

MENTAL RESERVATION - THE CHRISTIAN WAY TO AVOID LYING

"Lying is knowingly giving false information to a person who may or may not have a right to the truth" (Radio Replies, Volume 2, Question 903; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2482).

Christians do something called mental reservation - you keep the truth back from the other person but don't actually lie.

It can be a sin to use truth like that.

Christians say keeping truth back is not a sin if there is a sufficient reason. Fr John Hardon says that there are secrets we are obligated to keep. The idea is that you can break secrets if the great good of another demands it. He says that a mental reservation is a way of giving a vague answer to another person that rather than misleads them lets them know you will not tell them any more. He says a strict mental reservation that gives the other no reasonable chance to know that something is concealed in the answer is a lie. A mental reservation is about making the questioner feel they should mind their own business.

Radio Replies Volume 1 question 1027, deals with Jesus Christ using mental reservation (page 210). Jesus told the apostles in John 7:8 to go to the festival day in Jerusalem and added that he would not be going. However, Jesus went in secret.

Everybody agrees that Jesus knew the disciples would be misled. But all Christians deny that he lied here.

Catholics say he said, "I am not going to this festival", but he meant, "I am not going to this festival openly". Or that he meant, "I am not going to a future festival but am going to this one". Or that he meant, "I am going to this festival but not immediately or with you". So they want to say he was telling the truth but used his words to give the impression he was saying something different to what he meant.

They say he was using mental reservation. If he was, then if Jesus hadn't wanted people to deceive themselves, if he didn't want to take advantage of their mistake or the lie they accidentally told themselves, he wouldn't have chosen the words he used.

But the episode can be interpreted as Jesus telling a lie.

So we have to decide if John should be interpreted as saying Jesus used mental reservation or was a liar.

Now few people know of this mental reservation stuff. The gospel was not written for experts but for ordinary people. They would have understood him to have been saying Jesus lied. In fact, it is the most natural interpretation.

Many people think of mental reservation rightly as the homage a hypocrite pays to deception. If it is right, then deception cannot be wrong. The Bible never authorises mental reservation. It is safe to assume then that John was saying Jesus lied.

Had Jesus been thought to have been using mental reservation, the gospel would explain why he couldn't tell the truth. The Church teaches that mental reservation is only allowed for a very serious reason. That it is restricted so, indicates that the Church thinks that it is bad but prefers not to admit it. Jesus went to the festival in secret and this secrecy was unnecessary for he still went publicly about the Temple and preached after the festival.

Jesus could have answered, "I might go to the festival and I might not." People were used to him taking time out and going into solitude. He didn't have to say he if he was going to the festival or not. That should settle the question if Jesus lied or used mental reservation or if he did not. He used words that can be taken as lying instead of mental reservation. For a man to say a woman is his wife when he means, "She is not my legal wife but my wife in my heart for today" is to lie not to use mental reservation. Any lie could be turned into a case of mental reservation with Christian logic. And the believers do lie a lot to promote the faith as believable and they use the mental reservation excuse to wallow in their sanctimonious claim that they are so honest.

Jesus in John says he is the truth. Some take this to mean that John must have been thinking of mental reservation as an explanation for Jesus saying one thing and doing another. But this is assuming books don't contradict themselves when they are in the Bible. It is really making our prejudices and not the text the decisive factor. John couldn't approve of that.

Also, John 2 has Jesus miraculously making wine for drunk people at a wedding which shows an occasional tendency in

this gospel to make salvation depend on faith alone without good works and without even repenting sin! Why insist then that Jesus didn't lie? If he can do one sin then why not another?

Christians, Jesus lied. Live with it.

Here is an example of mental reservation. An adulterer is permitted to reply that he is not guilty of adultery if he has repented and got rid of the sinful responsibility by turning to God to wash it away when someone asks him if he did the dirty on his wife because he is now innocent.

This is deception for it is meant to mislead. The cults say that it is not deceiving for the listener has duped himself and the truth has been told. But then you are telling yourself that you are too devoted to the truth to lie while you are encouraging deception which is not consistent with this.

It is deceiving him for it is presenting what is not an answer to his question as an answer. If everybody used the truth to take in people who had no right to know the truth it wouldn't be long before people would be phrasing their questions so that nobody could give an ambiguous answer. It doesn't do the world any good in the long run.

They say that mental reservation is a lie when it is not required. Otherwise it is not deceiving as far as the will is concerned though deception is the effect. The effect is not intended but the greater good. But the problem is that the truth would be the supreme good if lying is always wrong. If the deception is not intended then what is mental reservation needed for?

Roman Catholicism permits mental reservation. Suppose someone asked you something they had no right to know. You could tell them a lie like, "I did not kill him" and add the words, "But I am lying", in your own mind and say them to yourself mentally. Only cults like Roman Catholicism could deny that this is lying.

The theologians of the Roman Catholic Church claim that the following behaviour is not lying but equivocation. If you are sitting typing at a computer and you are emailing the damning data to a manager about an employee suspected of stealing and the employee comes in and asks you what you are typing for and you say, "Practice" the Church says this is not lying but equivocation for every time you do your typing it is practice as well. But you are lying two ways. For instance, you know the employee is asking for your main reason and you are pretending the practice is your main reason. There is no point in asking questions when you will not get the main point as an answer. Plus you are lying to the employee by pretending to be somebody that would not do him any damage or shop him. It is bad enough to be a liar but to lie barefacedly and then deny that you are a liar takes some gall. As usual, the Church only gives solutions that are worse than the problem. Here they want you to be a sneak. A devious person is worse than a liar. The difference between a devious person and a liar is that the former is harder to catch out and therefore more dangerous. A liar is a person who tries to be devious but isn't necessarily really devious hence the difference between a liar and a devious person.

Equivocation can be very destructive when practiced on simple people who comprise the majority of the membership of the Church. When the Church accepts this form of deceit who is to say it is not fooling everybody it can fool?

The believers are so weak in faith that they run to miracle sites in search of the miracle of consolation and of miracles they can see. Their belief in miracles depends on God being a God of truth who sends miracles to attract people to what he has revealed say in scripture or through the pope and the bishops or all of them. But this doctrine of divine truth and the sinfulness of lying is so deadly that we can only conclude that such miracles come from a source that is unreliable and misanthropic.

If lying is always wrong, it is a pity it is. We do not need the wrongness of lying impressed more deeply and reinforced by the notion that there is a God of absolute truth who never countenances or tolerates lies. In that sense, even if lying is wrong belief in God cannot really be good.

One of the ten commands bans lying against a neighbour. The command not to bear false witness seems to refer to telling the truth in a legal context or in taking an oath. Many feel it does not rule out lies of any other kind when told for a good enough reason. But that still would not be a licence to do so. Also the command says you cannot bear false witness against your neighbour. Why neighbour? Why not just say anyone? Nobody would have been called on often enough to testify legally to justify needing it to be a major command. It means that all lies about a neighbour are wrong no matter about legal context or not.

No good done by religion can justify religion for its fundamental attitudes are anti-people.

Praising it is as foolish as praising and rewarding a seemingly devoted husband who is wishing his sick wife would die soon so he can be free to have a good time.

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