

**CATHOLIC BELIEF AND PRACTICE**

by Fr. John Ramsay

**CHAPTER 16 - THE COMMANDMENTS (Part Two)**

Now, let us examine the first two of the Commandments which govern our relationship with our neighbour - the Fourth and Fifth Commandments.

**THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT**

“HONOUR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER.”

Positively, that binds us to love, honour and obey our parents who gave us our natural lives: it also binds us to respect and obey all lawful and legitimate authority. Lawfully elected authority has the right to claim obedience for laws made for the common good, whether we voted for the political party in power or not!

Let us examine the family first. Our parents who brought us into the world have an obligation to love and care for, to provide for and educate their children. The children must love, respect and obey those who provide for them.

OBEDIENCE, here, means doing WHAT we are told, WHEN we are told and CHEERFULLY - NOT after much delay and with much grumbling! Notice that there is a two-way duty here - not just binding children but parents as well. The parents loving, providing for and educating: the children loving and obeying. And in old age the roles are reversed - children, now grown up, must care for their parents in their old age.

It obviously follows that parents sin if they neglect their children, fail to provide for them and, above all, fail to educate them in what is right and wrong. Such as by not correcting them when they do wrong and not giving them a good example, or spoiling them and thus failing to teach them self-control or self-denial. Children sin when they fail to respect and love their parents, disobey them, or ignore their good advice and fail to follow their good example.

The fact that the state provides schools does not excuse parents from their duty to educate their children in the Faith. Faith first grows in the home: the school is there to assist - not to take over. The best Catholic school in the world can do very little to foster Faith in the heart of a child from a lapsed home. Parents who think they have discharged their duty by sending their children to a Catholic school have failed to realise that by failing to give good example they make the work of the school next to impossible. But this commandment does not stop there: it binds us to respect all lawful authority. Good Catholics should also be good citizens. Good citizens play their part in their country's affairs by voting, paying their taxes, and above all by doing all they can to influence those around them to work for the removal of injustice, the relief of the poor, the care of the sick and in general to influence public opinion.

So often evil is done or good left undone through the inactivity or indifference of the so-called good. The great Irish statesman, Edmund Burke once said, “for evil to be done all that is required is for good men to do nothing.” Part of “spreading the Faith” - which we are all supposed to do - is making our Catholic views known and, hopefully, respected. The iniquitous 1967 Abortion Act would never have been passed if Christians had made their opposition felt. The State is, after all, PEOPLE and the greater proportion of senior office holders are ELECTED and thus the electorate have a good deal more say than they realise and could have a great deal more influence than they do have if they kept this Commandment faithfully.

One last point here. To make our feelings known, even if that involves outright opposition, it is NOT necessary - and indeed it is wrong - to do so rudely!

**THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT**

“THOU SHALT NOT KILL”.

Now let's look at the Fifth Commandment. This is a classic example of the negative phrasing of a positive law. POSITIVELY, this commandment binds me to have reverence for life and thus to treat my neighbour kindly, patiently, and with courtesy.

Let us deal first with the word “KILL”. To kill here means killing unlawfully another human being. It does not, therefore, forbid the killing of animals: nor does it forbid the taking of a life if it is in defence of another life whether one's own or someone else's. If all peaceful means fail, nations can use force and in so doing kill an unjust aggressor. Clearly, it must be a last resort and this is what is sometimes disputed by Church leaders. The point is, however, that it is NOT absolutely forbidden.

Similarly, the State may, if it believes it is the only way to maintain order, execute the criminal after due trial. Few civilised states still have capital punishment, but it is NOT forbidden. Having said all that, all UNLAWFUL forms of killing are gravely wrong: murder, suicide, abortion - indeed all forms of damage to oneself or another are wrong. This is especially so in the case of alcohol abuse and drug taking as the resulting loss of self-control often involves sin of other kinds being committed.

What has been said of physical violence applies also to VERBAL violence. Our Lord Himself said how far this commandment goes when He said: “You have learned how it was said to our ancestors, ‘You must not kill....’ but I say to you that anyone who is ANGRY with his brother shall be liable to judgement.” (Matthew 5: 21-22).

*(n.b. ‘judgement’ in this context means punishment)*

Unjust anger (and the language that goes with it) is wrong. We are bound to be patient and kind no matter how provoked we are. Nevertheless there are occasions when we are bound to show anger - what is called JUST ANGER – for example, parents with naughty children.

If we could only remember that just and restrained anger (or displeasure) almost always works whereas unjust abusive behaviour NEVER does. The Epistle of Saint James in the New Testament has a powerful passage which includes these words: “...the tongue is a tiny part of our body, and yet what power it can boast! How small a spark it takes to set fire to a vast forest.....” and so it continues. (James 3: 2 - 12)

It is well worth reading the whole of that passage!

I'll end with the pithy comment: ‘Better to keep your mouth shut and have people think you're a fool than to open it and remove all shadow of doubt'!!