

**DISHONEST CRITICISM: BEING A  
CHAPTER OF THEOLOGY ON  
EQUIVOCATION AND DOING EVIL  
FOR A GOOD CAUSE: AN ANSWER  
TO DR. RICHARD F. LITTLEDALE**

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Dishonest criticism: being a chapter of theology on equivocation and doing evil for a good cause:  
an answer to Dr. Richard F. Littledale by James Jones

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CHAPTER OF THEOLOGY ON EQUIVOCATION  
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AN ANSWER TO  
DR. RICHARD F. LITLEDALE.

By JAMES JONES, S.J.,

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1887.

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## A CHAPTER OF THEOLOGY ON EQUIVOCATION AND DOING EVIL FOR A GOOD END.

An Answer to Dr. Richard F. Littledale.

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On the 22nd of last November Dr. Richard F. Littledale sent the following letter to the "Pall Mall Gazette."

### THE PRIEST IN THE FAMILY.

There has been a good deal more fuss made over the recent case of proselytism than the incident itself seems to call for, seeing that there was nothing whatever exceptional in the circumstances, nor any departure from the course which would be ordinarily followed by a Roman Catholic clergyman applied to in the manner described. I have known many instances more or less analogous, and virtually the same method was pursued in all of them, inclusive of the factor of secrecy, where that appeared expedient. Sometimes rather more than

mere secrecy entered into the process. And it is on this head that I desire to correct the statement made by your correspondent "M. A. B.," who is like most converts in being unfamiliar probably with the system they abandon, and certainly with that they adopt. When "M. A. B." indignantly repudiates the doctrine that "the end justifies the means," and quotes Dr. Faa di Bruno's "Catholic Belief" as declaring that "Catholics do not believe that it is lawful to break a lawful oath or to tell a lie, or to do any other wicked thing whatever, for the sake of promoting the supposed interest of the Church, or for any good, however great, likely to arise from it," and that "the false and hateful principle that the end justifies the means, or that we may do evil that good may come, is utterly condemned by the Catholic Church," "M. A. B." is, I am sure, writing in perfect good faith, but in direct opposition to indisputable facts.

So far is the Roman Catholic Church from laying down any such condemnation as that alleged that it has as nearly as possible affirmed the contrary propositions formally by the elevation of Alfonso de' Liguori to the rank of a saint and doctor of the Church, thereby declaring not merely that there is no doctrinal or moral error of any kind in his teaching, but that it ought to be followed, as it is in point of fact followed, in the confessional, by most, if not all, Roman Catholic

pastors. And because he is the latest doctor of the Church in date of creation (1871), his rulings are the final ones so far, since no one has yet arisen to gloss, modify, or alter them. What he has to say on the matters at issue is that equivocation, of which he distinguishes three sorts, is always permissible for what are considered adequate reasons. "It is certain," he says, "and the common opinion of all, that it is lawful for a just cause to use equivocation in the manners described, and to confirm it with an oath. . . . And the reason is because we do not then deceive our neighbour, but for a just cause permit him to deceive himself; and, besides, we are not bound, if there be a just cause, to speak so that others may understand. And any honest object for retaining any good things that are useful to our body or spirit may be a just cause." (Theol. Mor., iv., 151.) But suppose there is no just cause, may one then swear with an oath to an equivocation? "Yes," says Liguori, except in a court of law, or in formal contracts. Nor is the exception secure, for he lays down further, when treating of mental reservation, which Pope Innocent XI. vainly tried to make wholly prohibited, that a witness or an accused, if irregularly questioned by a judge in court, may swear that he is ignorant of a crime to which he is in fact privy, meaning thereby that he does not know it so as to be legally bound to depose to it. And if the



act be one which the witness does not himself consider a crime (for example, agrarian murder in Ireland), he is not bound to disclose it; nay, more, if only the criminal and he know the facts, he is not merely permitted, but obliged, to swear that the accused did not commit it; while the accused is allowed the like liberty; and those who have thus sworn falsely are entitled to absolution without the confessor being empowered to require the acknowledgment of the truth as a condition. Farther, it is lawful to suborn perjured evidence, "if you have a great interest in employing perjury to expose the fraud of another person in order to obtain your own rights." (Theol. Mor., iii., 3, 77.) And as to the doctrine that the end justifies the means, it is the received maxim of the principal Jesuit writers on moral theology. I will cite only one, Busembaum, and I cite him for three reasons:—(1) His book has been edited and solemnly adopted by Liguori, whose acceptance of it gives it all the sanction involved in his own rank as doctor. (2) It has been published at the Propaganda press in Rome, thereby receiving very high Roman sanction. (3) It has passed through more than two hundred editions down to 1876. Now, he says: "When the end is lawful, the means also are lawful." ("Cum licitus est finis etiam media sunt licita," and "Cui licitus est finis, etiam licent media." —Edit. Francofurti, 1653, pp. 320 and 504.) Nor is

the doctrine merely speculative. It is put into active and constant practice. Dr. Faa di Bruno's book is a palmary example, being one of the most unverifiable I have ever examined. I will give one instance. In the original edition, he cited as a testimony to a modern Roman tenet a passage as being of the third century, and by St. Cyprian. It is, in fact, by one Arnold de Bonneval, a writer of the twelfth century, whose works are bound up in the same volume as St. Cyprian's in two well-known editions, but so that no mistake can be made. I directed public attention to this trick, and the wording has been altered in later editions, not by omitting the passage entirely, nor by confessing its true date and authorship, but by saying that it is "in the ancient writer found in St. Cyprian's works"—I quote the precise terms from the fifth edition, page 205—so that the point is made that, while there is no longer an assertion of St. Cyprian's authorship, the impression certain to be produced on an unlearned reader is that the passage is in some way connected with St. Cyprian, and of his era.

When I first adduced the citations from Liguori, given above, with some more to the like effect, the "Weekly Register" (a Roman Catholic newspaper) calmly charged me with having invented them, and alleged that not one of them is to be found in his writings. A legal friend of mine was so startled by

this that he came to me in alarm to ask if I had not made some unfortunate blunder, by putting one name for another; and I myself fancied for a moment that the numerals of reference to books and sections might have been misprinted, and so have given excuse for alleging that they were fictitious, but I verified them every one. When it is borne in mind that no cause would seem more just, no end more lawful, to a Roman Catholic priest than making a proselyte, the above facts make excusable the conviction that minute scrupulousness about accuracy or about means is not to be looked for when a case of the sort is on hand.