

**Remarks of Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron
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(As transcribed from digital audio recording at liturgy)

Good morning everyone. I am so very, really proud, honored, to have been included in this program, not only because of the topic, but in a particular way, because of the context in which we're gathered and which I speak, and I do particularly want to offer my thanks to Professor Stern for the kind invitation, even coming to see me and explain to me the program. I am really very grateful that you did that. Thank you very much doctor.

About altruism, let's start there. If we take it simply as a concern for others, I certainly am very happy to speak about this as a phenomenon as a Christian understands it and would cultivate it. And of course, already at the beginning I need to make a caveat, to speak from the Christian perspective needs to be nuanced in order to say that I speak from the Catholic Christian perspective. The remarks I offer would be nuanced differently, I believe, by an Evangelical theologian or a member of the mainstream Protestant churches.

What I'm not going to talk about is altruism exactly as Auguste Comte understood it, or in altruism as it was understood by certain modern thinkers who seemed to want to develop a kind of an ethic that was possible to move, to move forward without reference to the divine law, without reference to God. What I would like to do is, under this notion of motivations, make two points. I want to talk about how altruism, as I understand it, as a Christian understands it, is part of a greater whole. That's my first goal. And then my second is to talk about the dynamics that would direct a Christian to perform acts of altruism. And so, I will begin by speaking about the love of neighbor as it is taught in the Christian Church.

The second principle point I want to talk about are the Jewish roots of this command to love the neighbor. The next point will be to talk about the specifically Christian dimension of love of neighbor, which is a dimension rooted in confessing Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and Son of God who fulfills the whole law. My next step will be to foil or contrast the Christian love of neighbor with certain modern notions about the other and relations with the other, and then I'd like to conclude with a more personal note. I should say at the beginning, as sort of a

continuing disclaimer, and I'll do this by using a figure of speech one of my own professors in graduate school used often, I'm giving you a torso, perhaps some of you from art history are familiar with the Belvedere Torso in the Vatican Museum, which is simply a piece of a much larger ancient sculpture. I can only give a piece. This theme of love of neighbor is so intertwined with the whole of Christian profession, it is only possible to touch on certain basic elements. So, please, if you'll accept my disclaimer in that form.

So, love of neighbor. The great classic presentation by Jesus calling his disciples to the love of neighbor is found in the Gospel according to St. Luke, the 10th chapter, the Parable of the Good Samaritan. I know I only have a half-an-hour and it's probably familiar to all of you but I am going to read it nonetheless because whatever else I say, this is really the most eloquent presentation of altruism from a Christian perspective.

“One day there was a scholar of the law who stood up to test Jesus and said, ‘Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus said to him, ‘What is written in the law? How do you read it?’ He said in reply, ‘You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.’ He replied to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.’ But because he wished to justify himself, the scholar said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ Jesus replied, ‘A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But the Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.’ Which of these three in your opinion was neighbor to the robber’s victim?’ The scholar answered, ‘The one who treated him with mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’”

Really, the most eloquent presentation I could give you on the Christian perspective for motivation to be altruistic, which specifically, we speak of as the love of neighbor. What are the principles that underscore as we have, in the Catholic tradition, we have reflected upon this

commandment from our founder? First of all, that the love of the neighbor is an extension of the love of God. St. Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian, puts it this way: “Now the aspect under which our neighbor is to be loved is God, since what we ought to love in our neighbor is that he is in God.”

Love of God and love of neighbor are dimensions of one reality. We love our neighbor, we understand the reason, the foundation, for Jesus’ teaching is that all men and women are called to the same end. All are called to communion, to fellowship with God. And because the whole human race has a common end, a common purpose, human communion needs to be fostered in every situation, hence the parable that this man, this stranger, is a neighbor. The basis for the command to love our neighbors is respect for every human person as created in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, another self. Same to me. Not really different. Perhaps different in race, perhaps different in tradition, perhaps different in religious profession, but within all of those differences this profound sameness that all of us are created in the image and likeness of God, that all of us are persons.

This command to love our neighbor is based on the divine positive injunction. In another place Jesus says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” And this injunction from the founder of the Christian Church is summarized in what is often called the Golden Rule. Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them. This command to love our neighbor and to see every human being as a neighbor is especially governed by the virtue, the excellence of justice, which is specifically, the virtue of all right relationships. The great teacher of the Christian faith, Paul, says that all laws are fulfilled in loving the neighbor. In the Letter to the Romans, Paul wrote: “He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the whole law.” And, the Church teaches that purity of heart is required for recognizing each other human being as my neighbor who deserves my love because purity of heart is required in order to see as God sees, and God sees every other human being as beloved, and therefore, I must love and I must serve all the others.

What are the norms? What are the specific cash outs we might say of the Christian command to love my neighbor? First of all, it encompasses all right relationships. Secondly, it includes everybody no matter how different they are from me. Third, Jesus specifically teaches that in this love of neighbor always includes my enemies. In the Gospel of St. Luke it is recorded he taught love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Fourth, the love of

neighbor, the command to be altruistic to my neighbor, is most urgent to the disadvantaged. Jesus taught whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me. And finally, any offense against my neighbor requires satisfaction. What is done wrong must be made right. So this is a simple basic outline of the understanding of this moral command at the heart of the Christian Church, the heart of Christian discipleship, to love my neighbor.

Next principle point, the Jewish roots for this command. As a norm, I want to make two points here, I want to talk about this command insofar as it is a norm, and this command insofar as it bespeaks a world-view, an understanding of God and the world, and the individual. About the norm: the Christian Church understands this command to love my neighbor as rooted in the second table of the Decalogue. All of those commands given to Moses which prohibit what is contrary to my neighbor or as it says in the Book of Leviticus, “Love your fellow as yourself.” This teaching then, as you heard me point out earlier, is confirmed by Jesus and I offer you another citation, Matthew 22, a scholar of the Law, again asked Jesus: “Teacher which commandment in the Law is the greatest? Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole Law and the whole prophets depend on these two commandments, this ethical demand in the Christian Church is a resumption, a taking in, of the teaching given to Moses and confirmed by the prophets.

Now, what is the world-view that lives in the Christian Church that is one with that of the Jewish people in providing a foundation for this command? Perhaps the best way to speak about this is to see this command as rooted in the God's covenant with Noah. Specifically, here I would I cite Genesis 9:6: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in his image did God make man.” I happened to consult a commentary on the Torah given to me by Rabbi Krakoff and they're two very interesting comments about this verse that I found, and I hope I'm pronouncing the title properly of this commentary, Ets Hiam. The commentator points out that this verse from the Book of Genesis is based on a conviction that every human life is of infinite value. That the dignity and sanctity of human life derives from the fact that every human being bears the stamp of the Divine Maker. This conviction, shared by the Synagogue and by the Church, is the basic foundation for the injunction to love my neighbor. And in this context,

let me also please quote at more length a remark made by Dr. Leon Kass in his book on a reflection on the Book of Genesis:

“Although this verse from the Book of Genesis speaks mainly about punishment, the Noahide Law, at the same time, implicitly conveys a lofty message: radical human equality regarding the value of human life. Even before we are explicitly told that all human beings are equally God-like because they are all equally made in God's image, what we would look at as the more significant and lapidary part of Genesis 9:6, the retributive rule of life for a life is itself a teacher of equality. Against our ever-present natural temptation to care only for ourselves and for our own, and to depreciate or ignore the value of the stranger, and against our prideful propensity to make our own puffed-up sense of self-worth, the sole standard of justice. The Noahide Law teaches that at least with respect to life itself, every human being has a claim and a standing equal to our own. As the text soon makes clear, such equality can be grounded only in the recognized equal humanity of each human being.”

Insofar as the covenant between God and Noah is a recapitulation, my point is that the foundation for this commandment, this ought to love my neighbor, is based on this is, the is that creation itself is a covenant between the human race and God. That is to say, everybody else is my own and not really a stranger because everybody else is owned by God. All human beings are his own. As it says at one place in the New Testament, the Lord God makes the Son to rise on the just and the unjust. The other is not really a stranger, not really an alien, because she or he is a creature like me.

Now, the next principle part of my presentation: What are the specifically Christian dimensions that arise from my belief that Jesus is the Son of God and fulfills the law? First of all, in regard to norms, Jesus teaches his disciples, teaches me, that we are to love one another as he has loved us, so that it is his love for us that becomes the measure for our love of our neighbors. Second, is a well-known phrase, “Whatever you did to the least of my brethren, you did to me.” That in the Christian Church there is an identification of the weakest and the most vulnerable with Jesus, so that to love the other, to love the most vulnerable, is to love him who has first loved us.

Third, in regard to a perspective on this norm of the love of neighbor, a Christian point-of-view, an essential element of our perspective is that all have been judged by God as worthy of his love and that Jesus Christ has given himself totally for all others and part of my motivation in

loving my neighbor is to see them as worthy of the love of Jesus. And a fourth point in regard to these norms is that it is the Spirit of Jesus who gives me the strength to love with the love of Jesus.

Second point on this matter of the specifically Christian dimension of the love of neighbor: First of all, it is Christological in form. In especially the Catholic understanding of the commandment to love my neighbor, we understand that the love we give to our neighbor is qualitatively the same as the love of Jesus himself. This is related to the Christian understanding of grace, the Christian understanding of incorporation into Jesus. So that when I love my neighbor that is Jesus in me showing forth his love. Another way to put this point is that Jesus and I love together, and this is what I said about this simply being a torso, this would require days of explanation to plumb the depths of what Christians understand by the relationship of grace and nature and how it is possible for Jesus to work in me and be an agent in me without the destruction of my own autonomous and integral agency. But let me suffice it to say, this is what the Christian believes. There is a specific Christological end in the notion of the love of neighbor, that by loving my neighbor I give glory to Jesus, through Jesus to his Heavenly Father, and that I help perfect the aim of his mission in this world.

A third point about the specifically Christian understanding of the command to love my neighbor: It is a command which is knowable both by faith and by natural insight, natural reason. It is, however, only glimpseable by unaided reason, by a person of good will without faith, but it is glimpseable because the identity of all human beings as equal in dignity is the truth that is rooted in nature. This truth is not something that is added on to the order of creation, it is rooted in the world itself. However, the command is clarified and conferred by revelation; a very important point.

Now on to my next sort of chapter or paragraph, and I think this is a useful step. I'd like to set up a contrast between this Christian command to love my neighbor and what might be considered, this is going to be, as the Italians say, *grosso modo*, I'm going to paint in very broad strokes here. But to set up a contrast between the Christian command and basic modernity but I do think this will fair I believe and I think it will yield some insight into the Christian motivation for altruism.

Think for a moment about the other or the stranger in the whole stream of modern thought. Modern thought is in its classic formulations in the West very often, most often, sees

the other, the stranger, as either a copy of me or totally different from me. That means that the other, the stranger, is juxtaposed, set over against who I am and, therefore, the relationship between me and those others are either a construct, which is to say they do not exist by nature since each individual is an autonomous self. All relationships are artificial in that sense, made by my arbitrary choice. Or, in some radical modern thinkers, relationships are impossible and the only way to deal with others is somehow to subordinate them to me or to absorb them or be absorbed with all of them into a collective.

In the Christian worldview, which is, as I said, simply an assumption of the Jewish worldview, the other is always like me. Different, yes, but a different same. I would us that as a kind of a capsule formulation. The other, the one to whom I behave altruistically is always a different same. It is possible for us to be in common, to be together, to share a common end, a common goal, a common welfare without being absorbed or losing the distinction between myself and the other. And here, the relationship of the covenant is the paradigm where the human person was made in order to enter into a relationship with God. And in that relationship God never absorbs the individual but the individual is brought into communion with God. And therefore, this is my contention, this word neighbor in the Christian commandment is always the important word to use for the other. Who is my neighbor? Everybody is my neighbor; there is no one who is so other to me that she or he is not my neighbor. This word neighbor is most disclosive. A neighbor means someone who is born near to me. Somebody with whom I am sort of set together. And the point is, in this commandment, there is no one who is not my neighbor. No one who is so alien that she or he can be demarked, there's a demarcation on the other side of that line are those beyond my concern.

Now, then, the contrast between, and we've already moved into this obviously, between this modern sense of relationship with the other in the Christian sense. In modern relationships these are either an artifice set up for the sake of the self, and here I'd offer the thinking of Thomas Hobbs, especially in the Leviathan, as the exemplification of that. Or the other way that I relate to the others is within a collective. We might look at the writings of Marx as a paradigm for that. In the Christian command of loving my neighbor, relationships are always enhanced and cultivated; they are not created. It is by God's creation itself that all other human beings are related to me. And so when I love my neighbor, I do not establish the relationship. I recognize it; I enhance it; I cultivate it.

Another way to look at these two different ideas about relationship is to think about hell. In the famous dictum, I believe it's a famous dictum of the existentialist, hell is other people. In the Christian Church, hell is being without others. Hell is to be alone. And a third way to get at the distinction and the foiling, the contrasting I am trying to draw, is to think about hospitality. In the writings of Immanuel Kant, hospitality is kind of a weak trait. It promotes virtue but it is not a virtue itself. However, in the life of Abraham, in his entertaining of the three strangers, and in the New Testament, hospitality is recommended six times as an important virtue. The classic formulation is the Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 13, where we read: "Do not neglect hospitality" (and this is referring, of course, to Abraham), "Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels." My own reflection is that hospitality is the paradigm for loving my neighbor, for all righteous relationships, because in hospitality, I let the other, the one who seemed or was thought to be a stranger, to become part of what is most mine. What is as intimate, what is as personal as home? And so, the love of neighbor always involves a certain dimension of hospitality. To be part of my home is to receive the other and bridge the gap that seemed to make the other a stranger.

And I noticed finally, this is to bring my remarks to a conclusion, I noticed in the specification for today that I am allowed not to just talk about theoretical matters, I'm allowed to talk about more personal experience and I'd like to do that to bring my remarks to a conclusion. I want to give a sharper focus to my remarks by taking a count of the context within which I speak today, the Holocaust Memorial. And without in anyway, certainly not in any explicit way, and not even an implicit way, do I want to obscure the particularism of the Shoah, but I do want to offer some comments on what I, as a Catholic pastor, see as an insight which can help you all appreciate the truth I believe in, in the command that I am to love my neighbor, to speak about the Holocaust. As anyone who grew up read world history, I certainly have understood the facts of the Holocaust. But when I was in graduate school, I was asked to read some of the work of Dr. Emil Fackenheim, who had been a professor for a very long time at the University of Toronto. And I very much appreciated Dr. Fackenheim's remark, his insight, that the Holocaust is not a member of any species, not a reality of one of several possible or historical genocides, that the Holocaust is an historical event without parallel. And, in part, Professor Fackenheim makes the point that it is that, it is unparalleled because it was aimed at a whole people. It was aimed at a whole people precisely as a people and because of their claim of their unique

relationship with God. And likewise, a unique historical event because all the resources of a mighty nation were given over to this particular aim, this evil aim, of extermination.

Now, in reading the writings of Dr. Fackenheim, I took away, I think, a very important insight. Now I don't agree with everything that he said in order to characterize the Holocaust but I do understand that he helped me appreciate the Holocaust as a diabolical act. What I might term, if you will permit me, to characterize as a hyper-paradigm for all evil. An historical event that is disclosive of the quintessence of evil. And this insight was further sharpened for me by an artistic work reflecting on some of what Arthur Miller has to say in his play *The Incident at Vichy*. And in that play he makes the point that in the Holocaust the Jew is presented as the paradigmatic other, the one who never does and is never allowed to make a claim on his neighbor. One who is always and irretrievably alien and, therefore, able to be cast aside.

My point today then is that a Christian command to love my neighbor is a statement that this is a lie, that there is no other who is beyond my care and beyond my concern. To stake my own goal as a pastor trying to teach others and to live faithfully myself and live up to this command of Jesus that we should love our neighbor as we love ourselves, it would be this: I hope that all those who are under my care, whom I lead, would, should ever happen again, be righteous gentiles, that they would protect all and see none as other and as alien or beyond their concern.

So I've helped explain the Christian commandment to love the neighbor and how that is our sense of altruism. Thank you very much for your attention.