

# DO NO ADULTERY.

## CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

### CHAPTER VII.

## SIXTH COMMANDMENT OF GOD.

### *You Shall not Commit Adultery, etc.*

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325. *Jezebel's Paint.* -

Amongst the sins forbidden by the sixth commandment of God, we must not forget that which is committed by those persons who dishonour in themselves the image of God, whether by disguising themselves in an unbecoming manner, masking the face, or employing the thousand means invented by vanity solely to please the world or to seduce others into acts or thoughts of sexual licentiousness. We find in the Old Testament an interesting story on this subject. Jezebel or Jezebel as it is often spelt, wife of Achab (or Ahab), king of Israel, had made herself notorious by her impiety, and especially by the cruelty wherewith she had treated the prophets of the Lord, not to speak of the blood of Naboth, unjustly shed, and many other crimes. God raised up Jehu, and charged him to execute his vengeance on that sacrilegious race. Jehu commenced by killing Joram, son and successor of Achab, then he came to the city of Jezrael, where the wicked Jezebel still lived. As soon as that wicked woman learned the arrival of the conqueror, she flattered herself that she could gain him over by her arts and allurements. It was then she

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thought of painting herself. According to the fashion of the age and country, she painted her eyebrows and round her eyes with black, then she put red and white on her face, and finally adorned her head with a brilliant diadem and all the other ornaments her vanity could suggest. Thus adorned, she placed her self at a window just as Jehu's cortege was passing along the street. The general, looking up, at once perceived her, but instead of being attracted by her, he said aloud: "*Who is that woman? Let her be cast down!*" His orders were immediately executed; two or three officers who were in the room with Jezebel threw her out of the window. Her blood bespattered the walls and the pavements, and the dogs devoured her dead body. Terrible, but just death, which the prophets had foretold, in punishment of the barbarous treatment she had given the innocent Naboth, whom she deprived of his vineyard!

- *IV. Kings* in the Vulgate (*II Kings* in Hebrew based Bibles), Chap. IX.

326. *St. Jerome Studying Hebrew.* -

I think I have already told you several times, my young friends, that *idleness is the mother of all vice*; that sentence was pronounced by the Holy Ghost himself; it is therefore, true. It is said, on the contrary, that *work is the remedy for all vice*; but that is especially true of the shameful vice, as I could prove to you by a thousand examples. I will content myself with quoting one for you, that of a great Saint, one of the glories of the Church in the fourth century. Saint Jerome had had the misfortune, in his early youth,

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of forming bad connections, and even of contracting bad habits. But no sooner was he baptized, that is to say, at the age of adolescence, according to the custom of that age, than he set about correcting himself. Do you know what was the means that succeeded best with him? It was to work much. He began to study, to read, to copy books, all the while practising the exercises and the virtues of a solitary of the desert. The sin that he found it hardest to avoid was precisely that of which I have spoken to you in relation to the sixth commandment. Nevertheless, he was not discouraged; he seemed to say to the demon of impurity that tempted him every day: "Ha! you will not leave me alone! what though I fast, give myself the discipline, ruin my health with all manner of austerities, you do still pursue me? I well remember Our Saviour's words, 'it will do you less harm to lose one part of you than to have your whole body thrown into hell.' Well! I know how to subdue you!" He succeeded at last, my dear children, and do you know how? Still by work. To the studies he had already undertaken he added a new, and not very easy one. He began to learn Hebrew. It was an old Jew that taught him, and after a while he became himself so well versed in the language that he translated almost the whole Bible into Latin, which was rendering a great service to the Church. Let us do like him, my young friends; when we are tempted, let us work hard; if the temptation continues, let us work still harder; if it be obstinate, let us be obstinate in working, and all will turn to good account for us.

- D. GENEVAUX, *Hist. choisies*.

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327 *The Monk Assisting the Baker.* -

It is sometimes very difficult, my dear children, not to find one's self in the midst of scandals and bad examples, but, in such case, one must behave with all possible circumspection so as not to have any share therein. This is what a young solitary was once told by St Ephrem, one of the most celebrated Fathers of the Church in the fourth century. This good monk came to him and said: "Father, I am much embarrassed: my superior ordered me to go every morning to the oven, to assist the baker in his work; but as the oven is common to every one, and a great many people come there to bake their bread, it often happens that I meet with idle, gossiping young people, who sometimes indulge in very improper and unseasonable conversation. What am I then to do, so as not to offend our good God?" -- "My dear brother," answered the old monk kindly, "you must do as scholars do when they study their lessons in class. Each one busies himself with his own, and pays no attention to that of his neighbour's; although a certain noise is made when every one studies together, especially when they are reading their lessons out loud, yet each pupil only attends to his own lesson, and does not listen to what the others have to study. - Do you the same when there are people around you holding idle or improper conversation." The young solitary felt the wisdom of this advice; he followed it, and had no further trouble. Act in like manner, my young friends, and you will have nothing to reproach yourselves with when you are unavoidably placed in similar

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circumstances.

- RODRIGUEZ. *Practice of Christian Perfection*, III., 154.

328. *St. Bernard in a Frozen Pond.* -

A look, a glance is soon cast, but if one dwells ever so little on a dangerous object, purposely and willingly, there is a sin; it was only a look that led him who raped Dina (often spelt Dinah), daughter of Jacob, (see Genesis 34), the holy king David, the wise Solomon and many others, into the greatest crimes. (Some ancient writers have even laid blame on Dina herself for the sinful actions which followed upon her sorrowful rape.) St. Bernard, even when he was still young, watched over himself with most particular attention to avoid occasions dangerous to his virtue. One day, however, having seen a person passing who was dressed elegantly and tastefully, he stopped to look at her a little too long. Although he was almost sure that he scarcely did it intentionally, he could never forgive himself for this inadvertency for he found himself tempted to lustful and unlawful thoughts. Full of a holy anger against himself, he runs and throws himself up to his neck in a pond, the water of which is icy cold, and remains there till he is half dead. He remembers Our Lord's words, 'if your right hand should cause you to sin, cut it off and throw it away, for it will do you less harm to lose one part of you than to have your whole body go to hell.' Truly, my friends, this was a most

heroic sacrifice; but as such God rewarded it in an extraordinary manner, for He vouchsafed it so that from that day forth St. Bernard never had the least thought, the least temptation against the holy virtue. A good sacrifice generously offered to God never fails to bring us a multitude of graces which otherwise we should not have had.

- RATISBON, *Life of St. Bernard*

329. *Let Us Speak no More of That.* -

It is most extraordinary, my dear friends, how a virtuous young man imposes respect on those who are not so;

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his presence alone often suffices to paralyse all the evil that others might have intended to do. St. Bernardine of Sienna, a religious of the Order of St. Francis in the fifteenth century, was many times in that position, whilst he was studying in the college of his native city. His aunt, who was charged with his education, had inspired him with a great horror of evil, together with a solid piety towards the Blessed Virgin. His pleasure was to visit the churches, to dress the altars, to serve Mass and to hear visiting preachers (many of whom were thought of as strange by the vary insular and sedate congregations). But all that did not interfere with his studies; on the contrary, he obtained such remarkable success therein, that he was the consolation of his parents and professors. He had so gained the esteem of his fellow-students by his virtue, that the very worst of them were ashamed in his presence. Several of them declared that whenever they happened to say anything improper or unbecoming amongst themselves, they never dared to continue the discourse on the approach of *the little saint*, as they called him. "Hush!" said they, one to another, "let us speak no more of that! here comes Bernardine." How beautiful, my dear children, and how desirable it would be could the same be said of each of you!

- D. GENEVAUX, *Hist. choisies*.

330. *A Bleeding Crucifix.* -

Nothing is more awful, children, than the hardness produced by evil passions in a heart that gives way to them. The noblest sentiments, the most generous feelings give

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place to brutality, stupidity, a sort of imbecility impossible to comprehend. It is related in the history of the canonization of St. Francis Borgia that a Spanish gentleman, having had the misfortune to give way to evil passions, was stricken in the flower of his age with a mortal malady. His parents and friends did all they could to persuade him to prepare for the terrible passage, but the very name of confession made him furious. St. Francis Borgia, who was in the neighbourhood, having heard of this, wished to go and see him, to try whether he could prevail upon him to think of his soul's salvation. Before setting out, he went and threw himself at the foot of his crucifix and sought God to grant him the salvation of that poor soul. "Go," said an interior voice to him, "*go to the sick man and exhort him to penance; I promise you My grace will not be wanting to him.*" The saint hastens to the place; he is politely received on account of his high rank; but no sooner had he uttered the word confession than the dying man mustered all his remaining strength to tell him that he would never consent to it. Francis retires, throws himself again at the foot of his crucifix, and beseeches Jesus to soften that hardened heart. Then the same voice makes itself heard: "*Go back to him and take with you this crucifix; can he resist the sight of a God dead on the cross for his redemption?*" The saint returns immediately, but the unhappy man remains insensible; he then shows him the crucified image, which, by an unheard-of prodigy of divine mercy,

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miraculously appears torn with wounds and covered with blood. O still more astounding prodigy! the hardened sinner resists all! He casts a fierce look on the sacred image of Our Lord, turns to the wall, and in despair breathes forth his guilt-stained soul. Behold, my dear children, what comes of abandoning ourselves to our passions, and especially to that of which I have just been speaking.

- DEBUSSI, *New Month of Mary*, 62.

331. *A Prince at the Theatre.* -

Of all the princes who have made French history glorious, there were few, my young friends, so virtuous, so pious, as the Duke of Burgundy, dauphin of France, who had the happiness of being brought up by the illustrious Fenelon. I am particularly glad to tell you what he thought of the theatre and dramatical representations. (Regrettably, in his own day, far too many of them were nothing more than lascivious displays aimed at arousing lustful thoughts and frequently promoting immoral ideas. Has much changed since then?) Of his own choice he would have liked them, especially plays and productions which had an uplifting message, but he knew the danger of them too well to yield to his inclination. He was one day reproached for not accompanying his father, Louis XIV. and the other princes of the court on those occasions. "What would I go there to do?" he asked with much animation; "the state of the provinces and cities that he may one day have to govern is the sight for the dauphin of France to see." On one occasion, however, he could not avoid accompanying Louis XIV.; the performance took place in the Castle of Versailles. At the conclusion the king said to him: "What is the matter? it seems to me that you have taken no pleasure in this play?" -- "Pardon me, Sire, I had the pleasure of

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being near your Majesty." This was at once paying a delicate compliment, and evading the answer to an embarrassing question. But the king was not deceived; he saw that the pious dauphin regarded the play only with disgust, and he told him that for the future he could do as he pleased in that regard. From that day forward the Duke of Burgundy never set foot in a theatre. Fine example for so many young people who are troubled with no such scruples.

- REYRE, *Anec. Chret.*, 292.

332. *The Books that Mary Leczinska Read.* -

France has almost always had the happiness of having for queens or empresses, princesses eminent for their piety, their generosity, and other qualities of the heart. This is a fact easily verified by those amongst you who have studied our French history with care. But, amongst those queens, a choice place must be given to Mary Leczinska, daughter of King Stanislaus of Poland, and wife of Louis XV. She had a horror of all that might impair the purity of the heart, and especially bad books; if she only heard a word said against them, it was sufficient to prevent her from ever opening them. One day, two or three ladies of the palace were speaking before her of a bad production which had just appeared in Paris. "Have you read it, then, ladies?" she asked. "Yes, madam, we wished to judge for ourselves whether what they said of it was true." - "As for me," said the pious princess, "I would consider it a crime to read a book that might contain anything insulting to my father, still less

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what would be insulting to my God." Another time, some one was reading, in a small company, a pamphlet that was also worthy of reprobation; the Queen's arrival was announced. "Quick, quick, hide that book," some one exclaimed; "it is one of those that her Majesty does not like." - "It is true, gentlemen," said Mary Leczinska, looking at the title, "and it seems to me that all Christians ought to regard it with horror, as I do."

- REYRE, *Anec. Chret.*, 350.

333. *A Prisoner Reading the "Imitation".* -

Just as much harm as is done by the reading of a bad book, so the reading of a good one may do of good. There is one especially, my young friends, which has made as many saints as it contains letters: it is the *Imitation of Christ*. Hear what happened in this respect to La Harpe, one of the most distinguished Scholars of the 18th century, but at the same time one of the most impious philosophers. At the period of the Revolution he was arrested and thrown into prison. Alone there in a small room he began to reflect seriously, which had not happened to him, probably, for a long time. He also read some good books, amongst others the Psalms of David, the New Testament, and some others, but that did not completely change him. One day, weary of that state of uncertainty in which he was, he took up unthinkingly a book that lay on his mantel-piece in the prison: it was the *Imitation*. He opens it at random, and his eyes fall just on these words: "My son, behold here I am! I come to you, because you have called me." He

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had no need of reading farther; he was so impressed, so struck by these words, that he fell on his knees, his face to the ground, the tears streaming from his eyes. His breast heaved with sighs, he groaned and cried aloud, and broken, incoherent words escaped him; and, in the midst of that sweet revulsion of feeling going on within him, his mind recurred incessantly to the words, *My son, behold, here I am*. La Harpe was converted; and, as God did not permit that he should perish on the scaffold, he devoted the rest of his life to making good books to counteract, as far as possible, the effect of the bad ones he had had the misfortune to write before. The beautiful words that made an impious philosopher a fervent Christian are found, my dear friends, in the third book, twenty-first chapter; read them over sometimes, recalling to mind what I have just told you.

- GUILLOIS, *Nouv. Explic. du Cat.*, 254.

334. *A Reader of Romances*. -

{It is to be remembered in reading this little anecdote that the good De La Salle Brother is not talking about good and great literature but about crash, cheap, tawdry and often lascivious works which are aimed primarily at titillating our lower passions.}

It is related in a very interesting book, entitled *The Shepherd of Little Lambs*, that, during the course of a mission given at Marseilles, I think it was, a lady came to see one of the Fathers who preached. She saluted him affectedly, making use of silly, exaggerated words. He easily knew from that that the lady was in the habit of reading 'novels', and other books of the kind. "I see you read novels, madam!" - "I do, Father, but, then, they do me no harm whatever; I merely read them for recreation." - "It would be well for you, in that case, madam, before reading one of those books,

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to kneel down and say to God: 'My God, I am going to read this romance to please You. I know there are bad doctrines in it, bad examples, and bad advice; no matter, I am going to read it to accomplish my baptismal vows, and to promote Your glory and the salvation of my soul'. " - "But, Father, I could never say such a prayer as that; it would be mocking God." - "No, madam, if the book be good, you can and should say such a prayer or one very much like it with the word 'good' replacing the word 'bad'." - "But - but, Father -" - "Ah! there it is - you begin to feel that the book is not so harmless as you thought at first. Tell me, daughter, were you more pious formerly than you are now?" - "Yes, Father!" - "And did you read novels, then?" - "Oh! no, Father, not at all." - "Did you once prefer serious studies, useful work, grave occupations?" - "Yes, Father!" - "And did you then read novels?" - "No, Father!" - "Were you once wiser, more obedient, less addicted to luxury and foolish expense?" - "Yes, Father!" - "And did you read novels?" - "No, Father!" - "You formerly frequented the sacraments with more relish and with more exactness?" - "Alas! Yes, Father!" - "And did you read novels?" - "No, Father!" - "Well! madam, I have nothing more to say to you; you see yourself the danger of reading such silly productions."

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, V., 334.