

# A MEDITATION ON “THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN”\*

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To understand what the unforgivable sin is, we must look at the context concerning its first emergence as a subject of discussion. This is given in Mark 3:22-29:†

<sup>22</sup> And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebub,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” <sup>23</sup> And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan?<sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.<sup>25</sup> And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.<sup>26</sup> And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.<sup>27</sup> But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.<sup>28</sup> Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter,<sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.”

Luke 12:10 repeats the citation, but without a context:

<sup>10</sup> And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Next, we need to arrive at a deeper understanding of what it means to blaspheme and what the Holy Spirit represents. As well, we need to understand why an offence against the Son of Man (Christ) can be forgiven, while one committed against the Holy Spirit cannot.

## **What Is Blasphemy?**

Blasphemy is defined in *Young’s Analytical Concordance of the Bible* as, “to speak injuriously against.” Blasphemy is similar to slander: it is when someone uses speech to try to bring something exceedingly high down to a base level, or, said another way, when someone speaks of something holy in an irreverent manner.

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\* This article is a full reproduction of Appendix I from my book, *Hidden Treasure-Jesus’s Message of Transformation*, iUniverse, 2011.

† Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible.

## **The Holy Spirit**

Christian scriptures tell us that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, though three distinct persons, are essentially one. How are we to understand this? The best way is to look at it in terms of a practical example. Let's take water, which can exist in three states—liquid, solid (ice), and gas (water vapor). These three states of water are each distinct, but they are nevertheless one and the same. In similar manner, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three different states of the Divine. These three modalities exist to maximize our access to the redemptive power of the Divine.

The Holy Spirit is understood as a “person” of the Holy Trinity. Although it is not a “thing” in the sense that we can point to it and say “there it is,” we can nevertheless make reference to its effects.

If we understand salvation as a process of renewal and growth of personal consciousness toward the Universal, the role of Christ in “salvation” can be best understood as the principle of renewing life, while the role of the Holy Spirit must be understood as the reconciling principle of God that lives in each of us. In this reconciliation role, the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost in the King James Version) is our inner guide, awakening and leading us to the divine source that is our heritage. If, for whatever reason, we set up an opposition to this guide, then we render it of no effect.

## **Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (BATHS)**

When someone blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, he or she maintains an inner posture that is prejudiced against the revelation of the Spirit that can emerge from within. So, to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is not a single act per se, but a state of consciousness. When we are in this state of consciousness, we are inaccessible to the reconciling work of the Holy Spirit.

But how can we blaspheme against an internal guide, a force that prompts us from within? We can do so by maliciously opposing the manifestations of this force, especially without justification. In the West Indies, where I grew up, people had a colloquial expression to describe the general attitude of those set against seeing anyone progress, even though they themselves had no interest in advancing. The local people called such an attitude “bad-mindedness.” Bad-mindedness was also used to describe those who were opposed to your progress, even if they did not reap a benefit from their efforts or your failure. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could be seen as a form of bad-mindedness, but on a more serious level, in that we turn against the manifestations of God acting in us.

Recall that in Mark, after performing a miraculous healing, Jesus was accused of casting out demons and consequently of being in league with Beelzebub, the prince of demons. More than anything, this was a stupid and malicious accusation because common sense alone should have told the accuser that the statement could not be

true. As Jesus retorted, “How can Satan cast out Satan?”

It is interesting, though, that this malicious accusation was not interpreted by Jesus as an attack on him personally, but as an attack on the Holy Spirit. That’s because the workings of the Holy Spirit were being impugned and reviled—or spoken of injuriously. Jesus pointed out something disingenuous in the accusation: the accuser, instead of acknowledging that he had witnessed something miraculous and was in the presence of something wondrous, shut down his own perception, resorting to a bogus interpretation of what he had observed.

This same psychological dynamic occurs whenever we have insight into truth, but refrain from acknowledging it on account of what it might require of us. Such reluctance to surrender to the truth that is perceived can lead to a split between the part of us that knows (the knowing self) and the part of us that feels (the feeling self). The knowing self is aware of truth, but the feeling self refuses to go along and be won over, inventing bogus arguments to justify its refusal. Each of us knows how frustrating it is when we’re engaged in a debate with someone who, at a certain point, puts up a counterargument that he knows in his heart of hearts to be false. But he makes it anyway, just to score points. This is what it means to be disingenuous.

To blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is to maliciously oppose the work of God to reconcile the world to himself, and a world that includes oneself. Indeed, the reconciliation of the world to God can only be accomplished one person at a time. The Holy Spirit is the force by which God opens our hearts and makes us each aware of the path to our divine heritage. To see this force at work, and then to marshal our cognitive faculties to repudiate and discredit it, is the equivalent of someone in a flood refusing a lifeline. When we oppose the Holy Spirit—God’s agency of reconciliation—in this manner, we establish an internal, intra-psychic opposition to the single force that can draw us closer to God. This opposition then expresses itself in one becoming prejudicial against all things truly spiritual.

Ironically, opposing the work of the Holy Spirit does not necessarily mean that one is anti-religious. Indeed, we may show the outer signs of religiosity, but draw the line when the profession of religion requires sacrifices, particularly sacrifices of the old order—things that buttress our ego-bound sense of self. This old, ego-bound self is master of its universe and it does not want to surrender control to the emergent power of the Spirit. Therefore, there is an aspect of defensiveness in such opposition to the Holy Spirit. In organizing against the influence of the Holy Spirit, we are really trying to protect the status quo, not realizing that it is at the expense of something greater; because in organizing against the Holy Spirit, we’re organizing our personal energies against our own best interests.

## **The Unforgivable Sin (UFS)**

The consequence of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit is stated most dramatically in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. For example, while the English Standard Version simply states that BATHS is “an eternal sin,” the KJV drives home the point, saying that one cannot be forgiven of the offence either in “this world or the world to come.” Many other acts classified as sin in this world would not be considered sins in “the world to come” because they would become nonissues. But blasphemy against the Holy Spirit won’t be forgiven because it will disallow us from being drawn to God, and forgiveness can only occur when we are open to the embrace of the Divine. We can’t be forgiven in the world to come because we won’t be there; our negative intra-psychic dynamic would prevent us from getting to the kind of relationship that characterizes that world. In Matthew 13:12, Jesus speaks eloquently to the psychological dynamic that is created when we create internal barriers against our own redemption:

For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. (Matthew 13:12)

If we organize our psyche to protect against awareness, not only do we not go forward, but we also fall back. Carl Jung touched upon a fundamental spiritual insight when he said that the human psyche has a natural gradient toward wholeness,<sup>‡</sup> which suggests that it takes definite effort to thwart the movement of the soul toward the Divine. In simpler and more religious terms, it is natural for us to want to acquire self-knowledge, and with that, knowledge of the source of our origins, which is divine; and when we shut down this natural capacity for inquiry, we frustrate the work of the Holy Spirit.

BATHS cannot be forgiven because it is not a single act. It is not some debt that can just be written off. It is a posture in one’s consciousness, or a “dynamic.” A dynamic is a set of self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing actions in which one action leads to another, like some perpetual-motion machine. If we are caught up in the psychological dynamic of evading truth when confronted with it, the situation can only go from bad to worse, such that we will find it ever harder and harder to extricate ourselves from it.

At a psychological level, when we receive forgiveness for an offence, we become the recipient of more energy, which assists us in returning to a state of wholeness. However, with BATHS, even if we were forgiven, any additional energy introduced

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<sup>‡</sup> I’ve been unable to find a direct quote from Jung’s *Collected Works* on this point, though I distinctly recall reading it in the 1980s when I studied his writings in-depth. I can only surmise that the sticky notes I used at the time to mark passages in the various volumes in my collection could have been removed inadvertently. I can still recall how impactful I found this comment at the time of reading it.

would be coopted to serve the psychological complex of truth-avoidance. Thus, we are caught in a psychological situation that cannot benefit from having more energy introduced. It is as if the personality were caught up in a vortex from which it cannot be extricated—and this situation itself is the “unforgivable sin.” Short of the old personality structure dying, it cannot be reconciled. But as long as the unhealthy dynamic persists, it will continue to block the reconciling work that the Holy Spirit is trying to accomplish in us.

Clearly, to commit the UFS is to act against our own spiritual interest. So what would prompt someone to do so? I can think of several possibilities, such as fear of the unknown or fear of change—being too heavily vested in the status quo. Essentially, we commit the UFS when we put doctrine above revelation and when we value conformity more than obedience to the inner promptings of the Spirit. We are, in effect, relying on our own righteousness. As such, we run the danger of living a form of religious life that is unable to bear spiritual fruit. And since we are not available and responsive to the Spirit, we stagnate.

BATHS is a more common occurrence than we might want to think, seeing that its consequences are so severe. However, since this sin is a dynamic in consciousness, it can be corrected—but only by the offender and not by any outside agency. That’s why it is an unforgivable sin—because it is not within God’s sphere of influence to end this psychic campaign against the Holy Spirit. If it were within his sphere, this would violate an individual’s free will. God is all merciful, but there is one thing he cannot do, and that is to make up our minds for us.

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