The Great Commandment

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The Great Commandment

Essence of Christianity

Our relationship with God
the Father and with one another

The basis of Catholic Morality
and is the backbone of
Catholic Social Teaching
“When the Pharisees heard that [Jesus] had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them [a scholar of the law] tested him by asking,
"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 the first commandment.

The second is like it:
You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."
A Common Question

Which of the 613 Jewish laws was the greatest?

It was a major bone of contention and divided Jewish leaders into rival camps: Pharisees and Saducees

It was intended to be a trap.
Which commandment in the Law is the greatest?

Jesus’ answer is insightful and thought provoking going beyond the scope of the posed question and gives a summary of the law or even deeper its center or core.
Great Commandment

Jesus' answer combines two quotations from the Torah:

Deuteronomy 6:5
“Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

Leviticus 19:18 “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
To the Jewish Religious Leaders:

To the Jewish religious leaders Jesus’ answer underscores his orthodoxy as a Jewish teacher.

The quotation from Deuteronomy 6:5 is part of the *Shema Yisrael*, which is considered one of the holiest of Jewish prayers.

It is an affirmation of Judaism and a declaration of faith in one God.
To Jesus’ Disciples:

To his disciples, Jesus presented a new inner disposition and a new way of life.

The two commandments are connected to each other by the word ‘Love’ and their juxtaposition by Jesus was an original theological concept.

The “Love of God” is not primarily a feeling but faithfulness to the covenant, a matter of doing God’s will.
“...With all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

The nouns (heart, soul, strength) refer not to various parts of the person but are a way to stress that the whole person should love God with all available resources. In other words we should love God as he loves us...unconditionally.

The rabbis stressed this part of the commandment where:

• Heart meant will
• Soul meant life
• Strength meant wealth
Great Commandment is referenced in:
- Mark 12:28-34,
- Luke 10:25-28,
- Matthew 7:12, 19:19, 22:34-40
- Romans 13:9
- Galatians 5:14

In the Gospel of John we find the New Commandment that is similar to the Great Commandment:

“Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (John 13:34).
The three synoptic Gospels present the Great Commandment somewhat differently:

In Matthew and Mark we see Jesus responding to questioning by a Pharisaic scribe.

This is set in the context of Jesus being tested by the Pharisees.
In the Gospel of Luke the Great Commandment is set in the context of a discussion on discipleship.

Jesus is asked by the scribe, how to achieve eternal life. Jesus asks how the scribe interpreted the law. The scribe responds with the great commandment.

Jesus is then asked by the scribe, “Who is my neighbor?”

Jesus answers with the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

A powerful lesson about mercy towards those in need
Both of the verses quoted by Jesus were well known in Jewish circles.
The distinctive feature of the reply given by Jesus is that he connected the two.

There is no evidence for the combination of the two texts by any teacher prior to Jesus.

Love of God finds its only fulfillment in love of neighbor
Love of one's neighbor must be rooted in the Love of God

The two are inseparable
An Inseparable Love

Karl Rahner, SJ:

A person’s love for his neighbor is evidence of his love of God.

The Scriptures teach that God regards the love shown to a neighbor as love shown to him.

Therefore, the loving relationship between a person and his neighbor indicates a loving relationship between that person and God.
“Love of neighbor” is given in the Gospel of Matthew as the only explicit standard by which man will be judged (Matthew 25:34-46):

“Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.”
The Great Commandment is a summary and fulfillment of the 10 Commandments.

The first three commandments deal with the Love of God and the remaining 7 with the Love of Neighbor.

You shall have no other Gods before me
You shall not take the Lord's name in vain
Keep the Sabbath Holy

Honor your father and mother
You shall not kill
You shall not commit adultery
You shall not steal
You shall not bear false witness
You shall not covet your neighbor's wife
You shall not covet your neighbor's possessions
The Great Commandment is considered a formal moral imperative.
It is a command not a suggestion or request.
The statement is made with authority, not as just a teacher but as Lord.

The emphasis on the inseparability of love of God and love of neighbor is the key to making love the correct interpretation of the law and the prophets.
Christian Love

This is not a romantic love but a caring love. We must care about the wellbeing and good of others.

To Jesus the distinctive characteristic of this love is the mutual self-giving which breaks down relationships marked by the superiority/inferiority structure.

Jesus establishes a relationship built on equality. He commands us to love one another as he loves us, that is, with the love that has no room for one to be superior to another.
Christian Love

The spiritual life of the Christian is really a life that is lived in ways pleasing to God under the Great Commandment.

How we treat one another really matters. It touches not only the neighbor but reaches deep into the larger society.
Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

“Our neighbor is anyone who needs our help and whom we can help.”

The pope states that today loving our neighbor has global dimensions since we see and respond to people’s struggles and needs almost instantaneously.

With global communication satellites and the Internet we have real time views of disasters as they unfold anywhere on our planet.

This global worldview is at the core of Catholic Social Teaching that centers on our love for our fellow man. This is a global issue and should not be limited by boundaries of any type.
Catholic Morality

The Great Commandment along with the 10 Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount and specifically the Beatitudes forms the foundation of Catholic Christian Morality.

Catholic/Christian morality places Christ in the center of our moral decision-making.

Our conscience should be formed based on the teachings and life of Christ.
Moral Choices

As the Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches we have choices and each of us must assume responsibility for our actions.

The old WWJD evoloves into what would Jesus want me to do.
Great Commandment

It is a moral imperative of Christian behavior.

It is the blueprint of Christian love.

The two commandments are inseparable:

You cannot love God without loving your neighbor.
And you cannot love your neighbor without the Grace and Love of God.