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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

VOL. I = THE BAD CHRISTIAN

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

The Evil Effects of Scandal

“Behold, this child is set for the ruin and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted.” Luke 2:34.

How many Christians are there for whose ruin Jesus is set, because, although they acknowledge him to be the true God, they do not honor him as such, and are ashamed to follow his example, so that the life of Christ is to them only an occasion of a deeper damnation! But this is all contrary to the intention of our Saviour, who came down from heaven and suffered death that all men might be saved; and therefore it was solely through their own malice that the Son of God was a stumbling block to the Jews and Gentiles; and it is still owing solely to the wickedness of Christians that many of them turn away from Christ, and are lost forever. But how many Christians there are nowadays of whom one might say with truth: Behold this man is placed, not for the resurrection, but for the ruin of many souls! They are those who deliberately go in opposition to our Lord, and dig a pit for the souls of others by giving them scandal and leading them into sin.

I. For they who give scandal are sworn enemies and bitter opponents of Christ.

II. Therefore, “woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!”

To give scandal and to be scandalized are two different things, one of which can be without the other. For instance, there are three of you together; one begins an impure conversation, and thus gives scandal to the other two; the second laughs at it, and consents to a bad thought; he is scandalized; the third is angry with both of them, and leaves their company; he commits no sin, but rather practices a work of virtue. Being scandalized, then, means to offend God on account of some action or omission on the part of others; while to give scandal means to do or omit something which gives or may give occasion of sin to another. To give scandal is the vice that Christ warns us against in the Gospel, a vice that, grievous as it is, is unfortunately only too common in the world nowadays amongst people of all classes; so that one might almost say with truth that one-half of the world gives scandal, and the other half suffers from it, and thus, on account of the scandal, the whole world is in a state of sin. Scandal may be given by saying, doing, or omitting anything which, of its own nature or by force of circumstances, is capable of leading others into any kind of sin, although there be no intention of leading them astray, although no sin actually follows. The scandal-givers are the partisans of the devil. Their object is to teach wickedness to innocent souls, and to lead them astray.

Take a child ten or twelve years old; I ask you, if that child never heard an impure conversation, would it know how to talk impurely? If it never heard cursing or swearing, would it know how to use impious language? If it never was tempted to impurity by others, and knew not how sins of that kind are committed, would it be guilty of them? And if young people are dissolute in their morals, they have learned to be so from others; children learn it from grown-up people, and these latter from their seniors. See what a plague is spread in a community by those agents of the devil who give scandal!

But why do I call them agents of the devil? The name is far too good for them; they do more to lead souls astray than the devil himself. One of them gains more for hell, and destroys more souls, than a hundred demons could, with all their temptations and snares. Which of you can say that an evil spirit has given him a bad example, and thereby led him into sin? Who can say the devil has taught me this or that vice? You have never seen one of those fallen spirits, and if one were to appear to you, you would run away through fear and terror of him. But are there not many who must acknowledge that they have been led to offend God by the treachery of their fellow-men? Thus, what the devil cannot do by himself to destroy souls, he effects by the help of scandal-givers. What caused the fall of our forefather Adam? The hellish serpent did not dare to tempt him, knowing well that he was too wise to yield to temptation, but when Eve came up to him with her flatteries and caresses, after having eaten the forbidden fruit, his ruin and that of us all was at once effected. In the History of the Church we read of holy men, such as Macarius, James, John, and others, who, after having spent long years in the desert and in the mountain caves, practicing the greatest austerities, fell into the most shameful crimes. Who caused their fall? The devil cannot boast of having done it; he had made repeated attacks on them, but he could not gain a single victory over them; an abandoned woman was able to do more than all the demons in hell, to make those men offend God and fall into the most grievous sins. So powerful is scandal to destroy souls; and the devil, with all his rage against souls and all his craft in tempting them, would often fail to succeed were it not that he calls in scandal-givers to help him.

Naturally man is inclined to do what he, without being astonished thereby, hears of and sees others doing. A stranger on a journey comes to a river that he has to cross; he cannot find a bridge, nor does he know whether the river is deep or not, so that he is afraid to ford it. He walks along the bank for a time, and at length notices the traces of footsteps leading down to the water; he is overjoyed at this, and at once ventures in. Foolish man! Wait: how do you know that you will be able to get across? Oh, I see that others have been here before me, and where they crossed, I can cross, too. But are you sure that they reached the opposite bank alive, and were not carried down by the stream? He does not stop to consider that; he rushes in, gets into a deep place, and is drowned. The footsteps led him astray. You who give scandal, into what a raging, hellish sea you plunge whenever you commit mortal sin! You dishonor your God, you kill your precious souls, you ruin yourselves completely! But that is not all; you leave behind treacherous footsteps to mislead those who follow, and thus you involve many souls in the same destruction with yourselves. How many would never have entered on the way of sin if they had not been led astray by the footsteps of others! At first a pious soul is horrified at the very name of this or that vice. Shall I do that? She asks herself. If you do, says her conscience, you will be ruined. But meanwhile she notices the footsteps of others, their examples, and the customs they conform to, and her horror is gone at once! Where they have gone, she thinks, surely I may go. A well-reared child is horrified at the first oath or curse it hears; but if it grows accustomed to such language from its father at home, or from other children in the street, it will begin to curse and swear, too; if my parents or others curse, it thinks, why should not I? A modest, innocent young girl is disgusted at anything approaching impurity; but if she hears unchaste conversation, attends promiscuous gatherings, in which the laws of purity are certainly not too strictly observed, or sees others behaving improperly, and if she hears and sees such things frequently, she will think that, since so many do those things, there cannot be much harm in them, and there will soon be an end to her former modesty and reserve. An innocent young man avoids dangerous company and suspicious houses; he is invited to such places by others, laughed at as wishing to appear a saint if he refuses to go, and at last he accepts the invitation. A business man, whose tender conscience at first makes him uneasy lest he might now and then be guilty of an injustice, notices the footsteps of others and sees how they are accustomed to act under certain circumstances; oh, he thinks, they have a conscience, too; why should it not be lawful for me to do as they do? There is no other way of getting through the world nowadays. And so he acts as he sees others acting.

“Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!” Woe to him from God, from the souls he has betrayed, from the demons; but also woe to him from the holy Angels! How can they wish to guard him if he acts as their enemy? “Behold,” says God, “I will send an angel, who shall go before thee and keep thee in thy journey, and bring thee into the place that I have prepared” (Exod. 33:20); but, “take notice of him, and hear his voice, and do not think him one to be contemned” (Exod. 33:20). Why? “For he will not forgive when thou hast sinned” (Exod. 33:20). And what revenge will he take when, besides sinning yourself, you lead into sin the soul entrusted to his care? In truth, if, as Christ says, the conversion of one soul causes the Angels such joy, “I say to you, there shall be joy before the Angels of God upon one sinner doing penance” (Luke 15:10), how great must be their sorrow when a soul is lost eternally? Imagine the anger of a mother with the servant who through mere wantonness allows her little son to fall out of her arms on the ground, so that he hurts himself and is lamed. How, then, must an angel look on him who ruins eternally the beloved soul entrusted to his care? “See,” says our Lord, speaking against scandal, “that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say to you that their Angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10); that is, be on your guard, for the Angels before the throne of God will cry out for vengeance against you if you scandalize or injure a single soul.

Woe to you on your deathbed, when you are most in need of the help of the holy Angels! Even the holiest men look on that anxious hour as a terrible dangerous one; what must it then be for you, who have so often troubled the Angels, and turned them against you? How will it be with you when you are on the threshold of eternity, and the prayer for your departing soul is being said: “May the holy Angels of God meet him and lead him into the heavenly city?” What answer will you make when one of them asks you what has become of the soul you have betrayed, when he will require that soul at your hands? Will you answer him like Cain: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” That is what the children of the world say. What are others to me? They ask; I sin on my own account; I have no desire to lead others astray. Certainly, the Judge will answer, you are to blame for the ruin of that soul; your wicked talk, your flattery, your bad example has destroyed that soul, and many others, too; I now require all these souls at your hands. What answer will you make? Woe to you, finally, in the General Judgment, when the Son of God himself will come: “The Son of man shall send his Angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all scandals” (Matt. 13:41). If these Angels do not find amongst the elect the souls entrusted to their care, because through you those souls are lost, where will you fly from their anger? How will you be able to account for the number of sins that have been committed through the scandal given by you? Hear what will happen to you: “You shall be cast into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth,” in that eternal fire, which “is prepared for the devil and his angels.”

What resource is there left for those who give scandal? None but this: you must give back the souls that you have filched away from Christ and his Angels; and, first of all, you must give back your own soul to God by a true repentance for your sins, and then you must endeavor to encourage others to virtue by edifying conversation, a pious life and good example, so that you may make some atonement for the loss you have caused by leading souls astray. Cannot the desire of your own salvation move you to this? Are you still resolved to offend your God? Have you renounced all hopes of heaven? Does not the thought of an eternal hell inspire you with fear? Or have you made up your mind to be lost forever? If so, then have your own way; go on to your eternal destruction. But one thing I ask of you with God himself: “Let all your wicked doings suffice you” (Ezech. 44:6); sin yourselves, but do not prevent others from doing good; let them save their souls, and do not keep them out of heaven, nor drag them down to hell with yourselves. Amen.

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