

## INVOCATION

There are less than a half dozen references to lawyers in the New Testament and on the occasions that are mentioned the Doctors of the Law are usually pictured in the unenviable role of hecklers, trying to tempt or ensnare Our Divine Savior in His speech. Let us examine one of these references which I believe will furnish us with a thought suitable to the occasion that has brought us together this morning.

We read in the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, XXII 35-40 "And one of them, a doctor of the law, asked Him tempting Him; Master which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him: Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment, and the second is like unto this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the Prophets." A lawyer had asked Our Divine Savior which was the first, the greatest law of all. It was a question which the scribes had frequently pondered, because it was not easy to choose one from among the six hundred and fourteen precepts with which they were familiar, and even though they had compiled a list of the principal laws and prohibitions, they had not succeeded in coming to any agreement concerning the order of importance in which they should be listed; in fact, they

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had come to believe that this impossibility of agreeing upon the primacy of any one law was a sign that God willed that all the precepts of the law should be observed in the same order. Jesus settled the matter once for all by the simple declaration that the first and greatest law was to love God above all else, and the second was to love our neighbor as ourselves.

These were not new laws. They were written in the Old Testament though not in these precise words. When Our Lord picked them out and placed them at the head of the list it was easy to see their preeminence. And for anyone who admits the existence of God, it is easy to see the basis for the first and greatest law. If God is our Creator upon whom alone we depend for our existence and continuance in life, it is but logical that we belong to Him and owe Him everything that we are and have including a love that is above that for all else. The basis for the law that our Divine Savior places second is not so evident, especially since in the word neighbor He includes all men even our enemies, as He made so clear in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

What is there in this "man" that God commands that he be loved even as we love ourselves. As we rub shoulders with him in our daily life he does not seem to be so lovable. As Father Scott puts it: "Of all creatures man alone is an enigma. At times he seems to be an angel, again a devil. Proud of himself today, tomorrow he will despise himself. His thoughts sometimes are as high as heaven, at others as low as hell. A part of him delights in what is good, another part drags him down to what he

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despises. A battle is continually waging within him. He approves of the sublime but too often follows the debased.

"It is possible by observing the ways of other creatures to forecast to a certain extent what they will do. Of man ordinarily you can foretell nothing. Often a man cannot himself foretell what he will do. He may plan and purpose, only to be thwarted by himself. At times capable of the heroic, he as frequently acts the craven. He often wonders at his own courage and as often despises himself for his cowardice.

"He disappoints himself and his friends by his conduct under certain circumstances, while under others he wins admiration. He is a puzzle to himself. While men are praising him, he may be harboring thoughts and purposes that reek of infamy. While they are condemning him he may be wrapped in spirit to the highest realms. He wonders at his own vileness and at his own virtues. He is a living contradiction. That is man." That is him whom you must love even as you love yourself, no matter where you find him and no matter what the color of skin that clothes him; so says the second great law of God.

Man just doesn't seem worthy of love. In fact, he seems to be the one great discordant note in nature. Man is the only living thing that experiences rebellion within. His passions are continually at war with his ideals, constantly a trap for his downfall. Not so with other living things. With them passion directs them to their welfare. In indulging their instincts they follow the law of their preservation. The contrary with man. Witness the drunkard. The passions of other living things do not lead

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astray. Man's do. Look at the victims of vice. Animals left to themselves do not go to excess. Man does. His passions uncontrolled run away with him. The world is strewn with wrecks of unbridled passion. Why is man the one tragic contradiction in nature? We must go to the first chapter of Genesis for the story. Man rebelled against his Creator. He sinned and brought upon himself this tragic conflict within his own nature. There is no other explanation. But we are not concerned with the fall of man here, the fact remains that man with all his tragic contradictions is still the Creator's Masterpiece. "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels." He is still beloved by God. And not because of his sins and imperfections, but, in spite of them, because he bears the image and likeness of his Creator in his soul God commands that he be loved by us even as we love ourselves.

The relations which form the basis for these two great commandments also form the subject of a study that is of special interest to students of law. In the first instance the fact that God is the Creator and ruler of all things including man not only places Him as the object of our highest love but also as the supreme lawgiver. In truth, all authority rests in God and no other lawgiver has one iota of authority unless in one way or another it comes to him from God.

Today we are not only concerned with the supreme lawgiver but with the subject of law as well. We can, therefore, pause a moment with profit to consider the basis of God's second great commandment of love as the basis of man's accountability to law. We have been com-

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manded by God to love our fellowman as ourselves, as we have seen, not necessarily because of the good we outwardly see in him but because he is the favored creature of God, made to the image and likeness of his Creator and endowed with an immortal soul with intelligence and free will. For exactly the same reason man becomes a subject of law, he has a soul with the faculty to reason and a will to choose. We do not here speak of the law in nature about us, we speak of moral law, the natural law, the positive law of God or of those who have a right to direct us. All the world about us, the trees, the flowers, the birds and the beasts is subject to the inexorable laws of nature which determine and direct their way through time. They have not, however, been given laws for the keeping of which they will be held accountable by their Creator. It is true that man also, like the trees, the flowers, the birds and the beasts is subject to the immutable laws of nature in many things, but at the same time precisely because God has made him higher than all nature about him and has given him an immortal soul endowed with faculties to reason and to choose He has made him accountable and a subject of laws some placed by the Creator directly and others by those to whom it has been given to share in authority.

If I understand correctly the purpose of this Institute, we are assembled here today to show from history that there has always been recognized by man not only positive laws but a law written by Almighty God upon man's immortal soul which, in fact, has proved the basis for all moral laws. Since this certainly is of inestimable worth in

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these troubled times when so many people are turning their back upon God, we beg our Creator and supreme lawgiver to enlighten us and to guide us during these two days that our endeavors may be fruitful and conducive not only to our own spiritual and moral growth but to the honor and glory of that same all-wise and eternal law-giver.

✠ MOST REV. PAUL C. SCHULTE, D.D.,  
*Archbishop of Indianapolis,*  
*Honorary Chairman,*  
*Second Natural Law Institute Proceedings*