



THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour”

2. Respect for the Truth in Public Life

**Texts from the
*Catechism of the Catholic Church***

RESPECT FOR THE TRUTH

Limitations to the communication of the truth – common good, fraternal charity

The *right to the communication of the truth* is not unconditional. Everyone must conform his life to the Gospel precept of fraternal love. This requires us in concrete situations to judge whether or not it is appropriate to reveal the truth to someone who asks for it. (2488)

Charity and respect for the truth should dictate the response to every *request for information or communication*. The good and safety of others, respect for privacy, and the common good are sufficient reasons for being silent about what ought not be known, or for making use of a discreet language. The duty to avoid scandal often commands strict discretion. No one is bound to reveal the truth to someone who does not have the right to know it. (2489)

The seal of Confession and professional secrets

The *secret of the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation [Confession]* is sacred, and cannot be violated under any pretext. The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore, it is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason. (2490)

Professional secrets - for example, those of political office holders, soldiers, physicians and lawyers - or confidential information given under the seal of secrecy, must be kept, save in exceptional cases where keeping the secret is bound to cause very grave harm to the one who confided it, to the one who received it or to a third party, and where the very grave harm can be avoided only by divulging the truth. Even if not confided under the seal of secrecy, private information prejudicial to another is not to be divulged without a grave and proportionate reason. (2491)

Respect for privacy in the media

Everyone should observe an appropriate reserve concerning persons' private lives. Those in charge of communications should maintain a fair balance between the requirements of the common good and respect for individual rights. Interference by the media in the private lives of persons engaged in political or public activity is to be condemned to the extent that it infringes upon their privacy and freedom. (2492)

THE USE OF THE SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA

Respect for the moral law and the dignity of man

Within modern society the communications media play a major role in information, cultural promotion and formation. This role is increasing, as a result of technological progress, the extent and diversity of the news transmitted, and the influence exercised on public opinion. (2493)

The information provided by the media is at the service of the common good. Society has a right to information based on truth, freedom, justice, and solidarity. The proper exercise of this right demands that the content of the communication be true and - within the limits set by justice and charity - complete. Further, it should be communicated honestly and properly. This means that in the gathering and in the publication of news, the moral law and the legitimate rights and dignity of man should be upheld. (2494)

The mass media – need for discipline and moderation

The means of social communication, especially the mass media, can give rise to a certain passivity among users, making them less than vigilant consumers of what is said or shown. Users should practice moderation and discipline in their approach to the mass media. They will want to form enlightened and correct consciences the more easily to resist unwholesome influences. (2496)

By the very nature of their profession, journalists have an obligation to serve the truth and not offend against charity in disseminating information. They should strive to respect, with equal care, the nature of the facts and the limits of critical judgement concerning individuals. They should not stoop to defamation. (2497)

The role of civil authorities and the manipulation of the media

Civil authorities have particular responsibilities in this field because of the common good... It is for the civil authority... to defend and safeguard a true and just freedom of information. By promulgating laws and overseeing their application, public authorities should ensure that public morality and social progress are not gravely endangered through misuse of the media. Civil authorities should punish any violation of the rights of individuals to their reputation and privacy. They should give timely and reliable reports concerning the general good or respond to the well-founded concerns of the people. Nothing can justify recourse to disinformation for manipulating public opinion through the media. Interventions by public authority should avoid injuring the freedom of individuals or groups. (2498)

Moral judgement must condemn the plague of totalitarian states which systematically falsify the truth, exercise political control of opinion through the media, manipulate defendants and witnesses at public trials, and imagine that they secure their tyranny by strangling and repressing everything they consider 'thought crimes'. (2499)

TRUTH, BEAUTY AND SACRED ART

The universal language of creation

The practice of goodness is accompanied by spontaneous spiritual joy and moral beauty. Likewise, truth carries with it the joy and splendour of spiritual beauty. Truth is beautiful in itself. Truth in words, the rational expression of the knowledge of created and uncreated reality, is necessary to man, who is endowed with intellect. But truth can also find other complementary forms of human expression, above all when it is a matter of evoking what is beyond words: the depths of the human heart, the exaltations of the soul, the mystery of God. Even before revealing himself to man in words of truth, God reveals himself to him through the universal language of creation, the work of his Word, of his wisdom: the order and harmony of the cosmos - which both the child and the scientist discover - “from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator”, “for the author of beauty created them”. (Wis 13:3,5)

“[Wisdom] is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. For [wisdom] is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail. I became enamoured of her beauty.” (Wis 7:25-26; 7:29-30; 8:2) (2500)

The beauty of art – a distinctively human form of expression

Created “in the image of God”, man also expresses the truth of his relationship with God the Creator by the beauty of his artistic works. Indeed, art is a distinctively human form of expression; beyond the search for the necessities of life which is common to all living creatures, art is a freely given superabundance of the human being's inner riches. Arising from talent given by the Creator and from man's own effort, art is a form of practical wisdom, uniting knowledge and skill, to give form to the truth of reality in a language accessible to sight or hearing. To the extent that it is inspired by truth and love of beings, art bears a certain likeness to God's activity in what he has created. Like any other human activity, art is not an absolute end in itself, but is ordered to and ennobled by the ultimate end of man. (2501)

Art in the service of religion

Sacred art is true and beautiful when its form corresponds to its particular vocation: evoking and glorifying, in faith and adoration, the transcendent mystery of God - the surpassing invisible beauty of truth and love visible in Christ, who “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature” (Heb 1:3), in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9). This spiritual beauty of God is reflected in the most holy Virgin Mother of God, the angels and saints. Genuine sacred art draws man to adoration, to prayer and to the love of God, Creator and Saviour, the Holy One and Sanctifier. (2502)

For this reason bishops, personally or through delegates, should see to the promotion of sacred art, old and new, in all its forms and, with the same religious care, remove from the liturgy and from places of worship everything which is not in conformity with the truth of faith and the authentic beauty of sacred art. (2503)

IN BRIEF

- **The golden rule helps one discern, in concrete situations, whether or not it would be appropriate to reveal the truth to someone who asks for it. (2510)**
- **The sacramental seal [of Confession] is inviolable. Professional secrets must be kept. Confidences prejudicial to another are not to be divulged. (2511)**
- **Society has a right to information based on truth, freedom and justice. One should practice moderation and discipline in the use of the social communications media. (2512)**
- **The fine arts, but above all sacred art, of their nature are directed toward expressing in some way the infinite beauty of God in works made by human hands. Their dedication to the increase of God's praise and of his glory is more complete, the more exclusively they are devoted to turning men's minds devoutly toward God. (2513)**

