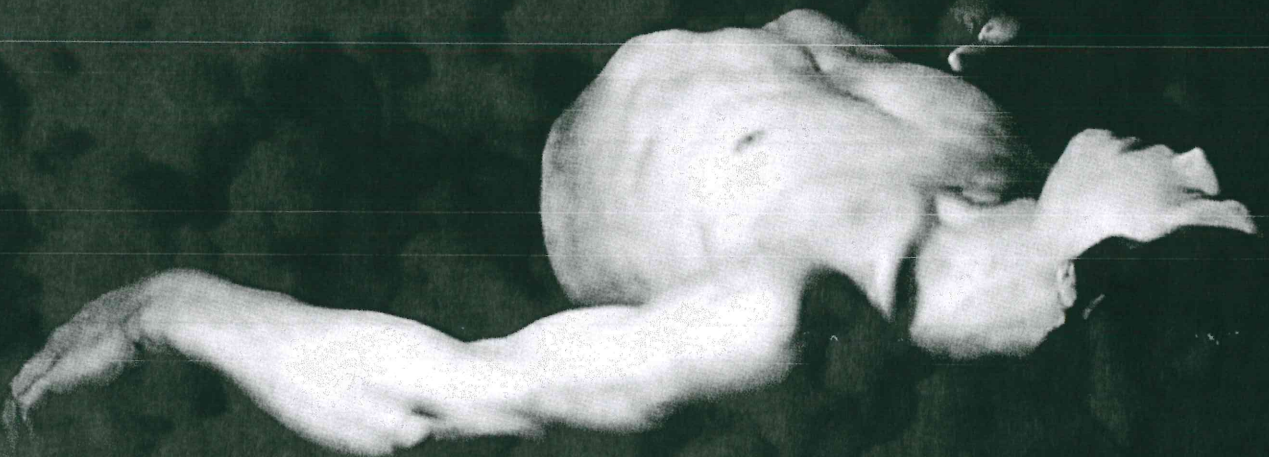


INTRODUCTION TO CATHOLICISM

Chapter 23

The Fifth Commandment

Human life is sacred.



Chapter 23

The Fifth Commandment

*I*n the summer of 1914, Gavrilo Princip killed the Archduke of Austria, Franz Ferdinand, and his wife Sophie. The murderer, a Serbian, committed the crime because he had a political grievance against the government of Austria.

This single act led to the First World War, in which two million people were killed, including over 800,000 Serbians, fellow citizens of the man who fired the first shot.

Not all murders have such catastrophic effects, but all murders are personal catastrophes affecting not just the two persons immediately concerned – the murderer and his victim – but also the lives of many others.

When a person is murdered, his place in the future history of the world is eliminated. Those left behind find themselves without the companionship, love, and support of the person killed. The loss cannot be recovered.



THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

You shall not kill. (Ex 20:13)

- Men find themselves enemies to each other as a direct result of original sin.

The Old Testament, in fact, records many murders, all of which result directly from man's sinful inclinations. One of the earliest sins recorded in the Bible is the murder of Abel by his brother Cain.

Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us go out into the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood." (Gn 4: 8-11)

In fact, both the Old and New Testaments forbid the killing of the innocent, which is murder. In Exodus, God says that one should not "kill the innocent and the righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked" (Ex 23: 7).

The law against murder is the most basic rule for peace and order in society. If killing were not forbidden, individuals could never trust one another, nor could a group of people ever feel secure.

The fifth commandment is based on more than just practical necessity, though. It recognizes the dignity of every human person. Each individual is sacred to God, for God has made man "in his own image." Since we are made in God's image, killing a human being is destroying one of God's greatest creations.

God has fashioned each of us in our mothers' wombs fearfully, wonderfully, down to the last detail. There is *nothing* about *anyone* of which God is unaware. Out of love and respect for the dignity of every human being, God created no two people alike. As a result, each of us has our own mixture of talents and gifts (as well as faults and shortcomings). These talents are given to enable us to accomplish on earth that for which God has created us.

When a person is killed, his murderer interrupts God's plan for his victim. He takes away what belongs to God—the life of a human being.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, "You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment." But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment. (Mt 5: 21-22)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus recalls the fifth commandment. He goes beyond the prohibition against murder to forbid anger, hatred, and vengeance. These actions go against the dignity of a person made in the image of God. When we choose to be angry with someone, hate someone, or seek vengeance against someone, we act contrary to God's commands. We are refusing to follow God's commands and choosing to do as we ourselves please. When we do this, we deny the special dignity

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not kill.*

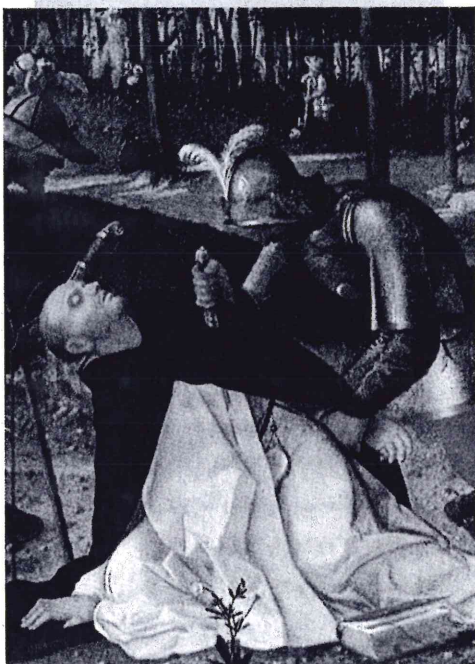


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And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground." (Gn 4: 10)

The Fifth Commandment

The Gospels not only forbid hatred and revenge, they call us to go further, to love supernaturally.



The murder of St. Peter the Martyr

*Here silent is Christ's Herald;
Here quenched, the People's Light;
Here lies the martyred Champion
Who fought Faith's holy fight.*

Excerpt from the eulogy by St. Thomas of Aquinas for Peter of Verona who was murdered by heretics in 1252 on the road to Milan from Como.

God has given to us as well as the dignity of others.

*"Human life is sacred because from the beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end; no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being."*¹ (CCC 2258)

God has willed each person for his own sake and made each person in his own image and likeness. As a result, the Gospels not only forbid hatred and revenge, they call us to go further, to love supernaturally. Jesus tells his disciples "to turn the other cheek, to love their enemies" (CCC 2262). The requirement to love one's enemy is unique to the Christian religion.

Christ models a life of forgiveness and love. He refused to defend himself when he was falsely accused and arrested. While nailed to the cross, he asked the Father to forgive those who were crucifying him.

To the prohibition against murder is added the requirement to avoid all physical and moral harm to one's neighbor, including the sin of scandal, by which a person is led into sin.

The key to following this commandment is to recognize the dignity of each person and his right to be treated as a child of God. Every one of us is dignified by the fact that we are made by God in the image and likeness of God.

INTENTIONAL MURDER

The fifth commandment forbids *direct and intentional killing* as gravely sinful. The murderer and those who cooperate voluntarily in murder commit a sin that cries out to heaven for vengeance.² (CCC 2268)

Murder of a human being is gravely contrary to the dignity of that person and is a denial of the holiness of the God who created him. Every murder is gravely sinful.

Particularly serious is the murder of a person by a member of the same family. Such an act destroys a life belonging to God and can do further serious harm to the natural ties that bind family members together.

Even more offensive to God is the sin of so-called "ethnic cleansing," in which entire groups of people are murdered because of their ethnic background or religious belief.

The prohibition against intentional murder extends to willing the death of an innocent person indirectly. If we put someone's life at risk without grave reason or refuse to offer help to someone in danger, we have violated the fifth commandment.

An example of refusing to render required assistance is societal acceptance of famines without taking action to relieve the suffering.

Also, those who take advantage of famines by raising the price of food to those in need commit indirect homicide, for which they will have to answer.

LEGITIMATE SELF-DEFENSE

The prohibition against murder does not conflict with the right to self-defense. When a person's life is threatened, he has a right to defend himself.

☞ The right of a person to self-defense permits him to use only the force necessary to protect himself against an unjust attacker. Obviously, this right does not free a person from the obligations related to the fifth commandment. The use of force in self-defense must match the threat. Put simply, if someone knows that all he has to do to defend himself adequately is strike the attacker, intentionally doing more than that is wrong. In a case of self-defense, one is obliged not to seek the death of the attacker directly.

The legitimate defense of persons and societies is not an exception to the prohibition against the murder of the innocent that constitutes intentional killing. "The act of self-defense can have a double effect: the preservation of one's own life; and the killing of the aggressor... The one is intended; the other is not."³ (CCC 2263)

Legitimate defense is not only a right for all people, but for some it is also a grave obligation.

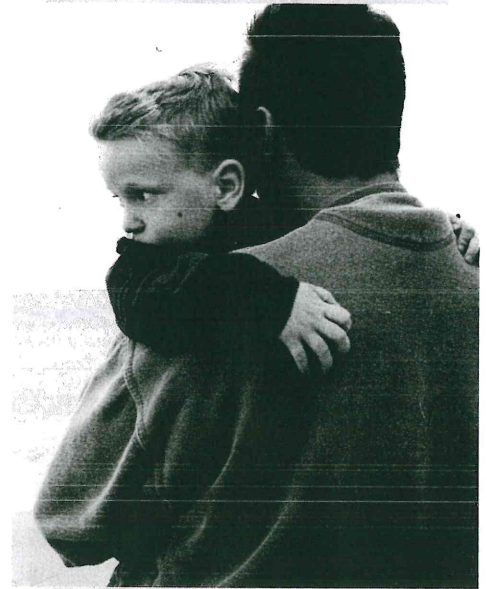
☞ Legitimate defense can be a grave duty for someone responsible for another's life, in defense of the common good of the family, or in defense of the state against forces that would seek to destroy it from within or without.

Those who are required to defend themselves, then, are people who are depended upon by others to the extent that their death would cause great harm to their dependents, such as parents with young children or political leaders.

Since this concept of preserving the common good of society is part of the principle of self-defense, the Church has always defended the right of properly constituted authority to punish evildoers with penalties that match the gravity of the offense against the common good.

The state's right to punish the guilty is not a matter of "getting even." The purpose is to require the law-breaker to make restitution, as a matter of justice, for a particular offense. This power of the state also helps to preserve public order and safety. A bloodless means of punishment is always preferred to its opposite when it is possible. This is because even those who have committed grave evils are still made in God's image and likeness and have the dignity that God gives to all people, and should be afforded the opportunity for repentance.

Use of the death penalty is appropriate only when a person is a continuing threat to the lives of others. Today, especially in developed countries, situations requiring the death penalty are very rare or even nonexistent.



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The Fifth Commandment

From the moment of conception, God is at work in the creation of a new human being whom he loves infinitely.

ABORTION

Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.⁴ (CCC 2270)

- Since the first century, the Church has condemned abortion as intrinsically evil. This teaching is unchangeable. Abortion directly willed as a means or an end is a criminal act gravely contrary to moral law. Anyone who formally cooperates in an abortion is automatically excommunicated.

From the moment of conception, God is at work in the creation of a new human being whom he loves infinitely. Hence, an embryo has infinite dignity from the moment of its conception, and its right to health services and care, along with all other human rights, must be honored.

The inalienable rights of the person must be recognized and respected by civil society and political authority. These human rights depend neither on single individuals nor on parents; nor do they represent a concession made by society to the state; they belong to human nature and are inherent in the person by virtue of the creative act from which the person took its origin. Among such fundamental rights one should mention in this regard every human being's right to life and physical integrity from the moment of conception until death.

The moment a positive law deprives a category of human beings of the protection which civil legislation ought to accord them, the state is denying the equality of all before the law. When the state does not place its power at the service of the rights of each citizen, and in particular of the more vulnerable, the very foundations of a state based on law are undermined.... As a consequence of the respect and protection which must be ensured for the unborn child from the moment of conception, the law must provide appropriate penal sanctions for every deliberate violation of the child's rights.⁵

With advancements in medical technology in recent years, many facts are known about a person prior to birth.

Only medical procedures that respect its life and integrity may be carried out on the embryo or fetus. Such procedures are moral to the extent that they do not involve a risk greater than the good to be accomplished. These procedures must be directed to healing, improving the health, or promoting the survival of the unborn child.

Prenatal diagnosis is morally acceptable "if it respects the life and integrity of the embryo and the human fetus and is directed towards its safeguarding or healing as an individual... It is gravely opposed to the moral law when this is done with the thought of possibly inducing an abortion, depending upon the results; a diagnosis must not be the equivalent of a death sentence."⁶

It is never morally acceptable to produce human embryos outside the act of marriage. Those who produce embryos in an immoral manner are treating the embryo as a product to be manufactured rather than as a human being with personal dignity.



The Fifth Commandment

Likewise, it is immoral to test or to change an unborn person's genes simply in order to produce children of a specific sex or other predetermined qualities. Such procedures violate the dignity, integrity, and identity of the unborn person whose genetic structure is unique and unrepeatable.

EUTHANASIA

Euthanasia means "good death" and is a term used to promote killing the chronically sick or aged.

The principle that life is sacred applies equally to those who are sick, handicapped, or aged. Direct euthanasia, the act of directly ending the lives of sick, handicapped, aged, or dying persons, is murder.

Thus an act or omission which, of itself, or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator. The error of judgment into which one can fall in good faith does not change the nature of the murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded.⁷

The term "ordinary care" refers to medical care required under all circumstances. It includes feeding, respiration, drugs, and care of the body, e.g., bathing and preventing bedsores.

Ordinary care could also include the use of painkillers to alleviate suffering of the dying, even if this treatment might have the secondary effect of shortening their days. It is morally correct as long as death is not willed as a means or end.

The requirement to give ordinary care applies also to those in the so-called "persistent vegetative state," as Pope John Paul II indicated in a statement on health care in 1998. All sick persons have an unconditional right to ordinary care.

Extraordinary care for the sick is not required. The term extraordinary care is applied to procedures that are burdensome, inordinately expensive, dangerous, or disproportionate to the expected outcome.

Refusing extraordinary care is not an act of killing. It is simply accepting what is medically unavoidable.

When there is a question regarding what constitutes ordinary or extraordinary care, the decision is to be made by the patient after consultation with the physician or by those legally entitled to act for the patient, whose legitimate interests and reasonable will must be respected. It is wise to consult a priest to determine if the correct moral choice has been made.

There are four conclusions to be drawn regarding appropriate care in serious medical cases:

- † It is always wrong to directly take the life of a sick person;
- † Ordinary means to sustain life are required in all cases;
- † Extraordinary means are never required;
- † It is permissible to allow the imminent death of a person.

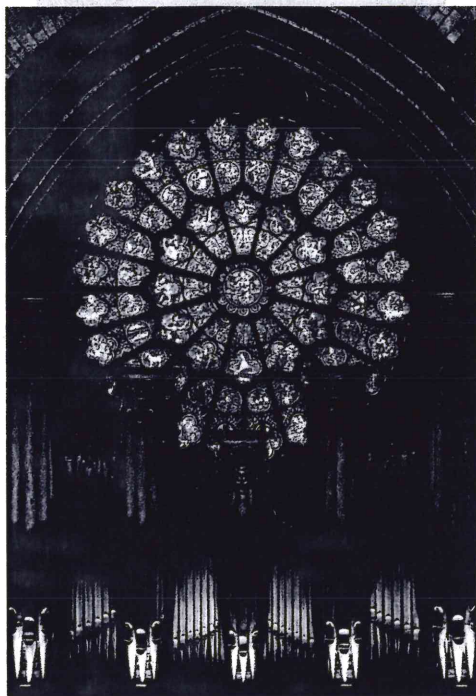
The principle that life is sacred applies equally to those who are sick, handicapped, or aged.



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The Fifth Commandment

Suicide results in endless pain and suffering for family and friends, who are left with the burden of a loss that is both unexplained and unexplainable.



The Church includes in her prayers those who have taken their own lives.

SUICIDE

Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him. It is God who remains the sovereign Master of life. We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for his honor and the salvation of souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of. (CCC 2280)

Suicide is the intentional taking of one's own life. It is an intrinsically evil act that contradicts the purpose of everyone's existence: to love and serve God in order to save one's soul and to assist others in the salvation of their souls. It is contrary to hope, justice, and charity. It unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with one's family and one's community.

Suicide results in endless pain and suffering for family and friends, who are left with the burden of a loss that is both unexplained and unexplainable.⁹ Voluntary cooperation in or the encouragement of suicide is contrary to moral law and a grave sin. In fact, all of us are bound by a serious obligation of love to seek assistance for those who talk about ending their own lives.

Though suicide is unquestionably a grave evil, personal responsibility for suicide may be diminished by suffering, torture, grave fear of hardship or anguish, and grave psychological disturbances. The eternal salvation of those who take their own lives should not be despaired of—God can provide by ways known only to him the opportunity for remedial penitence. The Church includes in her prayers those who have taken their own lives.

SCANDAL

Scandal is an attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil. The person who gives scandal becomes his neighbor's tempter. He damages virtue and integrity; he may even draw his brother into spiritual death. Scandal is a grave offense if by deed or omission another is deliberately led into a grave sin. (CCC 2284)

Anyone who uses the power at his disposal in such a way that it leads others to do wrong becomes guilty of scandal and responsible for the evil that he has directly or indirectly encouraged. "Temptations to sin are sure to come; but woe to him by whom they come!"⁸ (CCC 2287)

Scandal can be provoked by persons, laws, or institutions and takes many forms: pressure by friends, our classmates' example, television programs, immodest fashions, public opinion, and the movies.

We all have a tendency, born of original sin, to partake of the sinful actions of others. Often, this leads individuals to ignore the evil of following others into sin without caring about the effect this sin will have on their lives.

During the teen years, this is complicated by the almost overwhelming tendency to act as one's peers act. Young people are often introduced to sins involving drug abuse, sexuality, alcohol, gambling, and pornography through the actions of their peers as well as the culture at large.

Young people tend to absorb their morals from the culture without regard to moral law. For instance, currently, popular culture promotes

some immoral music, provocative dress, and warped attitudes about sex. Christians have an obligation to live counter-culturally and resist these pressures as an example for others.

Therefore, they are guilty of scandal who establish laws or social structures leading to the decline of morals and the corruption of religious practice, or to "social conditions that, intentionally or not, make Christian conduct and obedience to the Commandments difficult and practically impossible."⁹ This is also true of business leaders who make rules encouraging fraud, teachers who provoke their children to anger,¹⁰ or manipulators of public opinion who turn it away from moral values. (CCC 2286)

RESPECT FOR HEALTH

The precious gifts of life and health given to us by a loving God require that reasonable care be taken of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good. All members of society have an obligation to promote decent living conditions that permit everyone to reach maturity with the necessities—food, clothing, housing, health care, basic education, employment, and social assistance—available to them.

On the other hand, the neo-pagan cult of the body, which is prevalent today, is to be avoided. Too much stress has been laid upon the perfection of the body while ignoring the perfection of the soul.⁸ The perfection of a person includes both spirit and body; neither should be stressed to the detriment of the other. Therefore, the all-too-common idolization of sports and the use of illicit drugs to enhance performance must be avoided.

In reaction to this over-emphasis on the body, some people tend to go in the complete opposite direction. They view the body as a prison for the soul and a source of sinfulness. This is simply not true. Human beings are not simply souls trapped in bodies for a time on earth. Rather, a person is both soul and body; one without the other is incomplete. After the coming of Christ, all those who have died will be reunited with their bodies, which will be glorified. Then those in heaven will be completely human, with purified souls in incorruptible bodies.

In the meantime, we should strive to achieve true virtue for ourselves and others by finding a happy medium, where we neither seek holiness of soul by devaluing the body nor struggle for physical perfection without caring for spiritual health.

Because the body has a dignity granted to it by God, care must be taken to respect and protect it. No exterior reason or end justifies the mutilation of the body. The following conclusions may be drawn:

- ◆ Kidnapping, torture, and hostage-taking are serious violations of the rights and persons of others.
- ◆ Selling or promoting use of harmful drugs is likewise mortally sinful.
- ◆ Amputation, mutilation, and sterilization are permitted in cases of medical necessity only. The fad of having oneself tattooed could be a mutilation with no necessary or just reason.

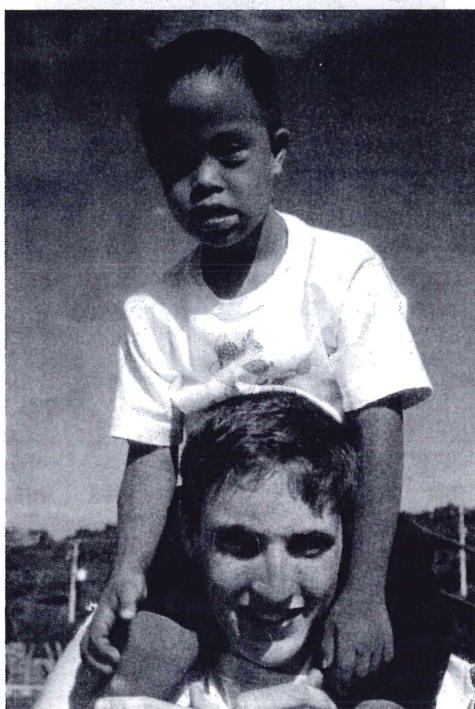
The perfection of a person includes both spirit and body; neither should be stressed to the detriment of the other.



Because the body has a dignity granted to it by God, care must be taken to respect and protect it.

The Fifth Commandment

The best way to deal with anger is to forgive and pray for the person who made us angry.



Peace can only be achieved by men following Jesus' example of love for all.

- ◆ Experimentation on human beings that is contrary to the dignity of the human person and the moral law, even with the consent of the person, is not morally legitimate.
- ◆ Organ transplants are morally permissible if the donor has given permission and if the psychological and physical dangers to the donor are proportionate to the good sought for the recipient. It is never permissible to cause death or disabling mutilation of a human being to secure an organ, even to save the life of another person.

KEEPING THE PEACE

Earthly peace is the image and fruit of the peace of Christ, the messianic "Prince of Peace."¹¹ By the blood of his Cross, "in his own person he killed the hostility,"¹² he reconciled men with God and made his Church the sacrament of the unity of the human race and of its union with God. "He is our peace."¹³ He has declared: "Blessed are the peacemakers."¹⁴ (CCC 2305)

Christ came to end hostility between people, nations, and cultures. God did not want to force peace upon men. Peace can only be achieved by men following Jesus' example of love for all.

Human beings, then, are to be the ones who work to bring about the peace of Christ. Anger, hatred, revenge, and grudge-bearing are sins against the fifth commandment. Often these sins occur because the actions of another cause hurt feelings. It is normal to react with strong feelings when another harms us, but feelings must be controlled, for they can easily lead one to sinful actions.

Anger is a sin contrary to peace. It leads to evil thoughts and revenge. The best way to deal with anger is to forgive and pray for the person who made us angry. Jesus said, "Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to punishment" (Mt 5: 22).

Deliberate hatred is also a sin against peace. It is contrary to the call to love our neighbor. Christ calls us to a higher standard. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5: 44).

Revenge is the desire to "get even" with another for the real or perceived harm he has done. This is, of course, sinful. It is not right to want another person to suffer. Ultimately, God gives to each man his due. "Vengeance is mine," says the Lord (Dt 32: 35). As we do not wish evil upon ourselves, we are required to wish good for others.

Forming cliques with the intention of excluding others is to be avoided. It's natural for us to spend time with those with whom we share common interests. However, it is wrong for a group to exclude other persons intentionally for frivolous reasons.

Holding grudges is refusing to forgive those who have offended us. How can we act this way when Christ forgives our sins so willingly in Confession? Difficulties with anger, hatred, revenge, and grudge-bearing should be discussed with a confessor.

WAR

The common good of the whole human family requires that society be organized on an international level. Neither the intent nor the result of this is to eliminate nations, but the first fruit would be an end to all wars.

Everything that is reasonably possible must be done to avoid war, which causes evils and injustices. In fact, all citizens and all governments are required to work to prevent war.

The Church recognizes the right of nations to legitimate self-defense by military force, but strict conditions are placed on those who would wage war. The moral law must be maintained always, even during armed conflicts. Practices contrary to accepted international practices and principles must not be allowed. Those who have responsibility for the common good must make the decision to go to war, and they may impose on citizens the obligation to bear arms. Men, women, and children who are non-combatants, the wounded, and prisoners must all be treated humanely.

As the Church has a fundamental bias against war, strict conditions are laid on those who wish to conduct one:

- ◆ War may be declared by proper authority for only a grave and legitimate cause;
- ◆ Military action must be a last resort;
- ◆ The good accomplished must outweigh the evil permitted;
- ◆ Non-combatants may not be targeted.

The Church requires the moral law to be observed even during war. War often leads to serious crimes against man and God. The practice of so-called ethnic cleansing is a great evil, as is indiscriminate destruction of cities and populated regions.

Nuclear weapons capable of mass destruction have been stockpiled over the past 50 years. Such weapons present a grave danger to all humanity.

“The arms race is one of the greatest curses on the human race, and the harm it inflicts on the poor is more than can be endured.”¹⁵ (CCC 2329)

The so-called arms race leads to the use of money and goods for the never-ending production of weapons of ever-greater destructive power. The monies wasted in this endeavor would be better used to aid the poor to live a better standard of life.

HUMAN SOLIDARITY

In light of Christ’s teachings, the fifth commandment, which is based on respect for the human person, requires us to love every individual just as we love ourselves (cf. Mt 19:19). Jesus’ call to solidarity is a call to see your neighbor as another self. If the world were based on the bond of love, the deep connection among all people would be realized. A world based on solidarity would have the following benefits:

- † Sharing of spiritual goods would be easier;
- † Social and economic inequalities would be reduced;

The Church recognizes the right of nations to legitimate self-defense by military force, but strict conditions are placed on those who would wage war.



If the world were based on the bond of love, the deep connection among all people would be realized.

The Fifth Commandment

Since life is the primary right of every person, it should be obvious that any action that directly violates the freedom or bodily integrity of innocent persons is wrong.

† Human rights would be respected;

† Money currently spent on weapons could be turned to social goods.

The call for solidarity is not about ignoring our individuality but is rather about making the Gospel a reality in the lives of everyone. Jesus commands us to love all people. If this love were realized, there would be true peace on earth.

CONCLUSION

The Father has given us both spirit and body to make our way through this life. Since life is the primary right of every person, it should be obvious that any action that directly violates the freedom or bodily integrity of innocent persons is wrong. There can be no double standard that allows us to claim personal integrity for ourselves while violating the personal integrity of others.

On the other hand, those guilty of crimes may forfeit their right to freedom as a result of their actions. The civil courts exist to make that determination.

The fifth commandment, understood in light of Christianity, not only prohibits us from harming others but requires that we have concern for the well-being of others. We must not hate or desire harm to fall upon any person. We also have a serious obligation to avoid leading others into sin by scandalous conduct. Remember that our call is to imitate Jesus in all our actions.



The Fifth Commandment

Chapter 23 Study Guide

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

During the 1994 International Year of the Family, the Holy See clashed with the Clinton administration and the United Nations bureaucracy at the Cairo population conference. The core issue was the promotion of abortion as a means of family planning.

On one hand, the Cairo conference proposed a view of women as autonomous agents, for whom sexual expression was but one aspect of self-development, which required liberation from the burdens of child-bearing and child-rearing in order to achieve equality with men. On the other hand, the Church insisted that authentic human development comes from using one's freedom to give oneself to others. For women in particular, that personal development cannot be separated from what Pope John Paul II has called the 'feminine genius,' namely, the woman's ability to care for the other.

On April 24, 1994, just four months before the Cairo conference was to begin, John Paul beatified the woman who could be thought of as an incarnation of the 'feminine genius' in the world and in the home, Gianna Beretta Molla.

Gianna was born as the tenth of 13 children to Alberto and Maria Beretta. Gianna learned a deep spirit of prayer and care for the poor from her parents and saw in her own mother a model of strength and humility. After making her First Communion in 1928, Gianna attended daily Mass for the rest of her life.

The Molla family moved several times during Gianna's youth, and Gianna struggled to pass some high school courses and even failed her courses in Italian and Latin. Her final year of school though marked a turnaround, and she went on to study medicine at the University of Milan in 1942, the same year that both her parents died.

In 1950 Gianna graduated with a diploma in medicine and surgery and opened a practice



St. Gianna Beretta Molla
(1922-1962)

with her brother, Ferdinando, who was also a doctor. She often served the poor for free and traveled—sometimes by bicycle, sometimes on her motorcycle—long distances to treat shut-ins.

Gianna discerned after much prayer that her vocation was to marriage and family life. Having devoted herself to her professional work, Gianna was already 33 when she married Pietro Molla, who was ten years her senior. Gianna wrote to Pietro:

With the help and blessing of God, we shall do all in our power that our family may be a little room where Jesus may reign over all affections, desires and actions. We become cooperators with God in the work of creation. Thus we can give Him children who love Him and serve Him. Pietro, will I be able to be the wife you always wished to have? I want to be!

The Mollas were blessed with three children in four years. After several miscarriages, Gianna

Continued

SUPPLEMENTARY READING CONTINUED

was pregnant with her fourth child when a tumor was discovered in her ovary. Faced with several options, Gianna chose the surgery that would save the baby but was riskier for herself. On April 21, 1962, she gave birth to a daughter. “If you must decide between me and the child, do not hesitate: choose the child,” Gianna told her husband a few days before the child was to be delivered by caesarean section. “I insist on it—save the baby.” While the baby was healthy, the mother was not. Gianna suffered for a week from agonizing pain. She was not able to speak in her final days, though she clearly maintained an intense dialogue with God during her death agony. She was returned home on the morning of April 28, 1962, and she died that same day.

Three decades later that child was present in St. Peter’s Square to see her mother beatified. For millions of young women around the world trying to balance work and family, professional life and spiritual life, femininity and equality, Dr. Gianna Beretta Molla may just be the ideal model. If the Church needs a patron saint of the modern woman, Gianna Molla, the happy pediatrician, devout Catholic, and caring mother, would be a good choice, demonstrating with her passion for life that the Gospel is still good news for the women of our time.

VOCABULARY

ABORTION

Deliberate termination of pregnancy by killing the unborn child. Such a serious offense results in immediate excommunication.

CLIQUE

A small exclusive party or set, a narrow coterie or circle.

ETHNIC CLEANSING

Genocide; the destruction of a group of people based on ancestry or ancestral traditions i.e., religion, customs, etc.

EUTHANASIA

An action or an omission which, of itself or by intention, causes the death of handicapped, sick, or dying persons—sometimes with an attempt to justify the act as a means of eliminating suffering.

EXCOMMUNICATED

Penal exclusion from the faith community intending to bring about reform and resulting in being forbidden to have any share in the Eucharist and all other acts of public worship and sacraments.

EXTRAORDINARY CARE

Life-sustaining forms of medical care that are either 1) radically painful, 2) excessively expensive, 3) doubtfully able to accomplish their designated objective, or 4) radically burdensome.

JUST WAR

Legitimate defense by military force as noted in CCC 2309.

MURDER

Intentional killing of a person.

VOCABULARY CONTINUED

NON-COMBATANT

One not involved in a conflict (especially war), such as a civilian in time of war; one whose duties do not include fighting, such as a surgeon or chaplain.

ORDINARY CARE

Forms of medical treatment given under the authority of a physician which are 1) not radically painful for the patient, 2) not extremely expensive, 3) readily available, and 4) expected to achieve their designated clinical objective.

PRENATAL DIAGNOSIS

Medical examination of the womb and child of a pregnant woman before she gives birth.

SCANDAL

An attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil.

SELF-DEFENSE

Necessary protections of persons and societies that may result in the taking of life.

SUICIDE

The willful taking of ones own life; a grievous sin against the fifth commandment.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What has made people enemies of each other?
2. Why is God offended by the taking of life?
3. What does it mean to treat someone with dignity?
4. How does one manifest true love of neighbor?
5. What is the basis of ethnic cleansing?
6. Why is self-defense permissible?
7. When is self-defense an obligation?
8. For how long has the Church condemned abortion?
9. What is the penalty for those directly involved in abortion?
10. Is it moral to carry out medical procedures on the unborn? Explain your answer.
11. What four factors must be considered when contemplating the cessation of extraordinary care?
12. Is assisted suicide permitted? Explain your answer.
13. List and explain four causes of scandal.
14. Why should both the soul and body be perfected?
15. May a government require military service in a just war?
16. What is the rule for treating non-combatants?
17. What benefits accrue to those who practice human solidarity?

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Susan's younger sister Jane visited Susan at college. While there, Susan took Jane to a party and let her get drunk. How are Susan's actions a scandal to her younger sister?
2. The editor of your local newspaper has written an editorial condemning the Catholic Church's teaching that euthanasia is immoral. In the editorial, he says that the Church's position is "outdated" and "insensitive to the suffering endured by the terminally ill and their families." He argues that it is cruel to allow someone to suffer needlessly and that people have a right to control their own lives, including when their lives are to end. Ask yourself to whom a person's life belongs and what makes a life valuable. Then write a letter to the editor defending the Church's teaching and explaining the reasons for the Church's position against euthanasia. Be sure to address his specific points in your response.
3. During an argument on the basketball court about two months ago, Tom insulted Bill. Tom eventually felt bad about it, but now he refuses to apologize because Bill wouldn't speak to him for weeks, and he is still giving Tom the cold shoulder. What is Tom doing wrong? What is Bill doing wrong? How do their mistakes transgress the fifth commandment?
4. Joe is so obsessed with fitness that he wants to skip Mass on Sunday morning so he can start off early on a day of bike riding to get in better shape. When his parents tell him he should go to Mass, Joe argues that the Bible says the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, so he strives for perfection of the body. What is wrong with Joe's argument?



FROM THE CATECHISM

2318 “In [God’s] hands is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind” (Jb 12:10).

2319 Every human life, from the moment of conception until death, is sacred because the human person has been willed for its own sake in the image and likeness of the living and holy God.

2320 The murder of a human being is gravely contrary to the dignity of the person and the holiness of the Creator.

2321 The prohibition of murder does not abrogate the right to render an unjust aggressor unable to inflict harm. Legitimate defense is a grave duty for whoever is responsible for the lives of others or the common good.

2322 From its conception, the child has the right to life. Direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, is a “criminal” practice (*GS*, 27 § 3), gravely contrary to the moral law. The Church imposes the canonical penalty of excommunication for this crime against human life.

2323 Because it should be treated as a person from conception, the embryo must be defended in its integrity, cared for, and healed like every other human being.

2324 Intentional euthanasia, whatever its forms or motives, is murder. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator.

2325 Suicide is seriously contrary to justice, hope, and charity. It is forbidden by the fifth commandment.

2326 Scandal is a grave offense when by deed or omission it deliberately leads others to sin gravely.

2327 Because of the evils and injustices that all war brings with it, we must do everything reasonably possible to avoid it. The Church prays: “From famine, pestilence, and war, O Lord, deliver us.”

2328 The church and human reason assert the permanent validity of the moral law during armed conflicts. Practices deliberately contrary to the law of nations and to its universal principles are crimes.

2329 “The arms race is one of the greatest curses on the human race and the harm it inflicts on the poor is more than can be endured” (*GS*, 81 § 3).

2330 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Mt 5: 9).

Endnotes

1. CDF, instruction, *Donum vitae*, intro. 5.
2. Cf. Gn 4:10.
3. St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II-II, 64, 7, *corp. art.*
4. Cf. CDF, *Donum Vitae*, I, 1.
5. CDF, *Donum Vitae*, III.
6. CDF, *Donum Vitae*, I, 2.
7. CDF, *Donum Vitae*, I, 3.
8. Lk 17:1.
9. Pius XII, *Discourse*, June 1, 1941.
10. Cf. Eph 6: 4; Col 3: 21.
11. Is 9: 5.
12. Eph 2: 16 J.B.; Cf. Col 1: 20-22.
13. Eph 2: 14.
14. Mt 5: 9.
15. *GS*, 81 § 3.

