

The True Witness



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PASTORAL LETTER OF HIS LORDSHIP THE BISHOP OF VALLEYFIELD, ON THE OATH.

(Continued.)

It is not desolating, dearly beloved brethren, to think that there are numerous occasions of falling into the sin of perjury, and that, especially if we count upon the impunity on the part of men, that we are so often exposed to commit this terrible sin. In law suits, under the pressure of repeated and pressing questions, suffering from the influence of certain sentiments, pressed by various devices, with a memory more or less confused and which the interests of the moment tend to confuse to a still greater extent, we want great courage and perfect lucidity of mind to place our hand upon the Holy Gospel and say to ourselves that we are swearing the exact truth. Outside of the tribunals, every place where the oath is required in virtue of the civil laws or by the more restricted administration of certain financial organizations, the danger is perhaps still greater; either on account of the mind being already troubled, disturbed by the noise of events, or that the taking of an oath, true or false, should result in the success or downfall of a transaction, we are very much exposed in these moments of perplexity to forget the holiness of the sacred Name and the respect due to it.

To what extent should be on their guard not only those who swear, but again, those who demand the oath, and who have as a special mission, by their state or profession, the exacting of testimony from those who have taken it. It is evident that their only object should be to obtain the truth, to make it known to the tribunal, and not to uselessly provoke flagrant contradictions, in no way necessary to the wants of their case, with the one purpose of tormenting the witness, and having as an only result the augmenting of the number of perjurers and the destroying of the public confidence which the oath should possess. Are not those still more guilty, who, in order to serve a mean and passing interest, forgetting all religion and abdicating all dignity, imitate the sacrilegious impety of Caiaphas, do not fear to summon false witnesses, and to induce them either by flattery or by threats, to commit, even in courts of justice, the most abominable perjuries? What an odious traffic of consciences! What a dreadful treason against God and against society!

In the second place, judgment is necessary, that is to say, wisdom and discretion, not to swear for vain things and on all occasions, but only when such is necessary. It was the habitual sin of the Jews to swear frequently, without reflection, without serious motives, without scruple, at every turn in life and on the smallest contradiction. Our Lord Jesus Christ takes them to task severely for this: "You have learned that it has been said to the ancients: You shall not perjure yourselves, you shall acquit yourselves of the oaths that you have taken to the Lord; and I say to you that you shall not swear, neither by heaven, which is the throne of God, nor by the earth, which is His footstool, nor by Jerusalem because it is the city of the Great King, or even by your head, because you have not the power to turn a hair either black or white. Limit yourselves to saying that is, that is not; if there is any more, that becomes wrong." Our Lord does not intend to forbid all oaths by these words, but he condemns the pernicious habit of swearing without necessity and judgment. Jesus Christ, says St. Augustine, forbids us to swear in any way, fearing that through swearing we should contract a facility for swearing, and that from the facility we contract the habit and that from this habit we fall into that of perjury.

Does he not condemn by the same token the lightness of conduct, the misplaced obstinacy and irritation of those who, being momentary deposit-

aries of certain vested rights, do not fear, in order to serve their ambition, or that of their friends, to press the taking of the oath without any real motive, and even when truth is otherwise well known and incontestable?

It is during election times, can we believe, that the most of the rash oaths are taken? Is this not too often the place of the unworthy profanation of the oath? Is not that the way to make of it something common and trivial; something over which we laugh, without dreaming that we thereby contribute to sap away the bases of the social edifice. It is certainly not meant to serve as a toy in the inexperienced hands of men possessed of little seriousness, and who seem to have as a special mission to create trouble and raise embarrassment among their adversaries, that the oath has been instituted with the august and sacred character from which it is inseparable.

Do not accustom your mouth to the oath, because it will result in great evils. The man who swears frequently shall be filled with sins, affliction will not depart his house (Eccles. xx.). Let us again cite the unqualified conduct of those persons who, even in private life, in their daily relations, are always ready to formulate oaths in order to accentuate affirmations or promises, often ridiculous in themselves, and which possess no interest relating to the public good.

Impudent, no less than frivolous, oaths recall to our minds that of Saul, who swears to put to death any one who would partake of food before the end of the day, and who finds himself bound by his word in regard to his own son, Jonathan, who had partaken of some honey.

The third required by the Holy Ghost for the holiness of the oath is that it be taken in justice, that is to say, that a person never should swear otherwise than in a manner conformable to the law of God, to the rights of society and those of our neighbor, and that it is never permitted to bind one's self by an oath to things that are contrary to our conscience. This is what happens when we support by an oath affirmations, or when we promise to do certain things that touch unjustly the honor, the reputation or the fortune of others; when we promise, again, under oath, to seek vengeance for an injury, to keep ill-will, not to become reconciled, in a word, to do harm to his neighbor. Interest and pride blind, upon this point, certain men who do not fear to invoke the name of God so as to make it serve their ambition or their anger. It is thus that we see in the Holy scriptures that forty Jews, irritated against St. Paul, leagued themselves together and swore, in the most frightful terms, to neither eat nor drink before they had killed the apostle (Acts xxiii., 12). Is it truly unheard amongst us that people swear to be revenged. If they have not always the intention to take a real oath, according to all the malice of their words, at least make use of expressions calculated to lead a person into the belief that they bind themselves by a formal oath.

Those also swear against justice who, becoming members of societies condemned by the church, or that are gravely suspected in her sight, pronounce in entering their oaths which bind them down all their lives, chain their liberty, and can eventually compel them to work in a manner, conscious or otherwise, calculated to trouble and even to sap away religious and social order. By this oath, as imprudent as it is unjust, the one affiliated to a secret society poses in rebellion against the most legitimate authority, and as a bound adversary of all those who are not members of this same society. This oath, which they have thus pronounced to keep secrets with the legitimacy constituted authority, to practice absolute submission to unknown chiefs, and to execute, in extreme cases, orders, the object of which they are ignorant, is at the same time a profanation of the name of God and an injustice towards our neighbors. It is for this reason that the Church forbids it to the faithful and that the latter, when they have had the misfortune of taking such an oath, should understand that not only they are not obliged by it, but

even that they are not permitted to keep it. What imprudence on the part of Catholics to thus expose themselves against the direction of the Church and in spite of her formal prohibition, to find themselves one day engaged between their word given under oath and their Christian conscience, which will command them to break it because the object thereof is criminal.

Herod had promised, under oath, to a courtesan, all that she should ask of him, even though it were half of his kingdom. She demanded the head of John the Baptist, and the Precursor was forthwith put to death to satisfy the keeping of a foolish and criminal promise.

Who can say to what length may be brought, some day, those who in spite of the formal forbidding of the Church, affiliate themselves to secret societies and take oaths, all the more dangerous that their formula is more vague and general? It remains with us now, dearly beloved brethren, to say a few words to you concerning perjury, of the terrible malice of this crime, the consequences which it entails, and the punishments which it merits.

Perjury is the crime of him who swears against truth, or who fails in the promises he has made under oath. A perjurer, consequently, is he who, before the tribunals, or in elections, in public business office, or elsewhere, by invoking the name of God, or with his hands on the Holy Gospels, or taking in any other way God to witness, affirms or denies something in a manner not exactly conformable to the truth as he actually knows it, without any doubt, without any possible hesitation.

A perjurer is also the one who, before undertaking the duties of a certain function, swears to be exact, faithful, disinterested, impartial in the discharge of his duties, and yet who has no well-defined intention to fulfill all those conditions, as would also be a perjurer he who, having taken the same oath, would subsequently take no pains to regulate the affairs of public interest confided to his care to the extent of this promise.

The violating of the oath of office and false swearing are two forms of perjury equally contrary to the sanctity of God and the general interests of society.

The perjurer, says Bossuet, is an impious man and a blasphemer, who takes the name of God in vain, and who thereby treats God as something vain, who does not believe that God is just, able to punish, or who defies him to do him any harm, and does not fear his justice, which he invokes against himself, any more than that, instead of God, he invoked the name of a vain, mute idol.

At the same time that it is a terrible profanation of the name of God, it also tends to shake the very bases of the social edifice, since it takes away from authority the only means that it possesses of knowing the truth in points interesting the peace of families, the security of contracts, the administration of justice, and in general all that either attaches itself to, or maintains the rights of every body, staple and firm.

This is one of the crimes which God holds most in horror: I will draw near to you for judgment, and I shall appear suddenly as a witness against those who swear falsely. (Malach. iii., 5.)

And again: I shall spread the malediction of the oath, which shall spread itself over the face of the earth, it shall enter into the house of him... who swears falsely by the name of God; it shall remain therein and consume it even to the wood and stones thereof (Zach. v., 4.)

(Continued on Page 4.)

Time tries all things, and as Bickle's Anti-Consumptive Syrup has stood the test of years it now ranks as a leading specific in the treatment of all ailments of the throat and lungs. It will soften and subdue the most stubborn cough by relieving the irritation, and restore the affected organs to healthy conditions. Use will show its value. Try it and be convinced of its efficacy.

The real calamity of life is to become bitter to let go, to cease striving; to cease unfolding and growing.—Angela Morgan.

ABOUT CONFESSION.

If It Be an Incentive to Sin, How is it That the Best Catholics are Seen Most Frequently at the Sacred Tribunal.

Does not confession weaken character?

Is not confession an incentive to sin by making forgiveness too easy? Do not Catholics go to confession and then commit the same sin over again?

On the contrary, we have already seen that certain conditions are absolutely required before God will ratify the absolution of the confessor. Pardon is granted, for instance, to the drunkard who has a mere natural sorrow because of his degradation and the poverty and shame of his wife and children; to the thief who has no intention of giving back the money he has stolen; to the impure man who will not avoid the proximate occasion of his sin; to the bitter, angry soul who refuses to forgive the offending brother, etc.

We know perfectly well that human nature is weak, and human passions strong; that the world of wicked men and women is full of temptations; that the flesh rebels against the spirit (Rom. vii., 23), and the devil does his best to tempt us (I. Pet. v., 8). But if a Catholic yields to these temptations, it is not in virtue of the sacrament he has received, but because he is false to the sacramental promise he made to God to sin no more.

We are willing also to grant that there have been abuses; that some Catholics go to their confession in a mechanical, perfunctory sort of a way, and do not realize the dignity and sacredness of this divine sacrament. But is there any good thing in the world that sinful man has not sometimes abused? The Sacrament of Matrimony, intended to sanctify and bless the pure union of man and woman, has often been made a mere tool for worldly advantage or a mere instrument of lust, as divorce statistics show. The Sacrament of Baptism, established to initiate the Christian into the Church of God, has been used to serve an unbeliever's worldly aims. The Bible has been abused by every false prophet from the beginning, in imitation of Satan (Matt. iv., 6). The press, the pulpit, the theatre, the stock exchange, the arts—all these have been abused. Would you, then, abolish them altogether?

The history of the Sacrament of Penance is proof positive of its being one of the greatest incentives to virtue the world knows of. Could it have survived during these nineteen hundred years if it were indeed an incentive to sin? Would millions of the most intelligent men and women still bend their knee? It is impossible to think so. The corruption of morals that everywhere followed the abolition of confession in the sixteenth century made many of the reformers wish for its re-establishment. Voltaire wrote in the eighteenth century: "The enemies of the Roman Church, who have opposed so beneficial an institution, have taken from man the greatest restraint that can be put upon crimes" (Dict. Phil., art. Cathec. du Cure).

If confession were an incentive to sin, how is it that the most hardened sinners never go and the best Catholics are seen frequently at the sacred tribunal? If it weakened character, how, then, do you account for its reformation of the habitual drunkard, its recall of the penitent Magdalen and the comfort and peace it gives the condemned criminal? If it encouraged crime, why should Catholic fathers and mothers rejoice so much in seeing their boys and girls go frequently to confession, and be sad of heart when they begin to neglect this duty? If it made Catholics worse, how, then, do you explain the fact that Protestants often desire for their servants and employees Catholics who go regularly to confession?

The fact is evident. The Sacrament of Penance is a guide to the doubting, a comfort to the afflicted, an encouragement to the weak, a warning to the young, a strong arm to the wavering, an adviser to the ignorant, a menace to the hardened sinner, a joy to the truly penitent; it is Jesus Christ speaking to the world: "Come to Me, all ye that labor and are burdened and I will refresh you" (Matt. xi., 28).

Why, sometimes non-Catholics, tormented by the anguish of unconfessed sins, have desired to receive the sacrament; and finding this impossible, have craved the privilege of unburdening their conscience to the trusted Catholic priest.—Monitor.

THE ONLY CATHOLIC BISHOP OF THE NEGRO RACE.

(From the Boston Transcript.)

The widespread and enthusiastic celebration the other day of the Garrison centennial makes more than ordinarily interesting any bit of news about the achievements of any member of that long-oppressed (and indeed still oppressed) race for which Garrison dared and did so much. Hence the interest which attaches to an account in a Spanish-American newspaper of Monsignor Gomez Pimenta, Bishop of Marianna, Brazil, who up to his recent death had the distinction of being the only Roman Catholic Bishop of the negro race in the world. There are, of course, in that world-wide Church clergymen of the negro race (there are two or three in the United States), and over one of our North American dioceses there presided until recently a man who had some trace of negro blood in his veins. But Monsignor Gomez Pimenta, the Brazilian prelate, was the only full-blooded negro Bishop, and now that he has passed away there remains in the Catholic Church no Bishop of the African race.

The story of Monsignor Pimenta's life is an inspiring record, a proof of what ability and merit will do, and a further proof (if any were needed) after beholding the rise of Pius X., the present occupant of Peter's chair) that in the Roman Catholic Church, apparently so autocratic and aristocratic, lowly origin is no bar to the attainment of the highest offices and honors. Still further than this, Monsignor Pimenta's life history is a most striking instance of negro progress and achievement.

Silveria Gomez Pimenta was the son of slave parents. Born in extreme poverty, he knew what it was to be destitute and hungry. When a child he attended school half naked and barefooted, but he was from the first remarkable for his application and his good conduct. He was, in fact, so excellent a schoolboy that his case came to the attention of the Archbishop of Bahia, who took a liking to the exceptional young negro, and placed him, after some time, in the seminary of his see city. Here Pimenta, now a young man, pursued his studies for the priesthood, winning admiration on all sides, not only for his intellectual powers, but for the kindness and nobility of his heart. Ordained a priest, he overcame the prejudices which exist against the negroes even in Catholic countries (though these are by no means so strong as the prejudice against negroes which prevails in the United States) and was given ecclesiastical charges and offices of much importance, in which he bore himself so well and so creditably that while still quite young, he was raised to the episcopal dignity as Auxiliary Bishop of the diocese of Bahia. In this office he still won favor, and when, in 1902, the late Pope Leo XIII. restored the Diocese of Marianna, Amazon, whose area was 300,000 square kilometers and whose population was two millions, he designated as its prelate the negro Bishop.

This new office was by no means a sinecure. For years the Bishop's territory had been more or less neglected, and the state of religion was far from ideal. He was almost alone and without resources in his vast diocese. Added to this, it had been the scene of an anti-Catholic propaganda which rendered the new Bishop's task particularly difficult. But this son of slave parents, who had overcome so many obstacles in his life, was not discouraged by the situation, no matter how hopeless it seemed. He bent every effort to the

work in hand—the building and maintaining of churches, schools, seminaries, houses of charity, etc., and gave so little thought to himself and his own dignity as a Bishop or even to his own comfort as a man, that he often went almost as poorly clad, and certainly with his feet as destitute of covering, as when he attended school years before in Bahia. But he succeeded before his death in rehabilitating the diocese, which he had found in ruins, and in elevating the tone of its religious and social life.

The merits of this negro Bishop were not confined to his own diocese or to Brazil; nor did his life of labor prevent him from continuing those studies in which he showed himself so brilliant at school. He was a man of vast learning, and had a high reputation among Orientalists for his knowledge of the Semitic languages. He was besides held as authority of great weight in Biblical questions; and in Rome, that city of religious experts, his opinion was much esteemed. His death removes a man of whom the negro race of North as well as South America may well be proud.

HOW THE CATHOLIC PAPER HELPS.

Hardly anything can be more helpful than the right kind of Catholic weekly paper.

Through it the pastoral letter or timely advice of the Bishop easily reaches priests and people. A single thrilling presentation of God's word by some gifted preacher may, through the Catholic newspaper, carry light and inspiration to the homes not only of his own parish, but also to those of every parish in the diocese, or, as in our case, in a group of neighboring dioceses. Misrepresentations or misconceptions of Catholic doctrine and practice which appear only too often in the daily prints can meet with weekly correction at the hands of men who speak in the name of the Church with a fulness of knowledge and light. This is obviously an advantage of the greatest importance and one which could not be expected from a Catholic paper published in some distant city. Finally the edifying work done in one parish or diocese will serve, as read in the columns of the weekly paper, as a guide and stimulus to priests and people elsewhere.

How often has not every priest been asked what Catholics are to think of certain statements, alleged facts, or false principles read in the newspapers, heard from the lecture platform, or urged in conversation by men and women, ignorant or prejudiced it may be, but too influential to be ignored? The priest regrets that his information or exposition in the case is given only to one person. He rightly wishes he could reach all Catholics likely to be perplexed by such utterances and through them all the non-Catholics who honestly seek information from Catholic friends or neighbors. The Catholic newspaper gives him the opportunity of carrying out his wish. The contribution of an occasional article on such practical questions will bring the priest who does it to keep closer watch over such damaging statements and opinions. It would induce him to study matters more carefully and afford him a means for the fruitful use of talents and attainments which so often lie dormant for want of opportunity. And in its measure the same consideration applies to capable laymen and women.

These are but a few hastily written hints of the many advantages of a local Catholic newspaper. But let us add the paper we hope for must not be of the diseased, flabby or moribund type to which unfortunately some Catholic newspapers belong. To meet with success our paper must be generous in tone, Catholic in heart and spirit, virile in thought, pleasing in style, rich in interesting news, wise and firm in doctrine. It must combine the knowledge, the firmness and above all the prudence and charity of Him whose cause it undertakes to further. The truth, the earnestness and the simplicity of Christ should be its motto.

It is no harder work to make friends than to make enemies. It pays much better.

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