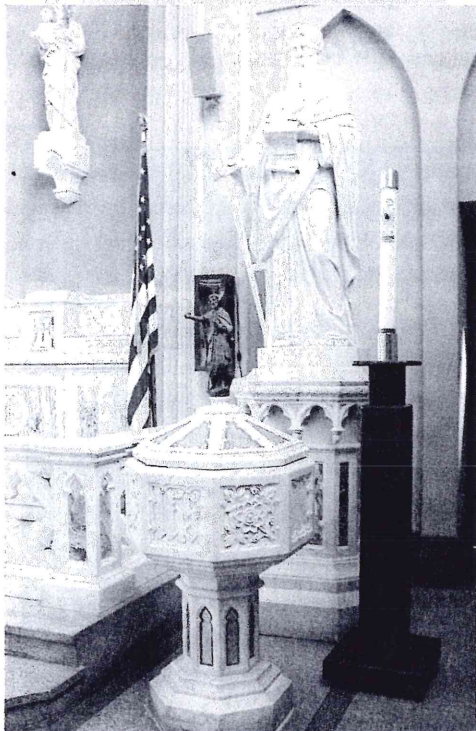
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The First Commandment

Man does not have freedom to risk his soul.



He has given us the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity in Baptism to empower us to serve him.

Jesus' statement, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free," points to one simple fact: answers to all the questions that arise in one's life require knowledge of the truth, and the greatest question that concerns all of us is what is the true way to find God and serve him.

No one should be coerced into belief in God or profession of a certain religion. The Church indicated during the recent Vatican Council that the right of all to seek God must not be coerced or restricted.

The Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that all men should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power so that, within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his convictions nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in associations with others.⁴

Respect for all men's freedom to seek the truth does not mean everyone is free to believe whatever he wishes without regard for the truth. Those who reject the idea that God does exist and refuse to seek him place themselves in direct danger of losing their souls. Man does not have freedom to risk his soul.

CONCLUSION

It is easy to say that we don't worship false idols as people in the Old Testament did. Idolatry, however, is simply placing some thing or person in God's place. The sin of Adam and Eve, the "original sin," was the desire to make themselves equal to God. Those who skip Mass on Sunday, involve themselves in drugs and alcohol, seek sex outside of marriage or break other commandments are involved in the very sin of Adam and Eve, the false worship of self. They have set themselves up as arbiters of right and wrong rather than accepting what God requires.

In Baptism, man promises to worship God, and when we practice the virtue of religion by adoring him and praying to him, we fulfill these promises.

God has loved us from all eternity. The God who calls us to do great things for him has planned our arrival at this point in the history of the world to accomplish a part of his plan. To ensure that we can accomplish all he has planned for us, he has given us the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity in Baptism to empower us to serve him.

How insulting it would be if we turn from fulfilling his plan to place our trust in the false gods of these times. The worst personal experience we can have is to be refused love by someone who ought to love us. How much worse will it be if we refuse to accept or return the love so freely given to us by God?

The First Commandment

Chapter 19 Study Guide

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

It occurs to all of us from time to time that there is a day known only to God when we will die. Few of us are called upon to consider whether we will be killed in the cause of Jesus Christ. Those who die for Christ have their faith tested to the limit.

The following testament was written by Fr. Christian De Chergé, a Catholic monk who lived in a monastery in Algeria. He was not planning to die, but he wrote in the eventuality that he might be killed by Algerian Muslim guerillas, who had earlier threatened the monastery. This message is a supreme example of the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love being lived out in a very real way.

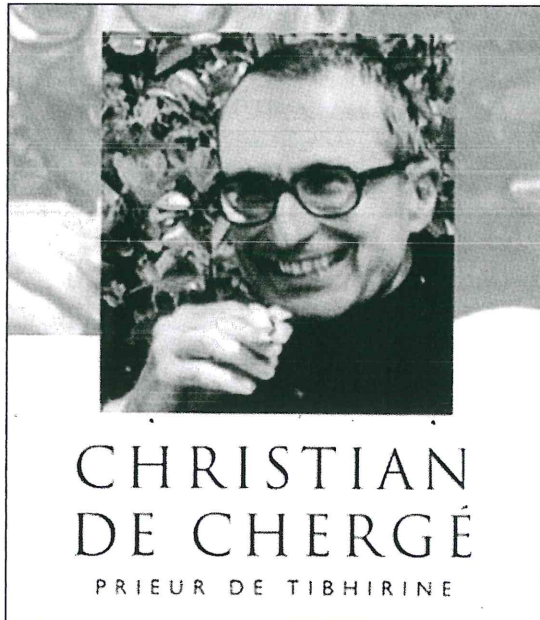
I go to God.

If it should happen one day — and it could be today — that I become the victim of an act of terrorism which now appears ready to engulf all foreigners living in Algeria, I would like my community, my Church, my family to remember that my life was given to God and to this country.

I ask them to accept that the sole master of all life was not a stranger to this brutal departure. I ask them to pray for me, for how could I be found worthy of such an offering? I ask them to be able to link this death with so many other deaths which were just as violent but forgotten through indifference and anonymity.

My life has no more value than any other, nor any less value. In any case it has not the innocence of childhood. I have lived long enough to know that I am an accomplice in the evil which seems, alas, to prevail in the world today, even in that which would strike me blindly.

I should like, when the time comes, to have a moment of lucidity which would allow me to beg forgiveness of God and of all of my fellow human beings, and at the same time to forgive with all my heart the one who would strike me down. I could not desire such a death. It seems to me important to state this. I do not see in fact how I could rejoice if this people I love were to be accused indiscriminately of my murder.



Fr. Christian De Chergé

(1937-1996)

To owe it to an Algerian, whoever he may be, would be too high a price to pay for what will, perhaps, be called the "grace of martyrdom," especially if he says he is acting in fidelity to what he believes is Islam. I am aware of the scorn which can be heaped on Algerians, indiscriminately. I am also aware of the caricature of Islam which a certain islamism encourages. It is too easy to salve one's conscience by identifying this religious way with the fundamentalist ideologies of its extremists.

For me Algeria and Islam are something different; they are a body and a soul. I have proclaimed this often enough; I believe in the sure knowledge of what I have received from it, finding there so often that true strand of the gospel I learned at my mother's knee, my very first Church, in Algeria, itself, and already inspired with respect for Muslim believers.

My death will appear to justify those who hastily judged me naïve or idealistic: "Let him tell us now what he thinks of it." But these people must realize that my most avid curiosity will then be satisfied. This is what I will be able to do, if God wills, immerse my gaze in that of the Father, and contemplate him with his children of Islam just

Continued

SUPPLEMENTARY READING CONTINUED

as he sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ, the fruit of his Passion, and filled with the gift of the Spirit, whose secret joy will always be to establish communion and to refashion the likeness, playing delightfully with the differences.

For this life lost, totally mine, and totally theirs, I thank God who seems to have willed it entirely for the sake of that joy in everything and in spite of everything.

In this thank you, which sums up the whole of my life from now on, I certainly include you, friends of yesterday and today, and you my friends of this place, along with my mother and father, my sisters

and brothers and their families, the hundredfold granted as was promised.

And also, you, the friend of my final moment, who would not be aware of what you are doing.

Yes, I also say this "thank you" and this A-Dieu to you in whom I see the face of God. And may we see each other, happy good thieves in the Paradise if it pleases God, the Father of us both. Amen, Insha Allah.

The guerillas returned two years later and cut the throats of Fr. De Chergé and six other monks.

VOCABULARY

ACEDIA

A less common synonym for sloth, one of the seven capital sins.

CHARITY

The theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.

DIVINATION

Sin against the virtue of religion in which one attempts to tell of future events by means of occult forces—Satan, demons, spirits, astrology, etc.

FAITH

Both a gift of God and a human act by which the believer gives personal adherence to God who invites his response, and freely assents to the whole truth that God has revealed; a theological virtue given by God.

HOPE

The theological virtue by which we desire and expect from God both eternal life and the grace we need to attain it.

INCREDULITY

The willful refusal to assent to revealed truth, or even the neglect of this truth.

RELIGION

A set of beliefs and practices followed by those committed to the service and worship of God.

SIMONY

The buying or selling of spiritual things, which have God alone as their owner and master.

SUPERSTITION

Sin against the virtue of religion involving the attribution of a kind of magical power to certain practices or objects, like charms or omens.

THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

Gifts infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. The theological virtues are faith, hope, and charity.

VENERATION

Showing devotion and respect to Mary, the apostles, and the martyrs, who were viewed as faithful witnesses to faith in Jesus Christ; must be clearly distinguished from adoration and worship, which are due to God alone.

WORSHIP

Adoration and honor given to God, which is the first act of the virtue of religion.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why do the Jewish people owe so much to God?
2. Why do we owe our total allegiance to God as a matter of justice?
3. What are the theological virtues?
4. When were the theological virtues received?
5. What is our first obligation to God?
6. What does the virtue of faith oblige us to do?
7. Explain voluntary doubt.
8. Explain the three forms of incredulity.
9. List and explain the sins against hope.
10. What is the key to all relationships?
11. What difficult act of love does charity enable us to accomplish?

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Read the parable of the “pearl of great price” (Mt 13: 45-46). Why did the man sell everything he had to obtain the pearl? How is the gift of faith similar?
2. Catholics have always held the Virgin Mary and other saints up for veneration. Often people address these saints in prayer. How do these acts differ from practices such as divination or polytheism?
3. Some people believe that once they accept Christ as their personal savior, they will go to heaven no matter what else happens in their lives. How does this contradict the virtue of hope?
4. In his testament, Fr. Christian De Chergé says he wishes to be able to forgive the person who would kill him, and he also wishes to beg God for forgiveness. How would God’s forgiveness of Fr. De Chergé be grounded in love? How is Fr. De Chergé’s desire to forgive his killer related to God’s love?

FROM THE CATECHISM

162 Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to man. We can lose this priceless gift, as St. Paul indicated to St. Timothy: “Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith” (1 Tm 1:18-19). To live, grow and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God; we must beg the Lord to increase our faith; it must be “working through charity,” abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church (cf Mk 9:24, Lk 17:5; 22:32, Gal 5:6, Rom 15:13, Jas 2:14-26).

1840 The theological virtues dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have God for their origin, their motive, and their object—God known by faith, God hoped in and loved for his own sake.

1841 There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. They inform all the moral virtues and give life to them.

1842 By faith, we believe in God and believe all that he has revealed to us and that Holy Church proposes for our belief.

1843 By hope we desire, and with steadfast trust await from God, eternal life and the graces to merit it.

1844 By charity, we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for love of God. Charity, the form of all the virtues, “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14).

1845 The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon Christians are wisdom,

understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

2133 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Dt 6:5).

2134 The first commandment summons man to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him above all else.

2135 “You shall worship the Lord your God” (Mt 4:10). Adoring God, praying to him, offering him the worship that belongs to him, fulfilling the promises and vows made to him are acts of the virtue of religion which fall under obedience to the first commandment.

2136 The duty to offer God authentic worship concerns man both as an individual and as a social being.

2137 “Men of the present day want to profess their religion freely in private and in public” (DH, 15).

2138 Superstition is a departure from the worship that we give to the true God. It is manifested in idolatry, as well as in various forms of divination and magic.

2139 Tempting God in word or deeds, sacrilege, and simony are sins of irreligion forbidden by the first commandment.

2140 Since it rejects or denies the existence of God, atheism is a sin against the first commandment.

2141 The veneration of sacred images is based on the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God. It is not contrary to the first commandment.

Endnotes

1. Ps 115:4-5, 8; cf. Is 44:9-20; Jer 10:1-16; Dn 14:1-30; Bar 6; Wis 13:1-15; 19.
2. Jos 3:10; Ps 42:3; etc.
3. *Roman Catechism*, 3, 2, 4.
4. *DH*, 2