

The Roman Catholic Church and the Decalogue

Dr. Verle Streifling

It's sad that many today have gone to excesses in denouncing the Catholic church. This is especially true in the way many as the SDAs call her the 'Beast' of Revelation; the 'man of sin' of Thessalonians and 'Little Horn' of Daniel 7, charging her with changing God's Law as in Dan 7:25:

"Says Daniel, of the Little Horn, the Papacy, "He shall think to change times and the law". And Paul styled the same power the "man of sin", who was to exalt himself above God...The Papacy has attempted to change the Law of God. The second commandment forbidding image worship has been dropped from the law...But papists urge, as a reason for omitting the second commandment, that it is unnecessary, being included in the first, and that they are giving the law exactly as God designed it to be understood". (Great Controversy, 1888 ed, p. 446, Ellen G. White)

"Prophecy has declared that the Papacy was to 'think to change times and laws'. ...Rome presumed to expunge from the law of God the second commandment forbidding image worship, and to divide the tenth commandment, in order to preserve the number." (ibid 50 + 51) Here she virtually echoes Uriah Smith, Adam Clark, (I, p.403), and Matthew Henry's Commentary.

Objectively Evaluating These Allegations

Yet, *if Rome joins* the prohibition of images to the first, holding them as *one command*, then I may not rightly charge her with 'taking away' from God's Word. Rather I must *prove she omits this prohibitive in all her Bibles, catechisms and books of devotion*, to rightly thus charge her. But the truth is *Rome does tell her people not to worship images of false gods*, whether these gods are idols, money, science or popularity, as in the New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism, p.106. Under the 'First commandment of God' they show it forbids worship of images. So too in their Catechism for Catholic Parochial Schools, p. 34, (quoted below), and their Baltimore Catechisms #2 and #3: "The Ten Commandments of God...179. Which are the Ten Commandments? 1. I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not have strange gods before me; thou shalt not make to thyself any graven thing to adore it..."

The Baltimore Catechism #4 by Rev. Thomas Kinkead cites the whole of vs 2-6 as the first command, as does The Popular Catholic Catechism by John A Hardon, S.J. without *one word omitted* from the verses forbidding false gods and adoring images, *but including vs 2 that SDAs omit, though part of the first precept, showing the commands are for Israel*. Moreover, *in none of Rome's Bibles having the OT, is any part of the ten commands omitted!*

Still some say Rome had *no right to change the order or numbering* of the precepts, *so the first two become one, and the tenth is divided*. Jamiesson, Fausset & Brown's commentary shows these should have done more home work *before shouting*, for here we read:

"Several Jewish writers—Talmud, Targum, Jonathan, and Maiomides—regard this verse (Ex 20:2) as forming a distinct precept. The Roman Catholic Church and the Lutherans, after the example of Augustine, divide the commandments into duties pertaining to God, comprised of the first three, and those relating to man, contained in the remaining seven. In their view, *which is supported by the Masoretic Text*, the first commandment extends from v.2 to v.6; the second is expressed in v.7; and in

order to make up the required number *they divide v.17 into two...” * (‘they’ is Catholics and Lutherans, supported by the Masoretic Text).

Surprise! While Mrs. White and some Protestants bewail Rome for how she divides the commands, yet she’s not alone, and *she follows the Masoretic Hebrew Text! Did any SDA scholars read the MT? If so, why didn’t they tell us this? Jamiesson, etc.*, add some interesting points as well:

1. the Jews themselves divided the decalogue differently, by making Ex 20:2 to be a separate precept! Yet this goes by *unmentioned at all*, for with this as another command, then by Protestant reckoning, there’s 11 commands! So, why decry Rome for how she divides them, when *nothing’s said about the Jews making vs. 2 a separate command!*

2. Catholics and Lutherans follow Augustine’s division. This implies before him, no one followed the Hebrew text in dividing these precepts. Jamiesson, etc., aren’t alone in affirming this. Yet, when refuting a heretic, St. Augustine shows *he found* prohibition images was in the first command, and that taking God’s name in vain was the second: “Of necessity these tables are against thee, for the second commandment is ‘thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain...’” (Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, p.216; series 1). And, “For to worship One God is also enjoined on us. ‘Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain’ is also enjoined on us which is the second commandment.” (Ibid, vol VII, p.24)

There’s another interesting word from Augustine in Vol. VIII, p.65: “And so do men live in opposition to the *three and seven*, that ‘Psaltry of ten strings’ Thy commandments O God, Most High are most sweet!” This, 80 years after Constantine, shows the Catholic Bishops *loved God’s commands. They didn’t hate them, trying to hammer them to bits! Augustine didn’t begin dividing them into ‘three and seven’*. Instead, he boldly stated taking God’s name in vain violated the second precept—even when dealing with heretics!

But 200 years before him, Clement of Alexandria, states that the first command is against idolatry; the second respects ‘the power of God which is His name’ and the **Third Word** “concerns the Seventh-day of rest”! But, here we see the translator played havoc with the text, giving Clement’s word ‘*tritos*’ as “fourth” to shift the reader to the Protestant division! (Ante-Nicene Fathers vol 2, p.512). So Clement shows how the Decalogue was divided in his day, *long before Augustine--even a century before Origen!*

Still the Jerome Biblical Commentary has other significant points to make.

1. re. the ninth and tenth commands (coveting your neighbor’s wife; & his goods); in Exodus the neighbor’s house is mentioned first, while in Deuteronomy the precept about his wife is first. But the Nash Papyri of the second century BC, harmonizes Ex 20 with Deut 5 for in this *most eclectic papyri*, Ex 20 has ‘*your neighbor’s wife*’ **before his goods, showing this to be the original order**. And here we must notice that the Septuagint, (LXX) reflecting the *more ancient Hebrew texts* from before the Nash Papyri, supports this harmonization, with his wife before his goods.

2. the decalogue was divided 3 ways: **a.** “In accordance with rabbinical tradition, the modern Jews divide them thus: the first, 20:2; the second 20:3-6; and the third through the tenth 20:7-17”. **b.** “Following Philo, Josephus, and the Greek Fathers, the Modern Greek and Reformed churches divide them thus: the first, 20:2+3; the second, 20: 4-6; third 20:7; the fourth 20:8-11; and the fifth through the tenth, 20:12-17.” **c.** “In the tradition of the Latin Fathers, Roman Catholics and Lutherans divide them thus: the first, 20:2-6; the second, 20:7; the third, 20:8-11; the fourth through eighth, 20:12-16; the ninth, 20:17 a; the tenth, 20:17 b.”

Clearly Ex 20:2 merely introduces to the decalogue as a whole and the first precept in particular, so it's not a separate precept. Thus both Rabbinical and modern Jews considered the command against strange gods and forbidding images as *two parts of a one and same command, as in the MT*. Herein, the Jews upheld the Catholic and Lutheran mode of division. But their point of separation was they held the two commands against coveting as only one, to keep the total of 10, (*because of having 20:2 as a separate command*), while the Catholics and Lutherans saw and kept these as two distinct commands. The church saw man's wife as a free moral agent, and thus could not be a part of his chattel as appeared from the Jew's mode of reckoning, for God gave these in two precepts as in the MT, Nash Papyri and the LXX. The Lutheran Cyclopedia, p.225 concurs the decalogue was divided these 3 ways. Kiel & Delischz call it two, but show it was also these 3 ways.

So desperate for truth we turn to the Catholic Commentary on the Holy Scriptures which tells us: "Origen, who introduced this (Orthodox & Reformed) view, attests to the previous existence of a different view in which two precepts forbidding evil desires were recognized, and one and the same precept forbade the worship of images and of strange gods." (p. 218) Thus we see that *prior to Origen, the Catholic and Lutheran view was there, and it was Origen who introduced a new view to the Eastern church*, while saying there was the previous view. And his telling the previous view existed, is congruous with the writing of Clement, and his division, based on the Hebrew text and LXX!

The reader may see the decalogue as in the MT, for himself, in the Inter-linear Bible by Green, or the NIV Triglott, which shows the LXX in Exodus concurs with Deuteronomy, giving the command against coveting neighbor's wife as the 9th, and his goods as the 10th as Nash Papyri shows. But the LXX reflects Ancient Hebrew mss supporting the Catholic and Lutheran division of the decalogue! So to harangue with them, indicts God who gave it so!

The Catholic Encyclopedia adds reasons for following the Deuteronomical order (vol V, p.5). Re. the 9th & 10th precepts we read "In Exodus a man's wife is ranked with his servants and his animals as part of his 'house' i.e., his possessions...In Deuteronomy 5:21 the commandment has a more elevated moral sense: the wife is considered first, and separately, followed by a prohibition against the desiring of another's property. *The use of two separate verbs to achieve this separation, naturally lends to an apparent increase in the number of commandments*" So *two separate verbs make these two separate commands*. Why weren't we told?

The Catholic Commentary adds more: "The intrinsic reasons in favor of Deut., and two precepts of desire are still stronger. As two acts of adultery and theft are forbidden in two separate precepts, *and as adultery precedes theft in all texts, versions and New Testament allusions, so we expect the two corresponding desires to be mentioned in the same order and to be forbidden in two distinct precepts*...The passage of Exodus moreover contains further evidence of textual corruption in the omission of 'his field' found in Deuteronomy and Papyrus Nash and required by *parallelism of pairs* house and field, manservant and maidservant, ox and ass.

"The case of the first precept is very different. Only images of 'strange gods' were prohibited, as appears not only from the words "Thou shalt not adore them; thou shalt not serve them" (Ex 20:5a; Deut 5:7) *but also from the cherubim (Ex 25:18) and the brazen serpent (Numb 21:8) which Yehweh ordered to be made, and from the mural decorations of the Jewish synagogues in the early Christian period as excavations abundantly attest*. There is question therefore not of a separate commandment which forbids the worship of all images *but an application of the precept forbidding*

worship of strange gods. The Latin division of the commandments is thus more likely to be original.”

From the MT, the LXX, the above exegetical and theological points, there are many reasons to hold the Catholic mode of dividing the precepts original:

1. The MT divides it thus, *with spaces between each precept*.
2. It also has double accentuation marks using the Heb ‘setuma’ or ‘phetuca’ *dividing the precepts*.
3. In Deut, all precepts after ‘do not murder’ are *connected with the Hebrew copula ‘and’*. This divides ‘do not covet your neighbor’s wife’ from ‘do not desire your neighbor’s goods’.
4. The Nash Papyri supports Deuteronomy having the neighbor’s wife first.
5. The LXX also supports the MT in this as well as having it thus in Exodus
6. Other intrinsic reasons in the Catholic Commentary ...Holy Scriptures:
 - a. Adultery and theft are separate commands, so then coveting the wife and his goods must also be distinct.
 - b. Parallelism of pairs shows ‘field’ omitted from Exodus so it’s corrupted
 - c. “The Lord” (Ex 20:11) is *inconsistent with “Jehovah your God”* throughout the Decalogue.
7. Threat and promise of Ex 20:5+6 combines strange gods and images in 1.
8. The Palestinian Jews held strange gods and images as 1 Command.
9. In Exodus 20:11 the decalogue shows interpolations and corruptions
10. Man’s wife is *not chattel, as in Exodus*. Deut shows her in higher esteem
11. A reason for each of the first 4 precepts shows Ex. 20:2-6 is *Only One*.
12. “Jehovah your God” in each of first 4 precepts shows Deut 5 is original.
13. Origen who introduced the ‘Reformed’ view of division, testified the other was there first
14. The Sabbath reason in Ex 20:11 is incongruous with Deut 5:14, 15 & 22.
15. Two *different verbs in Deuteronomy 5* separates coveting the wife, from desiring his goods.
16. The servants & things in Ex 20:17b. are part of his house of 17a., showing Exodus corrupted.

The statements in the Catholic Commentary re. textual corruptions in Exodus are evidently true. Thus it’s apparent that Ex 20:11 ‘for in six days the Lord made...therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it’ is also an interpolation later appended in from Ex 31:17 and Gen 2:2, as we have it today. This is evident because:

1. The *threat and promise* in the first command is in both Exodus and Deuteronomy, but 20:11 isn’t.
2. Ex 20:11 is a **third person interpolation from 31:17 where God speaks in first person (I, me, etc.)** throughout the decalogue.
3. The reasons and threats of the first command are in the first person, but 20:11 is third person
4. The reason of the Sabbath command in Deuteronomy is in concord with their cultural setting of leaving Egypt and entering the promised land.

5. Also words of Deut 5:14b + 15 are in concord with Ex 20:2 proving they should be in Ex 20:11 instead of what is there today.
6. Moses himself states the words of Exodus 20:11 *were not part of the original Sabbath command as God spoke it from Sinai*. In Deut 5:22, immediately after reciting the ten commands. He unequivocally states “These are the words the Lord spoke to all your assembly...**He added NO MORE**. And He wrote them on two tables of stone and gave them to me”.

So, **Ex 20:11 wasn't on the stones!**

We should note the SDA also acknowledge such later additions or interpolations in the Pentateuch, as seen in their Sabbath School Quarterly, 3rd Qtr, 1985, p.7, where they cite such examples as the account of Moses' death (Deut 34: 5+6); and 'updating' as the inclusion of 'Dan' in Gen 14:14, that wasn't called *Dan* at that time (Jdg 18:29). These examples show they *willingly acknowledge, teach and accept such amendments, additions and interpolations do exist in Moses' writings*. Consistency demands they cannot reject this evidence showing *Ex 20:11 is assuredly a later interpolation into the Sabbath precept, what Jehovah didn't say when giving it at Sinai, neither wrote on the stones*.

Ex 20:11 not a part of the original Sabbath command, forever eliminates from this precept any idea that it contained 'the Seal of God', even the theory that Sabbath is a creation ordinance, so is perpetually repeatable for us.

While Sabbatarians erroneously claim that Rome changed the Decalogue and the Sabbath, yet it really was Jews before Christ who *first changed the command, by eliminating Deut 5:14b + 15 and adding Gen 2:2 & Ex 31:17 to the text of Ex 20:8-11*. Yet, no one cries about them changing the Sabbath precept, while there arises such a howling when Rome holds the decalogue **as originally given By God Himself, as seen from Deuteronomy 5!** From this they raise more charges against Rome, that she's taking away from God's word by only abbreviating the precepts, instead of quoting the whole of each command in her catechisms. 7th day Protestants assuming the decalogue is the *foundation of God's government*, affirm no one has authority to abbreviate these, but must always quote them in their entirety!

Amazingly the Lutheran Cyclopedia p 225 says “Luther following the New Testament precedent (cf Matt 19:18+19; Mk 10:19; Eph 6:2-3; Col 2:16+ 17) omitted ceremonial elements (the word 'Sabbath' and ceremonial commands of the 3rd commandment), the mention of Iconolatry (1st command), and the threat attached to the 2nd commandment, and made other changes (eg. in the 10th commandment, Ex 20:17; Dt 5:21; and in placing the part that He used at the close of the commandments Ex 20:5b-6, Dt 5:9b-10).”

So *Luther began this, following NT Precedent!* SDA acknowledge abbreviations of these commands in the NT. In their SS Quarterly, 3rd Qtr, 1972, they say “Only three of the ten commandments are repeated verbatim in the New Testament: the sixth, seventh, and eighth.” (p.48) Canright showed that 109 times the 9 moral commands of the decalogue were alluded to in the NT. As only 3 of the 9 are repeated verbatim, we see *it's normative for NT Christians to use simplified quotes of these precepts without being charged for 'taking away from God's Word'*. If someone is so charged it must first be the NT writers--even the Holy Spirit who inspired them, who'd be first in line of indictment!

SDA's Bible Readings... p.324 condemns Rome's abbreviating the precepts in their Convert's Catechism... Below, we see the NT precedent for these:

1. (Matt 12:30; 1 Jn 5:21); 2. (Matt 6:9; 5: 33-37; 1 Tim 6:1); 3. Sabbath (*repudiated. Col 2:14-16*); 4. (Eph 6:1+2); 5. (James 2:11); 6. same; 7. (Eph 4:28); 8. (Col 3:9; James 3:14); 9. (Matt 5:28; Rom 7:7; 13:9); 10 (Lk 12:15; 2 Cor 9:5; Rom 13:9)

To prove Rome is the 'beast', 7th day sects allege the Pope wears a name on his vesture and miter, 'VIC ARIUS FILII DEI', which in Roman numerals adds to the number **666** of Rev 13. But to their calculations, Dr. John R. Rice notes "But to do so, notice you have to count 'U' as 'V' and *have to violate all the rules of Roman numerals*. You have 'IC' to mean 501 when it would clearly mean 499 in Roman numerals. You have 'IV' in the second word (ARIVS) to mean 6 when *it always means 4*. Roman numerals are never calculated that way. *Always if smaller numbers are before larger ones, it means the larger number less the smaller*. IV means *one less than five, for example*." (False Doctrines p.179 + 180).

From this study *we're faced with some heart-searching questions to be answered in fear of God and truth:*

1. Will I still repeat *such false charges against Rome*, about the decalogue?
2. Am I *willing to humbly see my errors in making such charges?*
3. Since the Catholic church *has upheld the decalogue as God originally spoke it*, won't I get off the band wagon of accosting her?

It's amazing that after laying such charges on Rome for 150 years, the *SDA themselves have changed every precept in the decalogue, in their 1994 Clear Word Bible!*