

the CATHOLIC NAVIGATOR

Aboard St. Peter's Barque with the Catechism Charting Our Course

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Chasing Holiness

We are taught that: "... *Refusing obedience* to civil authorities, when their demands are contrary to those of an upright conscience, finds its justification in the distinction between serving God and serving the political community." (CCC 2242) But, when do civil actions go from something good to something unholy?

The short and simple answer is that actions become unholy when they violate the laws, spirit, and will of God. But, as we know, nothing is short and simple. Discerning where the line is between holy and unholy can sometimes be difficult. We know that "The end does not justify the means." (CCC 1753)

This is a way of saying that even if we desire peace we cannot murder in order to achieve this goal. A good end, or goal, must be achieved through right action (e.g. actions described by the commandments).

To determine what we are permitted to do, and not just what we can't do, we must remember to take every decision under advisement. Prayer, study, and consultation about a course of action are to be grounded in our Gospel message, informed by our elders (in our families, local Church, and the Magisterium), and confirmed in a well-formed conscience with a heart that has been committed to God.



In The Year 4004 B.C.

...on the evening preceding Sunday, **October** 23, the first day of creation is claimed by some to have occurred! They view the earth as of 2014 A.D. as exactly 6018 years old, give or take a few days. Now, this claim for the earth's age is not based on modern scientific methodology. Rather, it was arrived at by Archbishop (Anglican) James Usser (1581-1656) in his *Annals of the Old Testament*, based on a quite literal study of the genealogies in Genesis.

Today, this observation has given birth to 'young age creationism.' Some proponents of this explain the fossil record as being planted by Satan to undermine the authenticity of the Bible. Most Catholics do not buy into using Sacred Scripture to date the world's age. Indeed, they can accept the current scientific consensus that the world is about 4.5 billion years old. And, they seem to agree with recent Popes' assessments of science and religion as not being fundamentally at odds with one another. Many Catholics are, in fact, renowned scientists. Moreover, the Vatican itself maintains an Observatory for the study of the universe (Astronomy). And, it was a priest, Msgr. Georges Lemaitre, who first proposed the Big Bang Theory of the universe! The Bible will always answer the big questions (why) and leave the 'smaller' ones (how, when, etc.) to science.



CATHOLIC NOTABLES...

Opposition to unjust government involvement is common in the U.S. The Church most famously lobbies against and protests abortion laws. Peaceable means are to be used. Armed resistance requires that several conditions be met before it is ever justified.

Notable examples of Catholic resistance to civil authority exist around the world. One such instance is Archbishop Oscar Romero, a Jesuit priest and Archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador. Despite the confusion of politics/involvement by other countries (namely, the U.S.), he steadfastly adhered to peaceful protests and homilies to bring an end to a corrupt government and the persecution and torture of religious in his country.

He was shot on March 24, 1980 while saying Mass. The audiotope of the Mass indicates that this occurred during the elevation of the chalice. The day before, he had challenged the army to not fire on their brothers and sisters; he challenged them to not violate God's law. In effect, he was inviting mutiny! But, he knew this and what it would bring about. His sums up his view on man's role in the public arena thusly, "One must not love oneself so much, as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life that history demands of us, and those that fend off danger will lose their lives."

Not yet a saint, Archbishop Oscar Romero, carrying the title "Servant of God" and with the implicit support of Pope St. John Paul II, waits in peace.

SCRIPTURAL SECRETS...



In the very next sentence in Matthew after Jesus condemns the leadership of Israel in the Parable of the Wedding feast, the Pharisees run off to discuss how to trap Jesus. Today's reading shows the Pharisees sending their 'guy' along with a Herodian. Herodians were 'friends of Herod.' They held themselves as a third party, separate from the Pharisees and Sadducees, but were supporters of Rome. The Pharisees didn't support Rome, but they didn't like Jesus. Both agreed that Jesus had to go; his words threatened the security of their positions.

Together, they came up with a plan: push Jesus to state his allegiance to either Israel or Rome so that whichever group was not named could then take their vengeance. Using a coin, they asked him if the state tax was legal. To say that it was lawful would be to betray Judaism. The coin itself was offensive to the Jews. The image on the coin not only showed the Emperor, but it described him as a god. This was idol worship! To say that the tax was not lawful

would be a betrayal of Rome. This would be the same as starting a protest or a riot: treasonous!

And, just when they thought they had him, *bada-bing!* --Jesus outsmarts them! He reminds them that it is the image that determines who something belongs to. Like the emperor's seal, his image on the coin meant the coins were his. More importantly, those who are 'created in the likeness and image of God' (Gen. 1:27) are thus God's. Wherever the image and likeness of God appeared so there was his daughter/son. Jesus makes it clear that the image and likeness of God are not found in these *hypocrites*, these *actors*. They have given themselves to men instead, not to God.

With echoes of his earlier words ("You cannot serve two masters... You cannot serve God and mammon." Mt.6:24), Jesus succeeds in pushing the Pharisees and Herodians into a corner rather than ending up there himself. Still, it is he who is living on borrowed time.



Catechetical Corner

We are bound as Christians to "honor all who for our good have received authority in society from God." (CCC 2234) The fourth commandment guides us in our response to all authority structures, whether in the family or in society: "Honor your Father and your Mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you." (Ex. 20:12)

This commandment also governs how authorities should rule: "Those who exercise authority should do so as a service. 'Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.'" (CCC 2235) This ideal is seldom met. We are left to follow the commandment while also making sure that we do not turn away from God in the process of fighting corruption. At times, this is a difficult line to walk.

The Church has often had to organize and stand against civil policies that fly in the face of the moral order. While we are to "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's," we must not do so in a blind and unthinking way.

Money...

Money.

During the First Century A.D. there was a definite need for a monetary system. Bartering of goods and animals might work between folks out in the country, but hard currency was needed when it came to paying the Roman Imperial taxes as well as the Temple tax.

Rome taxed the individual (poll or head tax –males only), water, land, necessities (such as salt and meat), houses, roads, and border crossings. All male adult Jews were assessed a yearly tax to support upkeep of the Temple.

The hard currency in circulation was of three sources. The native Jewish coin was the *lepton*, the widow's mite of Mk. 12:42. The most popular Roman coin, the *denarius*, was used to pay Roman taxes. And the Syrian *stater*, a Jewish shekel's weight in silver, was highly prized. The Temple tax was paid with the Syrian *didrachmon*, a half-shekel in value. These four coins kept the wheels of commerce well-oiled, even though resentfully so.

