God the teacher
of mankind

by
Michael Müller

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GOD THE TEACHER OF
MANKIND;
OR,
POPULAR CATHOLIC THEOLOGY,
APOLOGETICAL, DOGMATICAL, MORAL, LITURGICAL,
PASTORAL AND ASCETICAL.

EXPLANATION OF COMMANDMENTS CONTINUED.

BY
MICHAEL MÜLLER, C. SS. R.

VOL. IV.

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THE SECOND COMMANDMENT.

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

Our true happiness in this world consists in being united with God by the divine virtue of charity. The principal obstacle to this union of God with man is idolatry and superstition. To remove this obstacle, God gave the first commandment: "I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt not have strange gods before me; thou shalt not make nor adore idols, etc."

A person, however, might avoid the worship of idols, and still might not have due respect for God. Hence it is that God added the second commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

Now, what is meant by the name of God?

When we have sufficient knowledge of a thing, we give it a certain name to distinguish it from everything else; that name expresses the idea and image we have of that thing. We, therefore, name things according to the knowledge we have of them. Now, we cannot see God, we can never fully comprehend his divine essence. We therefore can never give a name to God which fully expresses his divine nature; as, for instance, the word "man" represents humanity. We know God in different ways; we know him by the works of Creation, and by revelation. According to the different ways of knowing God, we give him different names. Knowing that he is the cause and origin of all things, we call him "the Creator," "the Lord and the King of Heaven and Earth," "the Lord of Hosts," "the Almighty," "the
Strong," "the Eternal Judge," and the like. Knowing that God saved us from everlasting perdition, we call him "the Redeemer," "the Saviour," "the God of Mercy," "the Source of all Goodness," "the Good Shepherd," "the Lamb of God," "Eternal Life," "the Food of Our Souls," "Holy Communion," "the Blessed Sacrament," "the Father of the Poor," "the Friend of Children," and the like. Knowing that God purifies our souls from sin, we call him "the Sanctifier of Souls," "the Comforter of the Weak," "the God of all Consolation," "the Light of the Understanding," "the Sweet Guest of the Soul," etc.

By the name of God we must also understand especially the name of "Jesus," for this name is far more venerable than that of God. The word "God" signifies Creator, but the word "Jesus" signifies God the Redeemer and Saviour.

Hence the name "Jesus" adds to the word "God" or "Creator" the new and greater title of "Saviour."

Now, when God says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," he does not mean any particular name of his which should not be taken in vain, but he means that none of the names which represent him as the cause and origin of all things, or designates one of his divine attributes, should be taken in vain.

But this command must not be understood as directed to the mere name of God, that is, to the letters or syllables of which that name is composed; it is directed rather to the meaning of the word used to express the eternal Majesty of the Godhead. The respect of the Jews for the mere name of God—"Jehovah"—was so great that they did not consider their lips pure enough to pronounce the name "Jehovah," yet they did not hesitate to write it. This was rather a superstitious than true manner of observing this commandment; for the power of God does not consist in the mere
letters of which his name is composed, but rather in the meaning of those letters.

2. What are we commanded by the second commandment?

We are commanded: First, to speak with reverence of God, of his saints and priests, of religion, its practices and ceremonies, and of all holy things; and, second, to keep our lawful oaths and vows.

1. The God who created us—that God on whom we depend every moment of our existence—is a God of infinite majesty and glory.

Look around upon the heavens and the earth, how sublime an idea do they convey of their almighty Creator! What a stupendous mass is the ponderous globe upon which we stand; yet God poises it with one finger! How vast the abyss of its waters; yet he measures it, as Scripture says, in the palm of his hand! How awful is the roar of thunder! it is but the feeble echo of his voice. How terrific the glare of lightning; it is only a faint scintillation of his brightness. All that we see around us, the vast luminaries that roll above us, the earth which we inhabit, with its endless diversity of animals and productions, with man, the lord and master of the whole, once were not. The Almighty spoke one word and instantly we leaped into being, and we are. How must not the soul and all her faculties sink into insignificance before this idea of her Creator, God! How must not the soul long to honor the name of the one true, living God, who is the centre of all honor and glory! Yes, glory and honor essentially appertain to the name of God.

Amongst all creatures, man is essentially under obligations to glorify and honor Almighty God. Man is the masterpiece of the creation, a resplendent image of the three
THE SECOND COMMANDMENT.

divine Persons. God has redeemed man preferably to the angels. In baptism, man is consecrated to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, by an inviolable character impressed on his soul. Man, therefore, is under the strictest obligation to honor the name of his Creator, of his Redeemer and Saviour, and the Sanctifier of his soul.

Now, the name of God may be honored in various ways:

1. The name of God is honored when we publicly and confidentially confess him to be our Lord, our God and our Saviour; when we defend his honor amongst blasphemers, and courageously check their insolence by a seasonable correction.

2. The name of God is honored when we devoutly listen to the word of God, which announces to us his sovereign will; when we make it the subject of our daily meditation, and practise what it prescribes.

3. We honor and venerate the name of God when we sing his praises, when we pray devoutly, or when we give him thanks for all his blessings and whatever happens to us by his appointment, whether prosperous or adverse, saying, with holy David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all he hath done for thee." (Ps. 102, 1). Such praise is most agreeable to the Lord, especially when, like holy Job, we bless his name in our troubles and afflictions.

4. The name of the Lord is not less honored when we call upon the Lord, in order that he may deliver us from our afflictions, or grant us strength to endure them for the glory of his name. This is in accordance with his own wishes, "Call upon me in the day of trouble," he says; "I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Ps. 49, 15).

5. We honor the name of God when we speak reverently of God, of the holy Mother of God, or of any of the
saints of God, of the mysteries and great truths of our holy religion, its practices and ceremonies, and of other holy things.

God feels insulted by every kind of irreverence that is shown to him or to his saints; he feels insulted by everyone who ridicules his holy religion and its holy practices and ceremonies. He has often inflicted very severe punishments on those who offered such insults to him. In the first week of November, 1870, a wicked Italian dressed himself up like the Pope on state days, and thus robed, entered a saloon and solemnly imparted the Benediction, singing the words and with his right hand made the sign of the cross over all the rabble in the saloon. He had just finished the sign of the cross in giving the Benediction, when his right arm, dead and black, fell down by his side—not only the hand but the arm. In the same instant his face began to burn with something like an awful cancer. It blackened, and his face was fast being consumed. He fell to the floor and cried, "I have sinned against God and his Vicar on earth; call the priest, quick, or I'll be damned. Forgive me, comrades, forgive my scandal; bring the priest." The priest came and gave him absolution. His face was black and burning, his arm dead and black. In a moment he was a corpse.—[Letter of a priest, written to the Baltimore Mirror, November 11th, 1870.]

Those who fear God always speak of him with great reverence; and those who truly love God always speak most affectionately of him and everything that, directly or indirectly, relates to him.

We read, in the life of St. Margaret of Cortona, that hundreds of sinners came to see her after her conversion from a very sinful life. She spoke to them so tenderly and affectionately of the goodness and mercy of our Lord that they
entered into themselves, made a good general confession and
became models of piety.
6. Finally we honor the name of God by keeping our
lawful oaths and vows.
3. What is an oath?

An oath is to call God or anything sacred to witness that
what we say is true, or that we will keep our promise.

An oath is an external act of religion by which we appeal
to something divine. He who performs this act, or takes an
oath, calls on God to witness the truth of what he affirms of
things past or present, or of what he promises to do at a
certain future time.

Since the fall of our first parents, men, in general, have
a natural inclination to falsehood; hence, they distrust one
another. "Men," says the prophet Jeremiah, "have taught
their tongues to speak lies." (IX., 5). "Oaths," says St.
John Crysostom, "were introduced amongst men, not at the
beginning of the world, but long after, when vice had spread
all over the world, when man went so far in debasing the
dignity of his nature as to prostrate himself in degrading
servitude to idols; then it became evident that man could not
be induced to believe the assertion of his fellowman unless
he called on God as a witness of the truth which he asserted"
(Hom. 26, ad. pop. Antioch). An oath, then, is considered
by all as the greatest pledge that a man can give of the
truth of his words. He who calls on God as a witness to the
truth of his words, means to say: "May God bless or punish
me according as my words are true or false."

The form of an oath is not the same everywhere, for that
depends on the laws and usages of each country. But what-
ever the form of an oath may be, it is an oath to call God to
witness. To say "God is my witness," is just as much as to
swear by his holy name. To swear by the holy Gospel is to swear by God himself, whose revealed word it is.

It is also an oath to swear by such objects in which the divine power, majesty or goodness shines forth. Hence it is an oath to swear by the saints, who are the temples of God, who believed the truth of his Gospel, were faithful to its dictates, and spread its doctrines amongst the remotest nations of the earth; it is an oath to swear by the cross, or by the relics of the saints. It matters very little what form of words or what ceremonies are used to express that one calls on God as a witness of the truth of his words, provided such form or ceremony is meant and understood as being an appeal to God to witness the truth.

Is it an oath to say “God lives,” “God sees it?” If these and similar expressions are used by way of assertion, without calling God as a witness, then any such expression is not an oath. But if anyone uses such an expression to call God as a witness of the truth of his words, it is an oath.

Neither is it an oath to say “By my conscience,” or “By my faith,” unless divine faith is expressed or understood.

It is not an oath simply to say, “I swear such is the case,” provided the person who makes use of these words, is not asked to swear by God or anything sacred.

Is it lawful to take an oath?

There were, at different times, certain heretics, as the Pelagians, Wiclifflites, Anabaptists and Quakers, who asserted that it was never lawful to take an oath. They based their opinion on the words of our Saviour, “You have heard that it was said of them of old, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform thy oaths to the Lord. But I say to you not to swear at all; neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is his foot-stool; nor by
Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your speech be yea, yea, no, no, for whatsoever is more than these cometh from evil.” (Math. v., 33–37). Now, in these words our dear Saviour does not condemn oaths, generally, and under all circumstances. What he reproves is the perverse opinion of the Jews that truth alone was a sufficient reason to take an oath. Hence, they did not hesitate to make frequent use of oaths, and exact them from others on the most trivial occasions. Such frequent recurrence to oaths without weighty reasons is as highly prejudicial as the too frequent use of medicine. This practice, therefore, is condemned by our Saviour. He teaches that no one should swear by God, or heaven, or earth for a trivial reason, but only when necessity requires so solemn a pledge. When he says, “Let your speech be yea, yea, no, no,” he evidently forbids the habit of swearing in familiar conversation and in trivial matters. He, therefore, admonishes us against an habitual propensity of swearing, as countless evils grow out of the unrestrained habit of swearing. “Let not thy mouth,” says Holy Scripture, “be accustomed to swearing, for in it there are many falls.” (Eccl. xiii., 9). And again, “A man that sweareth much shall be filled with iniquity and a scourge shall not depart from his house.” (Eccl. xxiii, 12). Now, by condemning the unrestrained habit of taking an oath on every trivial occasion, our Lord, by no means, condemns the taking of an oath when there is a necessity for it.

Such an oath is not only permitted, but even commanded by the law of God. “Thou shalt fear the Lord, thy God,” says Moses, “and shalt serve him only, and thou shalt swear by his name.” (Dent. vi., 18). “All they,” says holy David, “shall be praised that swear by him (the Lord).”
(Ps. 62, 12). We are also told in Holy Scripture that the Apostles themselves made use of oaths. "The things which I write to you," says St. Paul, "behold, before God I lie not." (Gal. i., 20). And again; "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—knoweth that I lie not." (2 Cor. xi., 31). Even the angels have sometimes sworn. "The angel," says St. John, "swore by him who lives forever." (Apoc. x., 6.)

In fine, God himself, has often sworn, and as we read in many passages of the Old Testament, has confirmed his promises with an oath. (Heb. vi., 17; Ps. 109, 4). Indeed, he who attentively considers the origin and object of an oath will easily understand why it is not only lawful, but even praiseworthy to take an oath. An oath has its origin in faith. We believe that God is the author of all truth, that he can neither deceive nor be deceived, that all things are naked and open to his eyes, and that he superintends all human affairs. This faith induces us to appeal to God as a witness of the truth whom every one is bound to believe. To profess this faith by an oath is a very praiseworthy act of religion.

The object of an oath is not less praiseworthy, for its object is to establish the justice and innocence of a man, and to put an end to disputes and contests.

4. When is an oath lawful?

When it is necessary to take it for a just cause.

An oath to be lawful must have three conditions. "Thou shalt swear," says the prophet Jeremiah, in truth, and in judgment, and in justice. (IV., 2).

1. "Thou shalt swear in truth." Truth, then, holds the first place in an oath, that is to say: he who swears must be certain of the truth of his assertion. He who swears and at
the same time doubts whether that which he swears to is true, commits a sin.

2. "Thou shalt swear in judgment," that is, if we swear we must have a reasonable cause for taking the oath. Such a cause is when God's honor, or our own good, or the good of our neighbor, or our lawful superior ecclesiastical or civil, demands that we should take an oath. We must swear only after mature deliberation and calm reflection. Hence, in taking an oath, we must not be influenced by love or hatred, or any other passion, but by the nature and necessity of the case. Without this calm and dispassionate consideration, an oath is rash and hasty; and of this character are the irreligious affirmations of those who, on the most unimportant occasions, swear from a mere habit of swearing. This criminal abuse is but too prevalent amongst buyers and sellers. In order to purchase at the cheapest rate, buyers make no scruple to strengthen with an oath their dispraise of the goods in question, whilst sellers in order to sell at a high price, do not hesitate to strengthen with an oath the praise of their goods. Judgment and prudence, therefore, are necessary in an oath. Hence, Pope Gelasius decreed that an oath should not be administered to children before their fourteenth year, because it is generally believed that children, before that age, are not competent to perceive clearly the proper distinctions of things.

3. "Thou shalt swear in justice." The third and last condition of an oath is justice, that is, that which one promises to do on oath must be just and lawful. Hence he who swears to do what is unjust or unlawful, commits sin, and if he keeps such an oath, he commits another sin. Herod bound himself by oath to grant the request of Herodias as a reward for the pleasure she afforded him by dancing. This oath was both rash and unjust, for he knew not what unrea-
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Sonable or unjust thing she might ask. As she demanded the head of John the Baptist, Herod sinned again, and far more grievously, by keeping the oath—by commanding the head of John the Baptist to be given to her. (Mark vi., 21-28). Such was also the oath taken by those Jews who swore not to eat until they had shed the blood of St. Paul. (Acts xxiii., 12).

There are four kinds of oaths, namely: affirmative, promissory, imprecatory, and cominatory oaths. An oath is affirm. story, when, under its solemn sanction, we affirm anything past, present, or to come; as, for instance, St. Paul does in his epistle to the Galatians: "Behold, before God, I lie not." (I., 20).

An oath is promissory when we promise for certain to do something, as, for instance, holy David did, when he swore to Bethsabee, his wife, that Solomon should be heir to his kingdom, and successor to his throne. (3 Kings, i., 17). He, therefore, who promises on oath to do something without having the intention to fulfil his promise, commits a sin. But if, in a matter of little moment, a person swears with the intention of keeping his promise, but afterwards does not fulfil it, he is not guilty of a mortal sin, because he calls on God as a witness of his present intention, and not of the future execution of his promise.

It is necessary to remark:

1. An oath can never bind a person to do what is unlawful.
2. It is never lawful to swear without having the intention to take an oath.
3. When the punishment threatened with an oath is unjust, the oath is not binding.
4. He who swears falsely before a judge in a court of justice is guilty of a double sin; and should his false
testimony cause a certain loss to his neighbor he is bound to make restitution for the damage done. A witness is always bound to make true answers whenever he is lawfully interrogated by a judge. But some one may say: "Father, if I tell the truth, my neighbor will suffer a great loss. So, out of charity for him, I will say that I know nothing about him." This is no charity. By such perverse charity you condemn yourself to hell. If witnesses conceal the truth, malefactors are acquitted, and thefts, murders and other crimes are multiplied. If guilty persons were always punished, crimes would not increase so rapidly.

5. He who is subordinate to another is not his own master. He therefore cannot bind himself by an oath to do what he pleases. Hence, if he has taken an oath in a matter in which he is dependent on the will of his legitimate superior, his oath can, even without just cause, be declared null and void by his superior (father, or guardian, prelate, etc.)

6. For a just cause, the Pope, or bishop can dispense from an oath, or impose another good work instead.

7. One may also be released from the obligation of an oath by him in whose favor it was taken.

5. What is a vow?

A vow is a deliberate promise made to God, to do or omit something that is possible and more perfect than its opposite.

1. A vow is a promise made with the intention that it should be binding under pain of sin to keep the promise. Hence, such a promise greatly differs from a mere resolution, which is but a purpose to do or to omit something without the intention that it should be binding under pain of sin to do or to omit it. It is, for instance,
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a mere resolution to say, if I am quite well again, I will serve God better, I will pray more, and receive the sacraments more frequently. Such a resolution is not binding under pain of sin. But it is a vow to say, if God restores my health, I will have three Masses offered up in thanksgiving, or give fifty dollars to the poor.

If a person doubts whether he had an intention of binding himself under pain of sin in promising or omitting something, he is supposed he had the intention because every act is supposed to have been done as it ought.

When it is doubtful whether a person made a vow or only a simple resolution, his promise must be considered as a true and valid vow, if he is under the impression that, were he to violate it, he would commit a grievous sin.

2. A vow is a deliberate promise; because a vow supposes the perfect use of reason and a free agent. Human reason is the principal faculty which deliberates upon, chooses and commands, the performance of an action by the co-operation of the will; and as a vow implies a moral obligation to do, or omit a certain thing, it must be a voluntary act. Hence a vow essentially depends on the perfect use of reason and the free agency of the will. Vows, therefore, which are made before we have the full use of reason, are null and void, and the same is true of vows which are forced upon a person by menaces or violence. The person binding himself by vow must be free to do so. Before the age of sixteen no one is allowed to make solemn religious vows. Boys under the age of fourteen, and girls under the age of twelve, cannot engage themselves irrevocably by a simple vow, without the consent of their parents, and in some cases, without the consent of their tutors.

A wife cannot, without the consent of her husband, vow to do things that may, or do, occasion disorder in her
household affairs, such as to rise by night to pray, to make pilgrimages, etc. She can, however, vow to do things consistent with her duties as a wife, such as, the reception of the sacraments, abstinence from balls, theatres, shows, etc. The same may be said of servants.

3. A vow is a promise made to God, or to any of his saints in honor of God, because a vow is an act of religion by which we honor God, dedicating to his service our will and liberty in the thing that we vow.

4. A vow is a promise to do or omit something that is possible and more perfect than its opposite. The promise must be of something that can be done. Hence, if that which is promised is impossible, the promise is not binding. A person, for instance, makes a vow, to avoid all, even the least venial sin. This vow is not binding, because no one can, without a particular grace, avoid every venial fault; but if he vows to avoid all mortal sins, or every wilful venial sin, his vow is valid, because he can keep it with the ordinary assistance of God’s grace. If a person makes a vow to do something, and the principal part of it cannot be done, the vow is not binding; but if the principal part of it can be done he is bound to accomplish it.

What is vowed must also be more perfect than its opposite. To vow, for instance, to fast is better than not to fast; to vow to give alms is better than not to do so; to vow to remain single is better than to marry. Hence, should a person make a vow not to hear Mass on a week day, or to go but once a year to confession and communion, or to marry, or never to make a vow, such a vow would be invalid because its opposite is better; for to promise God to do something trifling, or indifferent, or an inferior good is to dishonor God rather than to please him, unless circumstances or the motive of making such a vow render its fulfilment more perfect than
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the omission of it, as when a person vows not to assist a poor man who is not in great need, in order to be able to give more assistance to those who are in extreme necessity and in danger of starvation, or to marry in order to escape the danger of incontinency and everlasting damnation.

Now, there are different kinds of vows. There are real, personal, mixed, absolute, conditional, temporary, perpetual, solemn, and simple vows. A real vow is one the matter of which is something external; for example, a person promises God to give one hundred dollars of his inheritance to the poor, or to make a present of a chalice to a church. In this case the money or the chalice is the matter of the vow, and if the person who made the vow does not give the money or chalice, his heirs are obliged to fulfill the vow.

A personal vow is one that regards the person who makes it; for example, I promise God to fast once a week for a whole year, or to make a pilgrimage. In this case, the obligation is personal.

A mixed vow is both personal and real; for instance, I promise God to visit the sick and aid them with my money.

An absolute vow is such a one as does not depend on any condition; for instance, a person promises God never to enter, on any account, a drinking saloon, because he often became drunk there.

A conditional vow is one the obligation of which depends on a certain condition; for instance, a sick person promises God to give five hundred dollars to an orphan asylum if he recovers from his sickness. This is a conditional vow which is binding only if the sick person recovers from his illness.

A temporary vow is one by which a person promises God to do, or to abstain from, something for a time; for instance, a person promises God to hear Mass every day for six months.
A perpetual vow is one by which a person binds himself to
do, or to abstain from, something forever, as when a person
promises to observe chastity, or virginity until death.

Solemn vows are those which are made in some religious
Orders, in which the Church has sanctioned the making of
this kind of vows. They are then accepted and considered
by the Church as solemn, and made by the novice, after at
least one year of novitiate, with the intention that they are
so accepted and considered. Similar is the vow of chastity
made by those who receive holy orders, and the vows of chas-
tity, poverty and obedience made by the Carthusians, Cis-
tercians and some other religious Orders.

Simple vows are those which the Church does not recog-
nize as solemn, or accept as such.

Now, he who has made a vow, is bound in conscience to
keep it. If we are obliged to keep the engagements and
promise which we made to our fellow-men, how much more
obliged are we to fulfil our engagements and promises made
to God? "When thou hast vowed anything to God, delay
not to pay it." (Eccl. v., 8.)

And St. Paul assures us that those widows who have been
consecrated to God by a vow of chastity, and afterwards
marry, have "damnation because they have made void their
first faith." (1 Tim. v., 12). As a vow is strictly binding
on conscience, young people in particular should be very
cautious in making vows, especially such as are perpetual.
If they wish to make an offering of something to God, let
them make only a simple resolution which imposes no obli-
gation. If they faithfully keep their resolution for a consid-
erable time, they may, by the advice of a prudent priest,
change their simple resolution into a temporary or perpetual
vow.

How long can a person delay the fulfilment of a vow
without committing a mortal sin? According to the opinion of many theologians, a person is guilty of a mortal sin if he defers the fulfilment of his vow longer than three years. This, however, is to be understood of those vows only, the matter of which is not perpetual — such as the vow to visit a holy place, to have Masses said, and the like; but to put off, for more than half a year the fulfilment of a vow the matter of which is perpetual, is regarded a grievous sin.

If a person does something which he bound himself by vow to perform, but does not at the time advert to the vow, he is not bound to do it over again in order to fulfil the obligation of his vow, because every one has a general intention to do first what he is bound in conscience to do, and then only to do what is a mere act of devotion.

If a person is in doubt as to whether he made a vow he is not strictly obliged to fulfil it, but it is safer for him to fulfil it. But if a person is certain of having made a vow, but is uncertain of having fulfilled it, he is obliged to do what he has promised, because, the obligation of the vow being certain, he remains under this obligation until he has complied with it.

If a person knows that he cannot comply with the obligation of a vow, he should apply to competent authority that may either release him from it altogether, or impose upon him some other good work instead. A vow, says St. Thomas, is a promise to perform some particular good work. Now, he who makes such a promise, may be placed in such circumstances that he cannot accomplish the good, without committing a sin, or without omitting some other good work, equally important, and more pressing. In such a case it is necessary that he be released altogether from the obligation of his vow, or that he perform some other prescribed good work instead of that which he vowed to do. In such a case,
as we have just said, a person must have recourse to competent authority.

Now, who has power to release a person altogether from the obligation of a vow, or change the matter of a vow into some other good work?

A father can declare, without any cause, a vow null and void which was taken, without his consent, by one of his children under age. A husband can, without any cause, annul a vow, taken by his wife, without his consent, in a matter in which she is depending on him. Any lawful superior can annul a vow taken, without his consent, by one of his subjects in a matter in which his consent is required for the validity of the vow.

In virtue of his supreme authority, the Pope can, for a just cause, release a person, in any part of the world, from the obligation of a vow, or impose another good work instead. If a person, from love of virtue, has vowed to observe perpetual chastity, or to enter a religious Order, or to make a pilgrimage to the sepulchre of our Lord in Jerusalem, or to visit the Churches of Sts. Peter and Paul in Rome, or the Church of St. James of Compostella in Spain, he cannot be released from the obligation of any of these five vows, except by the Pope.

Every Bishop can, in his own diocese, grant a dispensation in simple vows, or commute them, except those just mentioned, because they are especially reserved to the Pope.

But if any of these vows is only a penal or conditional vow, the dispensation from it is not reserved to the Pope; if a person, for instance, makes a vow to become a religious if he gambles again, or on condition that he is delivered from a certain illness, the vow is not reserved. The Bishop can, for a just cause, grant a dispensation or impose another good work instead, because the vow was not made through love of
virtue; nor is any of those five vows reserved, if it was made through great fear, and on account of some evil justly threatened. A priest can release a person from the obligation of a vow or impose another good work instead, if he is especially authorized by a Superior who has power to do so.

6. Are vows pleasing to God?

Yes, but not always: hence we should ask the advice of our confessor or some prudent priest, before making a vow.

Nothing is more earnestly recommended in Holy Scripture than the performance of good works. "Let your light shine before men," says our dear Saviour, "that they may see your good works," (Matt. v., 16.); and again he says: "Every tree that does not yield good fruit shall be cut down, and cast into the fire." (Matt. iii., 10). The performance of good works is most pleasing to God. Now, St. Thomas assigns three reasons why good works which are performed in compliance with vows are more agreeable to God than others.

The first is, that religion being the most excellent of all moral virtues, and a vow being an act of religion, it clearly follows that a vow increases the merit of every good work done in compliance with a vow. There is, for instance, a person, who vows to fast on a certain day. Now, to fast is a very good work in itself, because it is an act of temperance; but if this act is vowed, it is at the same time an act of religion. To this act of temperance, therefore, is attached a double merit—the merit of this good work and the merit of an act of religion. He, therefore, who performs a good work which he vowed to perform gains more merit than he who performs the same work without having vowed to perform it.

The second reason why good works which are done in
compliance with a vow, are more pleasing to God than others is because, in their performance, we offer more to God than in the performance of others. He who does a good work which he has vowed gives to God not only the good work itself, but he offers him also the sacrifice of his liberty of doing otherwise, and this oblation is the best that we can make to God.

The third reason why good works performed in compliance with a vow are more agreeable to God than others is because they are more perfect. The perfection of all exterior actions is in proportion to the perfection of the will, that is to say, the better the will is, the better also are its works. Now the perfection of the will is in proportion to its firmness and constancy in doing good. The more determined the will is in carrying out what is right, the more perfect it is, because it is farther removed from the defect which the Holy Ghost reprehends in timid persons when he says through the Wise Man: "The slothful man wills and wills not." (Prov. xiii., 4.)

All theologians say that the more hardened the will is in crime, the more grievous are the sins which it commits. In like manner, the more firm and determined the will is to do good, the holier and more perfect are all its actions. Now, there is no better means to increase and keep up this firmness and determination of will than vows, for vows check the flaccidity of the mind and fix the will and heart to serve the Lord faithfully and perseveringly, and consequently, make all its good actions more pleasing in the sight of God.

Now, if good works become more pleasing to God by vows, it is evident that vows must be very agreeable to him. St. Teresa bound herself by vow to perform all her actions in a manner as perfect as possible. St. Alphonsus made a vow to spend every moment of his life in a profitable manner. St. Francis of Assisi vowed never to refuse an alma
which was asked of him in the name of Jesus Christ. However, as the obligation of vows is very strict, it is not advisable to make a vow except after mature deliberation. It often happens that certain persons make vows without much previous reflection. The consequence is that they either soon break them, or fulfil them only after a long time. "It is much better," says Holy Scripture, "not to vow, than, after a vow, not to perform the things promised." (Eccl. v., 4.)

7. What is forbidden by the second commandment?

The second commandment forbids all profanation of the holy name of God.

The second commandment, as we have seen, ordains that we should revere the holy name of the Lord, and always speak of God and holy things with profound respect. Let us now see what is forbidden by this commandment. The second commandment forbids all profanation of the holy name of God.

Now, the name of God is profaned:

1. By pronouncing it irreverently, that is, by using it in jest, or in anger, or in any other careless manner; or by speaking irreverently of Holy Scripture, the saints, the sacraments, and other holy things; for to speak irreverently of holy things is to speak, in an indirect manner, irreverently of God himself, because he is the author of all holy things. There are many who carelessly and irreverently use the holy name of Jesus in every conversation. This is a detestable habit, which is condemned in Holy Scripture. "Let not the name of God be usual in thy mouth; and meddle not with the names of the saints;" (Eccl. xxiii., 10), for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that shall take the name of the Lord his God in vain." (Exod. xx., 7).

2. The name of God is profaned by behaving irreverently
in church. One of the chief reasons why many behave irreverently in the house of God, is because, on their way to church, they think and speak of immodest things, and then continue to do so even in the house of God. Many are not ashamed to speak aloud, to give full liberty to their eyes, nay, many go to church there to make love, in spite of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. What execrable irreverence this for the Lord of heaven and earth! How can we complain, if God sometimes sends heavy punishments upon a whole congregation or family, if there are some who dare commit sins even in the presence of the most Holy Sacrament and the angels of heaven. Many authors assert that in punishment for irreverence committed in the church, the Kingdom of Cyprus was lost and fell into the hands of the Turks. Verme relates, in his "Instructions," that in a certain church in which irreverences were committed, during the elevation of the Host, a terrible voice was heard, saying, "Christians, I am going to depart." Immediately after, the Host was raised in the air, and the voice repeated, "Christians, I am going to depart." Finally, when the Host had reached the roof of the church, the voice again repeated: "Christians, I depart." The Host was seen no more, and the church instantly fell on the unhappy congregation. Ah, how can God bear with us, if he sees that we offend him even in the church in which he dispenses his graces. It is not thus that pious and saintly christians have acted.

We read of St. Nonna, the mother of St. Gregory Nazianzen, that her reverence for the house of God was so great, that she never, even in leaving the church, turned her back to the altar or spat on the floor. The hermits of Egypt and Thebais observed the greatest silence in the church; they avoided most carefully the least distracting noise, such
as unnecessary coughing, audible sighs or anything that might in the least disturb the devotion of others. No other voice was heard than that of the priest reciting the prayers of the Mass. When St. John the Almoner saw anyone talk in the house of God, he made him leave it, saying: 'If you have come hither to pray, do not employ your mind and tongue in anything else; but, if you have come hither to talk about vain subjects, hear what our dear Saviour says in the Gospel: 'My house is a house of prayer. Beware of turning it into a den of thieves.'"

3. The name of God is profaned by ridiculing religion. In my work "The Greatest and the First Commandment," when speaking of sacrilege, I have shown how Almighty God is accustomed to punish most severely those who profane his name by ridiculing religion, or anything sacred. Not long ago it happened, that a Protestant lady went into a Catholic church at the time when the holy Rosary was recited. As she heard the Hail Mary constantly repeated, she began to ridicule the devotion by repeating the words: Hail Mary, hail Mary, holy Mary, holy Mary. What happened? All on a sudden she became insane. She was taken to the insane asylum, where she constantly repeated the words: Hail Mary, holy Mary.—It was evident to every one that her insanity was a punishment of God for her sin of ridiculing religion.

La Sémaine religieuse, of Arras, tells of scandals at Boulogne-sur-Mer, and of the punishment that followed them:—

"Two scandalous things happened at Boulogne some months ago — the first on the Thursday of Holy Week, the second on Good Friday. On Thursday thirteen young men (for the most part English) met in a tavern and held a banquet, aping the picture of the Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci. On Friday about forty Freethinkers met, with the
same intention, and had a meat-dinner. Several of the sacrilegious young men who had imitated the Last Supper were stricken with small pox in the succeeding week, and died so impiously and in such agony, that it was not hard to see that the finger of God was there. The first man attacked was the Englishman who had played the part of Jesus Christ. He was carried to the hospital, where he died — his body absolutely corrupted, his flesh actually hanging in shreds. The English physician attending him did not hesitate to say that the death of this young man was unnatural — that it was a blow of divine justice. This doctor was a Protestant, and a Protestant verging on Rationalism. It is stated that ten out of the thirteen died of the disease.

"Another scandal occurred on Holy Saturday. A young owner of a fishing-vessel, Demay, a Radical member of the Municipal Council of Boulogne, recently initiated into the Masonic Order, had been invited to the feast on Holy Saturday. As he was obliged to start on a yearly fishing-expedition on that day, he was unable to be present at the Masonic banquet, but he declared he would take his meat out to sea with him and eat it thinking of his Masonic brethren and friends. He was careful, before setting sail, to take down all the images of Our Lord and His Mother on board his vessel and to replace them by Masonic emblems. In place of the usual prayer in departing, he had the 'Marseillaise,' sung. The twenty men forming the crew saw these profanations with sadness; and one of them said to his wife: — 'How unfortunate it is that I have engaged to sail with Demay! The good God will punish us.' Of all the boats that set out from Boulogne, that belonging to Demay was the only one lost. The mariners on board left sixty-three orphans. The faithful of Boulogne saw in this an instance of divine justice. Another master of a fishing-vessel, who
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had likewise been received among Freemasons, was abandoned by his crew; and, so terribly have these facts impressed the people that, when anybody dies suddenly, they exclaim, 'He must have been one of the thirteen, or been present at the banquet on Holy Saturday.' The arm of God fell with terrible weight on these two cases. The patience of God is great, 'but his punishments severe!"—[Freeman's Journal of New York, Nov. 12th, 1881.

The Paris correspondent of the Catholic Times contributes three more instances of evidences of Divine Providence:

"At Mont d'Or, in Auvergne, a woman and her daughter kept a book and newspaper shop. As is usual in French watering-places, the building was of wood. Amongst other papers sold was a blasphemous and immoral pamphlet full of calumny and outrage against Pius IX. Not many days ago the shop was struck by lightning; the daughter was killed on the spot, and the mother is only just out of danger. Strangely enough, the shop, which was joined to some others, was burned to the ground, but the others were untouched. The people of the place have been much impressed by what appears to be an evidence of the anger of God.

"At Neuville Sous Carbie, in the diocese of Amiens, two Municipal Councillors impudently interfered when the Catholics were about to raise a cross in their cemetery. One of them expressed a hope that the figure of our Lord would fall and break its neck. A few days afterwards the blasphemer fell under a cart-wheel which literally passed over his neck and broke it."—[From the New York Tablet, Dec. 24th, 1881.

4. The name of God is profaned by blaspheming, that is, by speaking ill of God, or the saints, or holy things. Thus it is blasphemy to say of God, that he is a tyrant, or
that he rejoices in the misfortune of men, or that he is partial, or that he favors some men too much, whilst he treats others too harshly, or to say, that, if God does not punish that wicked man, I do not believe that he is just; or to say, it seems that the servants of the devil are better off than the servants of the Lord.

To be guilty of the sin of blasphemy, it is not necessary that one should speak directly against God. He who speaks of God's saints, or of sacred things in a contemptuous and injurious manner, is guilty of the sin of blasphemy, because God looks upon an insult offered to his mother or any other saint or sacred thing as offered to himself. Hence a person may become guilty of the sin of blasphemy in the following different ways:—

1. By denying any of God's perfections; as, for instance, by saying that God is not all-wise, nor all-powerful; that he is not good, nor just, nor kind, nor merciful; that he takes no interest in us here below; that he cares not for what we do; that there is no Providence, and the like.

Certain persons who labor under the affliction of wrong, and are in destitution and misery, sometimes fall into this kind of blasphemy.

2. The sin of blasphemy is committed by those who ascribe to God some fault or imperfection, by saying, for example, that he is an unjust God — that he is a despotic God — that he takes pleasure in the miseries of his creatures — that he cannot aid us in our troubles. Of this kind of blasphemy the children of Israel were guilty when, tired with the manna sent them from heaven they wanted flesh; for they spoke ill of God; they said, "can God furnish a table in the wilderness?"

3. The sin of blasphemy is committed by ascribing to creatures any of the attributes of God; for example, by
saying that the devil is omnipotent—that he knows everything to come, or that he knows as much as God himself; or by saying that such a person is a God, a second Messiah, as beautiful and as amiable as God. Of this sort of blasphemy the Jews were guilty when they attributed the miracles of our Lord to the devil.

4. The sin of blasphemy is committed by cursing God or wishing him ill; as, for example, by saying, death to God! would that there was no God, no Redeemer! This is the blasphemy of the damned souls; for St. John tells us, that “they bit their tongues for pain; and they blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pain and wounds.” (Apoc. xvi., 10). To speak contemptuously of God, or of his Son, Jesus Christ—to speak in a tone of mockery and contempt of the holy name of Jesus, or of the wounds, blood, passion, or death of Christ, is also to be guilty of the sin of blasphemy. Of this kind of blasphemy those were guilty who derided Christ hanging on the cross: “They that passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads, and saying, vah, thou that destroyest the temple of God, and in three days buildest it up again, save thyself; if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.” (Matt. xxvii., 39). Such was the blasphemy of Julian the Apostate, when, on the point of death, he cast some of his blood against heaven, crying out in his rage: “Well! Galilean, you have conquered.” This was the expression he uttered against God when his perjured soul was about falling into the arms of the devil.

5. The sin of blasphemy is committed by saying something of the Blessed Virgin, or of any other saint, that is an outrage on their sanctity and memory; as, for example, by saying, that they were cruel and wicked during their lives, and that they are undeserving of the honors which are paid to them; that they caused, whilst they lived, a great deal of
disquiet, and brought about much misery and wretchedness. The worst species of blasphemy against the saints is that which infidels pronounce against the Blessed Virgin, the Queen of all saints, by denying that she was always a virgin, and saying that she was no other than an ordinary woman.

6. The sin of blasphemy is committed by those who speak injuriously of sacred things and religion, for example, by saying, that the sacraments of the New Law are of no use or benefit to man — that the holy Scriptures are not the work of God — that they contain falsehoods — that religion is the work of man, and the invention of interested priests — that it is of no use or benefit to man — that all those who practise religion are just as bad as those who have no religion — that the Catholic Church is no better than the Protestant Church — that one form of religion is as good as another. It is, also, blasphemy against religion to mock and deride the ceremonies of the Church, to speak contemptuously of its holy practices, calling her sacraments and ordinances the mummeries of superstition. All such blasphemies dishonor God himself, and are so many outrages against his infinite majesty and holiness. Of such kind of blasphemies Antichrist will be guilty, for of him it is said by St. John: "He opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven." (Apoc. xiii., 6.)

7. The sin of blasphemy is committed by cursing those creatures of God, in which the power and goodness of God shine forth in an especial manner, as they do in heaven and in the human soul. Hence it is a blasphemy to curse the world, unless the curse is meant only for the wicked world, of which St. John says: "The whole world is seated in wickedness." (1 John, v., 19). It is also a blasphemy to say: "God damn my or your soul," — or to say: "Cursed be
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the wind, or rain or day of God.” But to curse simply creatures, such as the wind, the rain, the year, the dead and the like without referring any of these creatures to God, is no blasphemy, but only a venial sin, says St. Alphonsus.

8. Of the sin of blasphemy are guilty not only those who formally utter it, but also those who provoke or applaud it. There was once a very good and virtuous father. He had several children. For each of them he provided a large inheritance. In a word, he left nothing undone to make them comfortable and happy. Now, this good father had a great enemy who said all kinds of bad things against him in public speeches, which were printed in many newspapers. His children took great delight in all that was said and printed against their father; they went even so far as to congratulate this enemy of their father on the courage he had shown to speak against him, and what was worse, they paid him for his speeches, and bought thousands of copies of them to circulate them everywhere, in order that everybody might hate and detest their father as much as possible. What do you think of those wicked children? Are you not highly indignant and incensed against such conduct? This good father represents God the Father, who is the greatest benefactor of mankind; but alas! how is he treated by thousands of his children. Some of them blaspheme him in so shocking a manner that one is made to believe that they are possessed by the devil.

But there are others who applaud these devilish blasphemies; others publish them in newspapers, pamphlets or books; others read them with pleasure; others, without reading them favor their publication by subscribing to them, or by paying for admission to blasphemous lectures; others, whose duty it is to prevent and oppose the sin of blasphemy, tolerate it. All these are guilty of the sin of blasphemy.
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Now, blasphemy has always been regarded as one of the greatest sins in the sight of God, because it directly attacks his infinite majesty and perfections, and insults and outrages his sacred name. To insult a king of this world, to load him with indignities, and to scoff and ridicule him, is considered a very great offence; but how much greater is the offence of one who dares to give expression to insults and indignities against the King of kings and the Sovereign Master of heaven and earth. Hence, we find blasphemy severely condemned in Scripture.

St. Paul says: "Put away . . . . . blasphemy—filthy speech out of your mouth." (Col. iii., 8). This great Apostle delivered Hymenæus and Alexander over to satan that they might learn not to blaspheme. (1 Tim. i., 20).

St. Jerome says that, compared with blasphemy, every sin is small: "In fact, every sin, compared to blasphemy, is trifling." And St. Chrysostom says that, when a person blasphemes, his mouth should be instantly broken to pieces: "Give him a stripe—break his mouth."

"Blasphemers," says St. Alphonsus, "are worse than the damned." Those who are in hell always retain a perverse will in opposition to God's justice which condemned them to eternal torments. They are always filled with hatred and malice. If they feel any regret for past iniquities, it is only because iniquities were the cause of their eternal damnation. They died in sentiments of impiety, impenitence and in great hatred to God and his holy Church, which is real blasphemy. Hence they are in a state of satanic rage and despair. Even after the general Resurrection, they will never cease uttering groans of imprecation and blasphemy against God and all the angels and saints of heaven. The blasphemies of the damned, therefore, consist in the detestation of God's justice; but the blasphemies of the wicked on
earth principally consist in the detestation of God's goodness. The damned blaspheme the author of their torments; but the wicked of this world blaspheme their benefactor; they blaspheme him who keeps them alive. Instead of thanking God for preserving their life in order to give them time to repent and be saved, they blaspheme his divine Majesty. The sin of blasphemy, therefore, is so great, says St. Alphonsus, "that I wonder, why the earth does not open and swallow the blasphemer." St. Louis, King of France, enacted a law which condemned all blasphemers to have their tongues pierced with a red-hot iron.

Ah! how frightful are not the chastisements which God is accustomed to inflict upon blasphemers! In the Old Law it was God's ordinance that blasphemers should be stoned to death. In the book of Leviticus we read that a young Israelite, who had blasphemed, was brought to Moses, and that Moses, having consulted the Lord, the blasphemer was ordered to be stoned: "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Bring forth the blasphemer without the camp, and let them that heard him put their hands upon his head, and let all the people stone him. And thou shalt speak to the children of Israel, 'He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord dying let him die; all the multitude shall stone him, whether he be a native or a stranger.'"

"And Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and they brought forth him that had blasphemed without the camp, and they stoned him. And the children of Israel did as the Lord had commanded Moses." (Levit. xxiv., 10-23.)

The holy king Ezechias, who ruled over the kingdom of Juda shortly before the time of the Babylonian captivity, was on one occasion besieged in Jerusalem by the Assyrian general, Rabsaces, who had been sent by King Sennacherib to demand the surrender of the city. Rabsaces, in the name