

# STUDY MATERIALS: Moral Theology: Biblical Foundations

Rev. Benedict M. Ashley, O.P.

**Terms of Use.** Catholic Thinkers media is copyrighted material. However, we have made it free with the expectation that it will be shared and used by many. If you share what you see here, please acknowledge your source, and send people our way to find more. You or your organization may not benefit financially from use of our media without written consent. Please [continue reading](#) for full terms of use, and contact us with questions or requests: [info@catholicthinkers.org](mailto:info@catholicthinkers.org)

## Contents

- [1a. The Revision of Moral Theology](#)
- [1b. Is There a Specifically Christian Ethics?](#)
- [2a. The Moral Teaching of the Mosaic Covenant](#)
- [2b. The Prophets and Old Testament Morality](#)
- [3a. The Morality of the Renewed Covenant](#)
- [3b. The Communion of Saints](#)
- [4a. The Development of Moral Doctrine](#)
- [4b. The Church's Infallible Moral Teaching](#)
- [5a. Faith: Root of All Virtues](#)
- [5b. Faith and Prudence](#)
- [6a. Hope: Time and Eternity](#)
- [6b. Hope, Temperance, and Fortitude](#)
- [7a. Love: The Unity of Christian Life](#)
- [7b. Love and Justice](#)
- [8a. Christian Life in the Modern World](#)
- [8b. The Splendor of Moral Truth](#)

---

## 1a. The Revision of Moral Theology

Vatican II said in its Decree on *the Training of Priests (Optatus Totius)*, 1965 n.16:

Special care should be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific presentation should draw more fully on the teaching of Holy Scripture and should throw light on the exalted vocation of the faithful in Christ and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world.

Why was this necessary? In the Church before the rise of the universities in the thirteenth century Christian morality was always presented on a Scriptural basis. The actual precepts of morality in the Bible were commented on and illustrated by the various narratives, historical and fictional, by which the Bible illustrates these moral lessons. This was true of the Patristic Period (100 AD to about 500) when moral theology was generally expressed in homiletic or polemic form mainly by bishops. It continued to be true of the Monastic Period (about 600 to 1200) when moral theology tended to take the form of spiritual meditations on growth in holiness. In the High Middle Ages (1200-1300) in the newly founded universities, however, theology more and more took on the *systematic* form necessary for academic teaching. For such academic purposes the extensive work of the Greek philosophers Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics on the classification of the virtues was found very helpful. Nevertheless the students of theology did not take up these systematic studies until they had first studied the Bible for three or four years. Hence the teacher could presuppose that his constant references to the Scriptures to ground moral theology were understood by the students. This type of systematization of biblical data on morals is brilliantly exemplified in the Second Part of the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas that closely follows Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* but with ample biblical references. Moreover in the Third Part Christ is shown to be the historical realization of all the virtues.

In the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance (1300-1600) universities became dominated by quarrels between the religious orders and by Nominalism which so exaggerated logical systematization that it took the pastoral life out of moral theology. Nominalism tended to reduce morality to a system of laws whose obligation depends not on whether actions are beneficial or harmful to human persons but on the power of the legislator to decree and enforce them. God came to be pictured after the likeness of the despotic kings who were at that time establishing centralized governments over the new nation-states in place of feudalism. In reaction to arid legalism outside the universities there arose an enthusiasm for personal mystical experience. The Bible began to be studied more, but less for its consistent teaching and more for its literary and inspirational qualities. Finally, this renewed emphasis on individual religious experience and personal conscience became so exaggerated as to produce the Reformation. This Protestant movement tended to by-pass the Sacred Moral Tradition of the Church as the context in which the Bible should be read, and to read the Bible, usually interpreted very literally,

for its capacity to inspire individual faith in God's mercy to the individual. This could result in an enthusiastic pietism as in the Radical reformation, or in a pessimism about the possibility of progress in virtue and hence passive reliance on God's forgiveness as in Lutheranism, or in a moral rigorism as proof of one's election by God in Calvinism.

With the Catholic Reformation, the Council of Trent, and the foundation of seminaries for priestly education in the 1500's, though Nominalism had become obsolete, its *voluntaristic* or legalistic view of morality continued to have influence. This was partly due to the context of religious wars between Catholics and Protestants which led the Catholic Church to emphasize strict obedience to moral rules as authoritative without much tendency to show their source. But it was more importantly due to the new emphasis on more frequent confession and the seminary training of priests to hear confessions that occasioned the production of "manuals" of moral theology listing moral rules and classification of sins. This legalistic type of moral theology, because it reflected much pastoral experience dominated moral theology until Leo XIII revived the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas in 1880 after which moral theology began to be more and more centered on growth in the virtues culminating in the virtue of charity. Yet even now many Catholics retain the manuals' grim legalistic view of Christian morality. Thus when Vatican II called for a revision of moral theology on a more biblical basis, it was not asking an abandonment of Aquinas but a return to the sources of biblical, patristic, and monastic morality and spirituality which he synthesized.

Yet it is not so easy to take moral theology as it has developed over the centuries and as it preserves a rich fund of pastoral experience and systematic reflection and again reduce it to its rather remote biblical foundations. An example of this is the teaching of the Church against contraception and abortion that in fact are not explicitly condemned anywhere in the Bible! As regards abortion, of course, one might quote, "Thou shall not kill," but since the Bible does permit killing in war, in self defense, and capital punishment, and nowhere specifically says that the fetus is a human person, how can we base these Church teachings in Scripture?

Moreover, modern biblical criticism has made us more acutely aware than were scholars in the past that the books of the Bible were written over a very long period of time, by a variety of authors, and were often modified. Thus what they say is *historically conditioned*. What are we to think, for example, of the command of God in the Deuteronomy for the Israelites to kill their enemies, men, women, and children! Or how can we explain that Jesus forbade divorce and remarriage when the inspired law of Moses had permitted it and, after Jesus, St. Paul again permitted it in the case of a convert whose spouse refused conversion? From such cases people argue today that while the Bible forbade homosexual relations, today with knowledge that this orientation is not necessarily the fault of the couple, that the Church should permit same-sex marriages, etc. And if this is the case does the Bible really give us anything but a very general foundation, such as "do what is loving," for a system of morality?

Some theologians argue that since biblical moral teaching is time conditioned, to separate out what is timeless and still applicable in our day, it is necessary to resort to

natural law reasoning. Thus St. Thomas Aquinas says that the Ten Commandments, although revealed by God to Moses, are also nothing more than precepts of the natural law and hence can be discovered by human reason without biblical revelation. Hence these modern theologians argue that moral theology is really nothing more than philosophical ethics and that it can, therefore, dispense with a biblical foundation.

These objections are serious but in the following lectures I will show that Vatican II was not mistaken in calling for a biblical foundation to moral theology and that these objections can be satisfactorily resolved.

## Readings

For this Lesson 1 A read the following:

1. Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*. This reading explains the teaching of the Church on the Inspiration and Inerrancy of the Bible and its relation to Sacred Tradition.
2. The Pontifical Biblical Commission (with a foreword of recommendation by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger), "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," *Origins*, 23, n.29 (Jan. 6, 1994): 499-524. An evaluation of the various current methods of exegesis.

## Questions

1. Why is a revision of moral theology necessary today?
2. Why must moral theology be based on the Bible?
3. How is the foundation of moral theology in the Bible related to Sacred Tradition?
4. What does it mean to say that Bible moral precepts are "historically conditioned?"
5. What have been the historic stages of the development of Catholic moral theology?

---

## 1b. Is There a Specifically Christian Ethics?

The Pontifical Biblical Commission warns that according to the Sacred Tradition of the Catholic Church the Bible is not to be read as "biblical fundamentalists" read it, that is, without considering the different literary genres and the historical contexts in which its

different parts were written. At the same time the Church unambiguously affirms that the Bible is the *inspired word of God*. Therefore as *a whole and in all its parts it contains no error*, when it is properly read as God its principal author intended it to be understood and as the Sacred Tradition of the Church interprets it. Vatican II says in *Dei Verbum* that to properly interpret the Bible we must always keep in mind that the Divine Author's intention was to communicate to us a "*religious message of salvation*" not historical or scientific information except as these are directly relevant to this religious message. Thus it is a certain historic fact that Jesus was crucified. On the other hand the seven days of creation in *Genesis* 1 need not be understood as historical facts. This is because it is evident from its literary genre and comparison with other creation accounts of the time that the religious message of the text is only that God is the Creator who has made the world very good and that humanity is created in his image. It does not claim to know just how creation took place and God has us to explore this question by the methods of science. Likewise the moral teachings of the Bible were often given in particular historical circumstances. Hence we must always seek the moral *principle* that is being applied and not confuse it with modern applications of that principle that may be quite different because of the different circumstances. For example St. Paul tells the women in the church of Corinth that they should cover their heads with a veil (the word is disputed by scholars) at the liturgical assemblies (1 Cor 11:13-16). The principle here is that Christians at worship should observe the customs of the country that indicate reverence, so as not to disturb others in the assembly. This was especially important because the enemies of the Christians spread rumors that these private assemblies were actually orgies. Perhaps some of the charismatic women in the Corinthian Church made a spectacle of themselves when praying with charismatic emotionalism. In any case Paul's advice is a pastoral *application* to a particular situation. Today that application is obsolete, but the principle that the conduct of worship should respect the customs of time and place remains valid for all times and places.

As was said in Lesson 1, some theologians also think that the moral precepts of the Bible are so conditioned by the historical circumstances in which they were given that they are no longer obligatory in our times. Hence there is no specifically Christian ethics, but morality must be determined by human reason as it transcends time and place and is common to believers and non-believers. At the most, they say, the New Testament highlights certain "values" such as "love your neighbor" that can be known by reason but are often neglected. The way these values are practically realized is a matter of creativity and personal responsibility.

But is it possible that Jesus, who came to teach us the truth about God, did not also teach how to live for God! Of course it is true that the moral precepts of the Old Testament (Mosaic Law) are imperfect. But in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) Jesus interprets the Old Law for us when he repeatedly says, "It was said to you of old . . . but I say to you." Yet he does not abolish the Law; instead he says (Matthew 5:17-20) that "not the least letter of the law will pass away until all is fulfilled." Thus he teaches that (1) the moral law must not only be obeyed externally but internally by the right motives; (2) the ceremonies of the Old Law and its government regulations were given to the Jews until the fulfillment of the promises of the Messiah. After that they are

no longer binding because their purpose has been accomplished. The *Acts of the Apostles* makes clear that first St. Peter and then St. Paul understood Jesus teaching in this way. Finally, (3) Jesus teaches that though the moral Law of Moses still holds it must now take on a more perfect form than the Jews had been able to accept. For example, under the Mosaic Law men (but not women) had been permitted to divorce their spouses, provided they fulfilled legal requirements. Jesus, however, told his disciples that both men and women were forbidden to divorce and remarry.

When St. Thomas Aquinas said that the Ten Commandments of the Old Law are simply natural law, he meant that they are *materially* the same. According to him, however, the way any law is applied is in view of the *end to be achieved* and it is this relation to the ultimate goal of life that qualifies the law *formally*. Human reason directs us to the merely natural end of human happiness, but the Gospel revelation directs us to the supernatural end of intimate life in the Trinity. Hence it is false to say that Christian morality is nothing more than natural law ethics. It includes natural law ethics whose reasoning about human nature is often a great help in understanding God's revelation. Yet the Christian is called to live as Jesus did, a life that is not only human but also divine and can be discovered only in the light of Divine Revelation.

God's revelation is given to us through the Bible and Tradition taken together, as Vatican II in *Dei Verbum* made clear. In interpreting the Bible we must not cite isolated texts, but must interpret the parts by the whole and the whole by the parts. "The Bible is its own interpreter." This is what is called "Canon Criticism," taking the whole canon of the Bible into account in understanding any part of it. It is also the method of "the hermeneutic circle" in which back and forth the whole of the text explains its parts and these parts explain the whole. There are many human authors of the Bible but the One Author, the Holy Spirit, who knew what the whole canon would be, inspired it all. The Church, the People of God, through the Pope and Bishops, authoritatively canonized the Bible and its inspiration. Only in the light of the Magisterium that judges the development of understanding in the Christian Community and sifts out the wheat of true faith from the chaff of human opinion can we really understand God's teachings.

In considering the moral teaching of the Bible in subsequent lessons, we will consider (1) the Old Testament, (2) the New Testament, (3) Doctrinal Development in Sacred Tradition. Then we will consider the three specifically Christian virtues of (4) Faith, (5) Hope, (6) Love. Finally, (7) we will consider the situation of Christian morals today.

## Readings

1. Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, Chapter 1, pp. 1-13.
2. Begin to use Raymond Brown, *Responses to 101 Questions on the Bible*.

## Questions

1. Why and how is there a specifically Christian Ethics?

2. What is Canon Criticism and the hermeneutic circle?
  3. Why must the Bible be read in the context of Sacred Tradition?
  4. What is the difference between the principle of a biblical command and its application in the Bible?
  5. Give examples of how the Ten Commandments are applied in different ways in different circumstances but are always true in principle.
- 

## 2a. The Moral Teaching of the Mosaic Covenant

In the Old Testament God (Dt 30) entered into a Covenant with the Jews to witness him as the One Creator and offered them the choice of the "Way of Life" or the "Way of Death."

God said to Israel, "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him" (Dt 30:19-20).

Thus the Way of Life is that which leads to true and lasting happiness because it is in conformity with the design given to his creation by a wise and loving Creator. We must remember that the laws of the Old Testament were essentially directed to preparing the Chosen People for the coming of Jesus. Originally Israel had the crude and even brutal morality of the surrounding nations and had to be led to a higher morality step by step, and even then resisted this Law and disobeyed it. If we understand this gradual education of Israel by God we will not think of Old Testament Laws as merely "do's" and "do not's" but truly as a Way of Life. They are life affirming and a rabbi once said to me that a pious Jew wants to live long so that he can perform more *mitzvot* or duties of the Law, because each is an act of love and worship of God. If one reads Psalm 119 one will get a sense of this wonderful spirituality. The Psalmist says "I find joy in the way of your decrees more than in all riches" (v.14).

The Way of Life was given to the Jews in the Torah (Instruction) or Old Law centered in the Ten Commandments. Thus the whole of the Old Testament is unified by the concept of the *Covenant (Testament)* between God and his Chosen People and their obligations under this Covenant to witness to the One God to all nations is summed up in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17 and Dt 5:6-21). The many other moral, ritual, and judicial commands scattered through the *Pentateuch* have as their purpose to assist in the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments. These Commandments, therefore, are the key to interpreting the whole Old Testament. The hope for a Messiah that grows clearer and

clearer in the course of Old Testament history and prophecy is for an Anointed King, Prophet, and Priest who will finally help the people truly fulfill this Covenant. The theme of Wisdom that is also prominent in the Old Testament identifies "Wisdom" (personified as a Woman) with the *order* God has given to Creation and the Law that he has given to his people to help them know and conform to that order. Thus all creation becomes a praise of the wise and loving God.

The Ten Commandments were specified for the Jews in (1) moral laws; (2) ritual laws; (3) judicial laws. These had a long historical development, the tendency of which was to make them more and more just and specific. The moral laws are essentially the Ten Commandments. The judicial laws provide an order suitable for the Jewish People as a nation so that it can carry out these moral laws and give witness to other nations. The ritual or ceremonial laws are essentially symbolic (like sacraments of the New Testament). Their purpose is help the Jews develop a virtuous way of life in accordance with the moral commands, but they also have prophetic significance looking forward to the days of the Messiah. For example, the prescribed sacrifices taught the Jews to keep the first three commandments of reverence to God but they also mysteriously symbolized Jesus' Sacrifice on the Cross. Hence, though Christians no longer practice the judicial and ritual prescriptions they still have a deep spiritual meaning for us.

The dry prescriptions of the Law are given vivid life by the narratives of the Bible, both the historical ones as in the *Pentateuch* along with *Joshua*, *Judges*, and *Ruth*, 1 and 2 *Samuel*, 1 and 2 *Kings*, 1 and 2 *Chronicles*, *Ezra*, *Nehemiah*, 1 and 2 *Maccabees*, but also by what are probably edifying semi-fictional narratives, *Tobit*, *Judith*, *Esther*, *Jonah*, and *Job*. As Jesus was to use fictional parables, so these stories help us to understand the Way of Life and why departure from it is a Way of Death.

The Law was also enriched by the Wisdom Literature which besides *Job*, already mentioned, are *Psalms*, *Proverbs*, *Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)*, *The Song of Songs*, *Wisdom*, and *Sirach*, that express in poetry or proverbs the rich moral experience of the Chosen People and praise the Creator and his Way of Life as a guide to true happiness. In reading these we should take into account that they are poetry and pithy sayings, often with a touch of humor or satire, and are not to be taken too literally. Rather they express attitudes and feelings, sometimes with rhetorical exaggeration, that help us appreciate the beauty of right living and the ugliness and folly of the Way of Death.

Therefore it is a mistake to think of much of the Old Testament as boring and irrelevant to our present life. It is also a mistake to attempt to apply it to present life without taking account of the fact that, for the Christian, the Old Testament must always be read in terms of the New Testament. Scholars often object to this because they are concerned, and rightly so, with understanding these texts in their original setting. That is necessary and useful but it is incomplete since these books of the Old Testament are not just ancient texts. They are the living word of the living God given for all people and all time and hence their ultimate theological meaning cannot be separated from the ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ. For example, as we read the *Psalms* it is helpful to first see them as they were read by those who wrote them, but ultimately we must read them as



Jesus' own prayers. Thus on the Cross Jesus recited Psalm 22. It is by loving what Jesus loves and hating the sin that Jesus hates, because it is an injury to God's creatures, that we come to think and act as he does.

## Readings

1. Finish Brown, *101 Questions*.
2. Begin, Roland Murphy, *101 Questions on Biblical Torah*.

## Questions

1. What do you understand by "the Way of Life and the Way of Death?"
2. Can you explain how the Ten Commandments sum up all the rest of the moral Torah?
3. How do the narratives of the Bible illustrate the Law?
4. What is Wisdom Literature? Give examples of how it supports the Law?
5. What are some moral teachings in the *Book of Tobit*? If this book is, as many scholars think, a fictional short story, how can it teach morality?

---

## 2b. The Prophets and Old Testament Morality

The Old Testament not only gives us moral norms but exhorts and encourages us to live by these norms by its promise of happiness if they are observed and of the consequences of going on the Way of Death. Furthermore it gives many examples of how to apply these norms in different situations. This is *casuistry* or moral instruction by describing concrete cases and showing the consequences of good and bad behavior. Gradually in Israel there grew up a class of expert lawyers whose business was to study and interpret the law and advise people that were called *rabbis* (masters). Their methods were much like later canon lawyers since they followed the legal hermeneutic of interpreting the law in the light of *precedence* or decisions by earlier rabbis of special note and accepted authority.

Thus a large body of tradition developed which after the time of Christ (about 200 AD) was written down as the *Mishnah*. Further decisions were added to this to form the *Palestinian Talmud* (c. 400) and the *Babylonian Talmud* (c. 600). This *Oral Tradition* is considered by Orthodox Jews today to be of equal inspiration with the Hebrew Scriptures. Since, however, this tradition originated with the Pharisees whose

teaching Jesus in part disapproved of, it has never been accepted by the Church as a guide, though it is of much interest to scholars and helps us to understand the Jewish cultural context of the Hebrew Scriptures. In the Middle Ages the Old Testament Laws were codified by a great rabbinical scholar Rambam (Moses Ben Maimon, in Latin Maimonides, d. 1205), the Jewish parallel to the Christian Thomas Aquinas. He also formulated a Creed of 13 articles for Orthodox Judaism. Yet among Jews there is no central authority to interpret the Law, but only consensus among particular groups of rabbis.

While an interpretation and casuistic interpretation of the Old Law was legitimate and indeed necessary (Jesus himself debates with the Pharisees in a rabbinic manner) it had the dangers of becoming legalistic. "Legalism" means to lose sight of the purpose of a law, to quibble about its wording so as to find loopholes in it, and to be more concerned about small matters than about the great ones. Against these tendencies and especially against the idea that external ritual observance was as important as sincere obedience to the moral precepts of the Law, the prophets of Israel proclaimed the words of God, "What care I for the number of your sacrifices . . . Put away your misdeeds before my eyes, cease doing evil, learn to do good" (Is 1:11a, 16b-17). Moreover even good deeds require the right intention of the heart. This does not mean, however, that good intentions alone make good actions. What is required is that one does what is right with the right intention. One must intend always the true *goal* of life, love of God and neighbor, and to reach that goal choose only means that will really lead to it.

The tragic experience of the Chosen People, however, was that they were as a people not faithful to their Covenant with God, although a holy Remnant remained faithful. As a result their nation was divided and hence first Israel in the north was conquered by the Assyrians and later Judah in the south was conquered by the Babylonians and the leading officials of Jerusalem were carried into a sixty-year exile. On their return the country was weak and poor and under Persian and then Greek and finally Roman domination.

The prophets, however gave hope to the people that a Messiah, or Anointed King, who would be the greatest of prophets and a priest, would some day come to restore the nation, provided they prepared to receive him by a strict observance of the Law. Yet only gradually did the Jews come to realize through the consequences of disobedience, such as the Exile in Babylonia, how destructive was wandering off into the Way of Death.

At the time of Jesus there was no clear religious unity among the people, who were divided into different sects, notably the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes, each with different expectations and different interpretations of the Scripture and the Law. Yet many hoped for a Teacher of Righteousness who would speak with authority in explaining the Law. They hoped also that the Messiah would come to establish peace and justice and that God would send his Holy Spirit to cleanse them from sin and enlighten their understanding of the Way of Life. Yet there were many different ideas about the Messiah, as there still are today among Jews, some of whom think that the Messiah is simply a symbol for justice and peace in the world.

Among the prophecies of the Old Testament are the four *Servant Songs* (Is 42:1-9; 49:1:13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12) of Deutero-Isaiah which speak of a mysterious figure who will suffer for his people. Some see in this Servant only a figure of the Chosen People itself, since in its witness to God it also suffers. In the New Testament, however, this Servant is identified with Jesus who dies on the Cross for the salvation of all humankind. No doubt both meanings are intended, but it is in Jesus that the martyrdom of the faithful remnant of the Jews is perfectly realized. The Christian Church as it shares in Christ's suffering servanthood in witness of the Gospel is also symbolized by these Songs. They manifest for us that the Christian way of life is a way of the Cross, since it requires total self-giving to God and neighbor.

### Readings

1. Re-read Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, Chapter I.
2. Roland Murphy, *101 Questions on Biblical Torah*
3. Read in the Bible *The Book of Tobit*.

### Questions

1. What is the relation of the *Prophetic Books* to the *Pentateuch*?
2. Were the prophets and the priests of the Old Testament at odds?
3. What moral principles can one draw from *Judith*?
4. What is a "morality of intention"?
5. What is the difference between objective and subjective morality?

---

### 3a. The Morality of the Renewed Covenant

In Jesus the promises of the prophets that a Messiah, or Anointed One, would come were fulfilled. The Holy Spirit anointed him at his baptism by John the Baptist. He had been sent by God the Father to renew the Covenant for which John had prepared the people by a baptism of repentance. To prepare us for baptism, Jesus, though he was without sin, accepted John's baptism. When John protested Jesus said, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt 3:15). There are, of course, episodes in the Gospels where the Pharisees accuse Jesus of violating the Law. But in fact in all these incidents Jesus is very careful to fulfill the Law, although not always as these particular Pharisees wrongly interpreted it. Jewish scholars point out that it was

on these very points that the rabbis were not all agreed. Jesus who was as human as we are but without sin was also the Son of God, Eternal Wisdom itself. By his word and the example of his life he taught the Way of Life and gave us the grace to turn away from the Way of Death. He did not abolish the Old Law, but with an authority far superior to that of the prophets, he gave to the Law, materially considered, its true interpretation and its true form. This form is the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor as oneself that "fulfills the Law and the prophets." *Matthew* has summed up for us Jesus' moral teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), given in less complete form in *Luke* as the so-called Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6:20-49). In this Sermon two elements of the Old Law disappear, the ritual and judicial precepts, but the moral precepts are renewed and perfected. The emphasis throughout is on the *interior* of morality. Sexual sin begins in the *deliberate will* before it is carried out in action and so for every other sin. Sins are actions that break or weaken our relation with God, usually by doing harm to ourselves or our neighbor, since we cannot love God and be willing to injure his creatures. We are all called to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect, i.e. we are to love God and neighbor with the same love that God loves us. He loved us first and thus gives us the power to love in a similar way in return.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus forbids divorce and remarriage but in Mt 19:1-12 he explains this more fully in a text that gives us the key to the way Jesus interprets all of the Law. The Pharisees quote the text from *Deuteronomy* 24:1-5 that requires a man if he divorces a woman to give her a document so she can marry again. They ask Jesus for what reason is such a divorce permissible, because some rabbis require the reason of adultery, others any light reason, and the Law does not specify. Jesus answers by going back to God's original law in creation (natural law as confirmed by biblical revelation) in *Genesis* 1 and 2 that makes marriage monogamous and indissoluble by either the man or the woman. Thus on the basis of the Old Testament itself he perfects the Mosaic Law by returning to God's original plan for humanity. That plan was directed to immortal life (the fruit of the Tree of Life) and thus had a higher goal that was intrinsic to human nature, since we were created in grace.

By returning to the law of creation Jesus made the Old Law into the new Law which applies not just to Jews but to all humanity. The first Christians, who were Jews at first, had a hard time accepting this completely, and the issue became urgent when non-Jews (Gentiles) began to be converted. St. Peter was the first of the apostles to decide that these Gentiles did not have to practice the ritual and judicial precepts of the Law (see *Acts* 10). Yet even he had his hesitations about its full application, and for some time there were Jewish Christians who continued to practice many of these aspects of the Law. St. Paul, however, when he began his great missionary work decided to insist no longer on circumcisions or the dietary laws and after some debate was supported by the Jerusalem Church (*Acts* 15:1-20) including St. Peter and especially St. James, bishop of the Jerusalem Jewish Christians. In St. Paul's *Epistle to the Galatians* this point is made very vigorously.

The New Testament Epistles often conclude with a section of moral instruction (Torah) that helps us to see how the moral law of the Old Testament now was applied to

Christian living. The focus of these instructions is usually on family morality (*Haustafeln*) since at that time the Church was small, persecuted, and with little social influence except at the family level. This does not mean that social morality was forgotten, as we see in occasional references, but there is actually more in the Old Testament about this than in the New.

The New Testament teaching, because it presupposes the detailed moral teaching of the Old Testament, does not add very many detailed precepts. Instead it puts its emphasis on the development of Christian character through the virtues, since a consistent fulfillment of the moral precepts of the Bible requires development of the virtues. These virtues are gifts of God given to the Christian at baptism, but they cannot be actually realized unless the person uses these virtues to develop the natural virtues that support them. For example, a newly baptized adult has the virtue of truthfulness, but unless he makes an effort to use it in daily life and thus develops the natural virtue of honesty to support it he will become a liar. Thus the virtues given us in grace help us to develop natural virtues of character and to elevate them to the manner in which Jesus himself lived. In the New Testament it is insisted that the specifically Christian virtues which we receive in baptism are *faith, hope, and love* (charity) that are called the "theological virtues" because they relate us directly to God.

The Sacraments, rooted in Baptism, centered in the Eucharist, replace the old ceremonial Law and convey the Holy Spirit and his Gifts. The interior Law of Christ is the indwelling Holy Spirit who as healer, purifier, and guide enables every Christian to bear this "easy yoke" if they are to be "meek and humble of heart" as Jesus was. The shepherding, or pastoral care, and the canon law of the Christian community replace the old judicial law. Christians are a leaven in secular societies working to bring peace and justice. They are especially advocates of the poor, and are not subservient to worldly governments.

### Readings

1. Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, 1964
2. Read *Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy*

### Questions

1. What became of the moral, ritual, and judicial precepts of the Old Law under the New Law?
2. What does it mean to say that the new Law is the "the Law of the Holy Spirit"?
3. Why is the moral instruction of the New Testament so lacking in concrete norms compared with the Old Testament?
4. In what sense did Jesus return to the Law of Creation?

## 5. Is it really possible for us to imitate Christ?

### 3b. The Communion of Saints

Consistent with and in continuity with the whole of *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope John Paul considers "Conscience and Truth" (VS, 54-64) at some length as he did with "Freedom and Truth" (VS, 35-53). The relationship between human freedom and the truth about the good is lived most deeply in the heart of the person, in his "moral conscience" (VS, 54).

The way in which one conceives the relationship between freedom and truth, freedom and law, is intimately connected with the proper understanding of conscience. As above, some try to oppose freedom and law, with freedom so exalted that a so-called "creative conscience" conquers all (VS, 54). Some others tend to reduce conscience to the application of 'general' moral norms but not to concrete particular ones. This 'creative' and 'responsible' voice (sometimes called 'free and faithful') attends not to the precise observance of universal norms but to "the creative and responsible acceptance of personal tasks entrusted to him by God" (VS, 55).

These judgments are indeed 'autonomous', and for some, the sign of moral maturity, some go so far as to say maturity is inhibited by the excessively categorical position adopted by the Church's Magisterium.

For some (often the Proportionalists above) there is even a double status of moral truth (VS, 56). A separation, even opposition, is alleged between the teaching of a precept valid in general, and a particular norm of the individual conscience which of course makes the final decision about good and evil. Some may call this "pastoral," some may call it a "creative hermeneutic," but the result that the deciding subject determines the truth about the good (VS, 56).

VS, 57-59 takes the teachings on conscience in Scripture and through Tradition to elaborate the distinctions above (III:7) and the *Catechism* §§1776-1802. The dignity of moral conscience derives from the truth about the good:

"The judgment of conscience does not establish the law; rather it bears witness to the authority of the natural law and of the practical reason with reference to the supreme good whose attractiveness the human person perceives and whose commandments he accepts" (VS, 60).

"The truth about the moral good, as that truth is declared in the law of reason, is practically and concretely recognized by the judgment of conscience. . . .

Consequently, . . . the link between freedom and truth is made manifest. Precisely for this reason conscience expresses itself in acts of 'judgment' which reflect the truth about the good, and not in arbitrary decisions. The maturity and responsibility of these judgments . . . are not measured by the liberation of conscience from objective truth, in favor of an alleged autonomy in personal decisions, but, on the contrary, by an insistent search for truth and by allowing oneself to be guided by that truth in one's actions" (VS, 61).

"In any event, it is always from the truth that the dignity of conscience derives. . . It is never acceptable to confuse a 'subjective' error about the moral good with the 'objective' truth rationally proposed to man in virtue of his end, or to make the moral value of an act performed with a true and correct conscience equivalent to the moral value of an act performed by following the judgment of an erroneous conscience. It is possible that the evil done as the result of invincible ignorance or a non-culpable error of judgment may not be imputable to the agent; but even in this case it does not cease to be an evil, a disorder in relation to the truth about the good" (VS, 63).

Just as freedom must be rooted in the truth and geared toward the good; so the same linkage is essential for a correct conscience and a correctly formed conscience -- it must conform to and reflect the truth about the good. The unrelenting theme of *Veritatis Splendor* is, of course, the truth.

Over 100 years ago, John Henry Cardinal Newman in his famous Letter to the Duke of Norfolk (Dec. 27, 1874) makes the point that I consider prescient since in the last century he repudiated a favorite distortion of conscience now reigning in this century.

(This Letter of Newman is cited in VS, n.34, footnote #59, and while not cited in VS 58, it makes the same point, as does the *Catechism* #1778, footnote #50). Newman's thought deserves careful study:

"The view of conscience, I know, is very different from that ordinarily taken of it . . . It is founded on the doctrine that conscience is the voice of God, whereas it is fashionable on all hands now to consider it one way or another a creation of man" (p.247).

"The rule or measure of duty is not utility, nor expedience, nor the happiness of the greatest number, nor State convenience, nor fitness, order, and the *pulchrum*. Conscience is not a long-sighted selfishness, nor a desire to be consistent with oneself; but it is a messenger from Him, Who, both in nature and grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by His representatives" (p.248).

"When men advocate the rights of conscience, they in no sense mean the rights of the Creator, nor the duty to Him, in thought and deed, of the creature; but the right of thinking, speaking, writing, and acting, according to their judgment or their humor, without any thought of God at all. They do not even pretend to go by any moral rule, but they demand, what they think is an Englishman's prerogative, for

each to be his own master in all things, and to profess what he pleases, asking no one's leave, and accounting priest or preacher, speaker or writer, unutterably impertinent, who dares to say a word against his going to perdition, if he likes it in his own way."

"Conscience has its rights because it has duties; but in this age, with a large portion of the public, it is the very right and freedom of conscience, to ignore a Lawgiver and Judge, to be independent of unseen obligations. It becomes a license to take up any or no religion, to take up this or that and let it go again, to go to church, to go to chapel, to boast of being above all religions and to be an impartial critic of each of them. Conscience is a stern monitor, but in this century it has been superseded by a counterfeit, which the eighteen centuries prior to it never heard of, and could not have mistaken for it, if they had. It is the right of self will" (p.250).

J.H.Newman, *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching* (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1876) in a Letter to the Duke of Norfolk on the occasion of Mr. Gladstone's Exposition 1874; esp.#5 "Conscience" pp.246-261.

Highly recommended reading: J.Cardinal Ratzinger, *Conscience and Truth* (Braintree, MA: Pope John Center, 1991) 38 pp.

---

#### **4a. The Development of Moral Doctrine**

By *development of doctrine* in the Church is meant that though public revelation was complete with Jesus and the Apostles, the Church's understanding and formulation of this unchangeable doctrine in the course of history can develop positively or even negatively. Positive developments take place when through prayer, experience of Christian living, controversies that reveal false interpretations, etc. the Church comes to see some element in Jesus' teaching more clearly or formulates it more precisely by freeing it of mistaken interpretations or renders it consistent with other formulations. Negative development is when a teaching formerly well understood in the Church becomes to a degree neglected or less clearly formulated. A positive dogmatic example is the Christological definition of Chalcedon that Jesus is a Divine Person having both divine and human natures, occasioned by the heresy of Arius. A positive moral example is the Church's present condemnation of human slavery that for a long time it had not clearly realized was totally inconsistent with New Testament teaching on human dignity. An example of negative moral development was the way for a long time the Church relied on the state to punish heresy. It had not done this in the Early Church and Vatican II has again declared the full meaning of the rights of human conscience.



Therefore John Paul II has called on the members of the Church to acknowledge and renounce some of their past errors in preparation for the Third Millennium. He has mentioned the Vatican's own condemnation of Galileo in scientific matters and the abuses of the Inquisition in moral matters. The Church in its effort to conform to secular notions of legal due process for some time adopted the procedures of Roman Law that required the use of the torture of witnesses to confirm their testimony. Today the Church condemns torture as contrary to human dignity and the natural law.

How are such admissions of error compatible with the teaching of the Church that the Magisterium by reason of the guidance of the Holy Spirit is *infallible* in definitive teachings on faith and *morals*? This question will be discussed in the next lesson. Here I will only note that theologians may and usually do continue to discuss teachings of the Church. They need to do so to determine a teaching's level of authority, to discover its sources in the Bible and Sacred Tradition, to improve its formulation, to show its inter-relation to and consistency with other doctrines -- also to discuss its application to new facts and situations, and even suggest how it could be better taught. All of this scholarly effort contributes to the development of doctrine. Nevertheless, since theology is based on faith, and the bishops and pope alone have their mandate to teach from Christ, they, not the theologians, can alone pass definitive judgment on what is of faith and what is not. Theological opinion not based on this teaching of the Magisterium is not authentic theology, any more than is scientific opinion not based on observed facts real science. Even if theologians discover for *certain* (which history shows is very rare) that the Magisterium has made an error, they ought to present their arguments with humility and in a manner that will not seem to discredit the Magisterium. In particular it is irresponsible of theologians to urge on the faithful dissenting theological opinions as if they had an authority equal to that of the Magisterium. One has only to read such New Testament writings as *2 Peter*, *Jude*, and *1 John* to see that the Early Church already had a problem of theological dissent, and the inspired writers urge all to adhere to the Church's official witness to the Gospel.

Some theologians have acted as if a doctrine that is not solemnly and infallibly defined by the extraordinary teaching of the popes or an ecumenical council is free not only for discussion but for dissent and even for campaigns in the media to force the Magisterium to change. They forget that before pope or bishops declare a doctrine as infallible they must be certain that it is the faith of the whole Church. They have no authority simply to define personal opinions. This is why Vatican I in defining papal infallibility said that it was participation by the pope in the same infallibility that Christ promised to his Church. Hence, when in the process of doctrinal development, it becomes evident that a doctrine is with high probability or even certainty explicitly or implicitly contained in the Bible and/or Sacred Tradition, it becomes irresponsible to dissent from such a doctrine. While in this case dissent, since it is not directly against faith, is not formal heresy, it is a refusal to be guided by the Church who according to the Faith is our best guide. Those who so dissent must take this responsibility on themselves before God and cannot claim that they have a right as Catholics to do so.

The Church has never solemnly defined that abortion is a sin. Yet, John Paul II in *The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae)*, declares that the Sacred Tradition has rightly interpreted the revealed Biblical Commandment, "Thou shall not kill," to mean that, "It is always wrong to directly kill an innocent human being." Thus, for example, a Catholic cannot defend President Harry Truman's dropping of the atom bomb on the plea that it saved American lives. We cannot directly kill the innocent, as Truman did, no matter how good our intention. Yet also Canon Law forbids us to accuse other Catholics of *formal* heresy without being sure that they are really denying Church doctrine in a stubborn way after they have been correctly informed. We should always make allowances that perhaps the person in question although mistaken is subjectively in good conscience (*material* heresy).

Some theologians have argued that since solemn declarations of the Magisterium that a truth is divinely revealed have in most cases had to do with dogma not morals, therefore very little of the Church's moral teaching is infallible. This is not true, since from the beginning of Church history the Church has included in its catechizing of adults to be baptized a detailed moral teaching based on the Bible. This Sacred Tradition is taught by the ordinary teaching of the universal Magisterium and hence does not require further definition to be known to be revealed or closely connected with revelation and hence infallible. Thus, that to hate all Jews is a sin has never been taught by the Church by an infallible declaration, yet it has always taught that Mary, Joseph, Jesus and the Apostles were Jews and that God's promises to the Jews are inviolable (Rm 12:25-26).

Thus after Vatican II the pope, after consulting all the bishops, issued the *Catechism of the Catholic Faith* to provide all members of the Church with a clear and safe guide to conscience. In the *Catechism* Part I is devoted to the Creed, Part II to the Sacraments and Liturgy, Part III to Life in Christ, and Part IV to Christian Prayer. Thus Part III is a systematic treatment of Christian living, which is empowered by prayer as explained in Part IV.

## Readings

1. Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, Chapter 2, pp.41-88.

## Questions

1. Why can the Church never change the moral teachings of Jesus and the Apostles?
2. What is the role of the *sensus fidelium* in the development of moral doctrine in the Church? Why does Vatican II prefer the term *sensus fidei*?
3. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the development of moral doctrine?
4. What is the role of the Magisterium in the development of moral doctrine?

5. Do you think there can be a development of doctrine that in the future will permit the practice of contraception?

#### 4b. The Church's Infallible Moral Teaching

Since, as was shown in the last lesson, Church doctrine develops without ceasing to be true to Jesus' original unchangeable teaching, it should be clear why at any given period of history there are different levels of certitude in the teaching of pope and bishops (Magisterium). (1) Some teachings form the *ordinary teaching* of the whole college of bishops headed by the Pope as revealed to faith, for example that the Jews are God's Chosen People. All Catholics must believe these revealed truths on divine faith as infallibly true and essentially unchangeable. (Note that it is not sufficient just that they be universally taught but it is required they be taught to be *revealed by God*). (2) Sometimes controversies arise over these ordinary teachings (such as the Arian heresy) or the Magisterium thinks it inspiring to emphasize some particular truth (such as Mary's Immaculate Conception and Assumption). Then either an ecumenical council of the bishops with the pope's consent or the pope on his own authority may declare that this is a revealed truth by a solemn or *extraordinary definition*. The infallibility of such extraordinary teaching is thus made evident to all Catholics even if they would not have been sure that as ordinary teaching of the Magisterium it had the universality and basis in revelation that would make it evidently infallible.

Besides these two levels of infallible teaching that must be received on divine faith, there is also teaching that is not itself divinely revealed, yet if it were false would either result in the contradiction of some infallible teaching, or would make the Church unable to define its teachings as credible. For example, although the Bible does not speak of modern science, to hold that modern science has proved that miracles are impossible contradicts the revealed truth that Jesus worked miracles. It also makes it impossible for the Church to defend the credibility of the faith by the "moral miracle" of the Church. When the Church corrects such assertions this teaching is also infallible because otherwise none of the Church's teaching could be infallible, since all could be contradicted. However, since these corrections as such are not revealed, they do not require the assent of divine faith, but only the obedience of mind and will to the Church guidance.

Other teachings of the Church are *not* known to be infallible and might someday require some correction or re-formulation. This does not mean, however, that Catholics are free to deny them if in fact the development of doctrine at a given stage of history has made it very probable or even certain that they are revealed or are closely connected to such revealed truths. Thus before the Council of Chalcedon infallibly defined that Jesus is a Divine Person with a divine and human nature, it was clear to most Christians that this

was a revealed truth by which they lived and for which they were willing to die. On the other hand, there can be teachings of the Magisterium for which there has not yet been sufficient doctrinal development to be sure that they could not be changed in the future. An example might be John Paul II's teaching on capital punishment as contrary to human dignity. Yet, again this does not mean that a Catholic may simply reject such teachings. In fact all Magisterial teachings must be received with an obedience of mind and will, not because we are sure they are revealed and therefore infallible, but out of obedience to the Magisterium as our surest guide on the Way of Life. Magisterial teachings always have greater authority than any human opinion, even that of the most distinguished theologians. I pointed out in the last lesson that in non-infallible teachings there is a possibility, though a generally remote one, of error, and that a theologian who is certain should point this out in a way that does not cause scandal. This is why John Paul II can now admit that a Pope made a mistake in the Galileo case, or that previous warnings against certain historical views of biblical scholars or Darwinian evolution are to be corrected. These mistakes did not pertain to infallible teachings of levels (1) and (2) above, but resulted from an incomplete development of doctrine and the acceptance by popes of too hasty opinions of theologians. Though they did serious harm, this in time has been corrected. In the meantime they were a safer guide for the conscience of Catholics than were the half-truths of science that even when correct had to be received with caution because it was not yet clear they were really true. As the government controls experimental drugs before they have been thoroughly tested, so the Church must proceed with caution to protect its Sacred Tradition.

In the development of doctrine the whole Church plays a necessary part. The Bible and Sacred Tradition are handed down not only through the pope and bishops but through the whole faithful, especially parents in instructing their children in the Faith. Moreover, ordinary Christians, as well as learned theologians, and saints with mystical gifts, and the events of history that put truth to the test, all play a part in the development of doctrine. Yet as this positive development takes place there must be an authority that by the aid of the Holy Spirit can discern, judge, and declare what is authentic and what is not, separating the wheat from the chaff. It must do this with increasing certitude and finally with authority or the Church itself could not be infallible as Jesus promised it would be, saying, "Teach all nations . . . I am with you until the end of the ages" (Mt 28:16-20). History shows that in fact the teaching of the Catholic Church has been consistently the same for two thousand years, while in the Christian churches that have separated from her there has been division after division and no clear and consistent understanding of what Jesus taught.

Note that in development of moral doctrine the changes have usually not been the direction of relaxing moral principles or norms to accommodate a desire for "freedom" in the sense of doing what one pleases. That kind of relaxation in society means a lowering of moral standards and an increase of selfish autonomy and leads to social irresponsibility. Instead development is usually in the direction of (a) applying Gospel norms more *consistently*; (b) applying Gospel norms more *precisely* in view of the actual facts. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for "straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel," i.e. lacking a sense of priorities which is a kind of inconsistency. He also rebuked them for

forgetting that "the Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath," i. e., forgetting the purpose of a law and hence applying it wrongly. Good moral theology seeks to help the Church refine its moral teachings by seeking consistency and precision. It does not attempt to change its revealed principles, nor does it neglect the tradition of their application.

### Readings

1. John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis Splendor)*, 1993
2. John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae)*, 1995

### Questions

1. Why is the moral teaching of the Magisterium a safer guide for conscience than the views of theologians or our own opinions in moral matters?
2. Why has the Magisterium not infallibly defined all the moral norms?
3. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in aiding the individual apply the moral teaching of the church to their own problems?
4. What arguments could be used for and against the infallibility of the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* on marriage?
5. How can we be sure what Jesus taught about sexual behavior?

---

## 5a. Faith: Root of All Virtues

Faith in the Old Testament has a definite doctrinal content, namely, God's deeds and promises as shown in the narratives of Abraham and other patriarchs (see Sirach 44:20-24), in God's covenant promises, in the Psalms, and in the call to living faith by the Prophets. This faith is openness to God's revelation of his true nature as Creator and to his wise and loving guidance in our lives. In the Old Testament also a great theme is the manifestation of Wisdom in God's creation and governance of all things. Wisdom is the practical aspect of Faith and its opposite is Folly. Both are personified as women, no doubt because it is our mothers who first teach us the Faith. Thus the Wisdom of the Old Testament is equivalent to the object of Faith in the New Testament, but with a special emphasis on the prudential, or practical aspect of God's wisdom as it guides us in practical living. Hence morality is living in accordance with the plan of God's wisdom and this plan is revealed in the order of the universe and in our own human nature that can be known by human reason. The deeper mysteries of God's

nature as the Trinity and of the Incarnation of his Son in Jesus Christ, as well as of our vocation to eternal life in the community of the Trinity can be known only by revelation accepted by faith.

Christian faith, however, is not a mere "leap in the dark." While we cannot by our own human reason see the intrinsic truth of God's mysteries, God has given us signs by which we can recognize with genuine certitude that Jesus Christ is his Son and that what he has taught us can and should be believed. Jesus gave these signs to the people of his own times by his fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament in his holy life, by his miracles of healing and casting out demons, etc., and by his Resurrection from the dead. These signs were worked long ago and we cannot today directly verify them, but we have the witness of the Catholic Church to them. This Church itself is also a sign accessible here and now that makes Faith reasonable and obligatory, since the Church, according to Vatican II, is a "moral miracle." It is a miracle in its catholicity (inclusiveness), its historic continuity (apostolicity), its unity of faith and government (unity) and the holiness of the life required of its members and exemplified by its saints. These so distinguish the Catholic Church from any merely human organization that those who come to know the Church as it really is are obliged to believe its witness to Jesus Christ, God's Word.

Faith, however, is not just God's promises, nor just trust that God will save us, as Luther used the term. It is the knowledge of God as He is in Christ, Truth Itself, but now only known in darkness (Christ crucified). It is the "evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11). Yet Faith is "living faith" only when it is united to Hope and Love. Even purely human faith in another (without which society is impossible) requires not just an act of the intelligence but also of the will to trust the word of another about something we cannot know by ourselves. For such an act of faith to be reasonable and not mere credulity we have to know that the one whose word we trust is reliable. Then we believe what the trustworthy person says not because we can see it to be true, nor even because of the signs that tell us he is to be trusted, but because he whom we trust says he knows it to be true. Similarly divine Faith is a reasonable act based on our reasoned certainty that God is revealing something to us through Jesus and his Church that it is impossible for us to discover or see of ourselves. Our reason knows that the invisible God is speaking through certain visible signs he provides to lead us to faith. However, once we see from these signs that we ought to believe, we believe not because we see its truth, nor even because of the signs that it is God who speaks. Instead we believe because it is God himself who reveals himself and shows this to us by signs, since he is the absolute Truth that cannot be mistaken.

The apostles believed what Jesus taught and the very Truth of God by an act of faith and will, but only after they had seen him fulfill the Old Testament prophecies, work his miracles, and rise from the dead. Two thousand years later we can read the account of this in the Bible and we can show by reason that this account is basically historical, yet these events are very far away and we cannot see them for ourselves. Hence we must believe through the witness of the Church, its Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Faith, therefore, requires obedience of the mind and heart to God through the Magisterium of

the Church as the Early Church believed in Christ through the Twelve whom he had sent to preach in his name. It is not just a personal "experience" but it is ecclesial, the fidelity to the faith of the Christian Community. It is true that the personal experiences that we may have through prayer, through our relationships with others, and in the crises of our own lives may raise for us the fundamental questions of life that only the Church can answer. These experiences can, therefore, lead to Faith and confirm and support it. They are subjective, interior signs that God is speaking to us. But the Catholic Church, unlike the Protestant churches, does not rest its witness merely on individual experiences in reading the Bible or hearing moving sermons. The Catholic Church makes them credible by the fact that as an objective and public witness it is as *moral miracle* because of its marks of *unity, catholicity, apostolicity, and holiness* mentioned in the previous lesson. Like Jesus himself, the Church says to all "Come and you will see" (Jn 2:39), get acquainted with the Catholic Church in its history and its present life and you will see that you ought to believe what she teaches in the name of Jesus.

### Readings

1. Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, Chapter 2, p.61-150.

### Questions

1. Who is Lady Wisdom and who is Lady Folly in the Wisdom Literature?
2. What is the difference between human faith and Christian Faith?
3. Why is Christian Faith the basis of the Christian life?
4. What is the difference between Christian Faith and a "religious experience"?
5. What is the relation of Christian Faith and human reason?

---

## 5b. Faith and Prudence

We are *justified*, i.e., put on the Way of Life rather than the Way of Death, by *living* faith alone, as St. Paul constantly teaches. But if we have living faith we obey God's commandments and thus do good works knowing these are the response God asks of us. Yet we cannot do these good works by ourselves just as we cannot believe of ourselves without the gift of God's grace. We can do them only by the power of God given us to cooperate with his work of restoring his creation. Protestants are mistaken in thinking that Catholics believe they are saved by their own good works. That is the heresy of Pelagianism that the Church has always condemned. We are saved only by

"faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). "We love [God] because he first loved us." (Jn 4:19) and because God loved us he gave us the gift of Faith from which flow Hope and Love that lead us to do "good works," that is, to obey God in all things. This requires a profound conversion and transformation or "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17) by grace in baptism. As Jesus said, "Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing"(Jn 15:5) that can lead to salvation.

Those who were once justified by faith, but who have then fallen into mortal sin, left the Way of Life, and started again down the Way of Death, may still have the virtue of faith. Yet this can only be a *dead* faith that cannot justify nor save until in his mercy God again converts the sinner to repentance and the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation that restores the life of grace.

The first three of the Ten Commandments (worship of the One God, reverence for his Holy Name, observance of the Sabbath) express a living faith whose direct object is God himself. The other seven commandments have as their direct object respect for the rights of our neighbor. In the Lord's Prayer the same order is found with the first three petitions directed toward God, the last four to our neighbor and ourselves. Sins against these first three commands are sins directly against faith and if fully deliberate and serious are mortal sins that render faith dead. Formal *heresy*, i.e. deliberate, serious, and stubborn denial of God's Word recognized to be such, destroys even dead faith. Material heresy, i.e. denial of God's Word that is not recognized to be such through ignorance, etc., or that is not stubborn, but only impulsive, does not kill faith.

Along with the gift of Faith, the baptized receive the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Is 11:2-3) with which the Messiah is anointed. The Gifts of Understanding and Knowledge in particular support Faith and it is these gifts that flourish in the life of Christian mystics. The baptized are also given the Virtue of Christian Prudence aided by another of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, called Counsel (Is. 11:2). Christian Prudence enables us to apply the New Law to the various situations of our life so as to move forward on the Way of Life to eternal union with God in Christ. But we need to be always mindful of what Jesus would do in the same circumstances and of what the Church and sound reason and experience teach us that we may have a rightly formed conscience. The prudent Christians are thoughtful persons who always think of what effects their actions will have on their relationship with God and neighbor. Even the "little ones" among the baptized are given this divine wisdom to always seek to do what pleases God not men. Casuistry is legitimate when it is an exercise of Christian Prudence so different from a "worldly" or "carnal" prudence that seeks ways to satisfy one's desires apart from God.

We sin against Christian Prudence when we refuse to accept the guidance of the Church or neglect to pray, study, and meditate in order to understand the new Law of Christ more profoundly. Moral theology is an academic discipline in the service of Christian Prudence and is of no value unless rooted in it. Too often today the axiom that "One must always follow one's own conscience" is taken to mean that in matters of conscience we have absolute autonomy. It was the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant who at the end of the eighteenth century made this view popular. He



taught that it is morally wrong either to act out of motives of self-interest or to follow any other guide than one's own autonomous conscience. Neither of these theories is compatible with Biblical teaching. The Creator made each of us responsible to seek our own happiness, but he also made us social beings so that our happiness must include sharing the common good with others. That is why Jesus said love God and your neighbor "as your self." True self-love is not selfish! Thus Kant's "altruism" is psychologically false; we cannot love others if we do not rightly love ourselves. Furthermore, Kant exaggerated human autonomy. We do indeed have to follow our own conscience but only after we have properly informed it and sometimes this means trusting in the judgement of those wiser and more prudent than we. Our first responsibility is not to make up our own minds for ourselves, but to find guides that are trustworthy. No one could be more trustworthy than God, his Son Jesus, and the Church to which God has given the Holy Spirit and confirmed as credible by accessible signs.

After Vatican II, the theology of Karl Rahner was widely accepted. Instead of the traditional *apologetics*, or arguments for the credibility of Catholic faith just outlined, Rahner proposed a *fundamental theology* based on a blend of Thomism and the philosophy of Kant (Transcendental Thomism). This fundamental theology depends not on the *objective* signs just mentioned, but on subjective religious experiences and their correlation with historical Christianity, as in Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith*. I have already shown that such arguments can have validity. Hence Rahner's method is not false, but it requires confirmation by the more objective method base not on private subjective signs but on ones that are public and objective. Jesus gave both such kind of signs, since he worked public miracles but also appealed to the hearts of his disciples by his own witness.

### Readings

1. Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, Chapter 3.
2. *The Book of Sirach*
3. *The Epistle of St. James*

### Questions

1. "To be prudent" in English usually means to be *cautious*. Is the virtue of Prudence just caution? What is it then?
2. What is an "informed conscience"?
3. Discuss the Kantian concept of morality? Has it influenced your thinking?
4. Why must we love ourselves? How should we love ourselves?
5. Why is Prudence the chief of the moral virtues?

---

## 6a. Hope: Time and Eternity

In the Old Testament the virtue of Hope is directed to the coming of the Messianic Age when peace and justice will reign on earth. The fulfillment of this hope was long delayed because of Israel's failure to carry out her covenanted witness to the One True God for all the nations. It is only in the last books of the Old Testament such as *Daniel*, *1 and 2 Maccabees*, and *Wisdom* that the rewards of a future life are clearly taught. Although the pagans of the Near East did believe in a future life, the Old Testament for the most part speaks only of a survival in Sheol, a dark place where contact with the living and with God is absent. The reason for this is probably the biblical writers' fear of supporting fanciful pagan beliefs about a future life until a definite revelation about it was given them by God. We begin to see the dawn of this revelation (that would be completed only with Jesus' Resurrection) only in the later books of the Old Testament *Daniel*, *Wisdom* and *1 and 2 Maccabees* when it became necessary to encourage the martyrs of Greek persecution.

To endure this long time of waiting the Old Testament saints strove to carry out the Mosaic Law faithfully in all its details. Consequently when that Law was finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God-with-us, the faithful Remnant (for example, Simeon and Anna in Lk 2:22-38) received the Messiah with joy, but the religious leaders of the Jews rejected him and failed to lead the Jews as a people to accept him. We must not condemn most of the Jews of that time in Israel since they depended on their leaders for guidance. We certainly must not condemn the Jews in the Diaspora who probably knew nothing of these events. Nor can we condemn Jews of later times who have often been turned away from the Gospel by being cruelly and unjustly persecuted by those who professed the Gospel. Yet Jesus' rejection by so many of his own people and his crucifixion have become for all the world the great evidence of his love for all of us, even his enemies. Without the Cross we would never have understood the depths of God's love for us, namely that God the Son, in obedience to his Father's mission, in his human nature, truly died for us. Thus God's infinite power that through love has been put at our disposal is the ground for the certitude of Christian Hope.

New Testament Hope also includes justice and peace on earth in this world just as did Old Testament hope. We pray "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Thus current "liberation theology," freed of certain Marxist influences, is entirely in accord with Christian Hope. Yet Christian Hope goes beyond this, since what we hope for is justice and peace not in a merely earthly sense, but "as it is in heaven," that is, as it is in the Community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is this community that is the Kingdom of God in the fullest sense. Sometimes the words of Jesus "The poor are always with you" (Mk 14:7) are used to argue that since the elimination of poverty is impossible there is no use working for a better world. But Jesus spoke these words to

rebuke the Pharisees who criticized the penitent woman for anointing his feet with precious oil. He meant that that we ought *both* to care for the poor and show gratitude to others. Since He knew, however, that since He was soon to die, for the short time remaining he accepted this woman's gratitude. Plenty of time was left to care for the poor in whom we should see Christ still present with us (Mt 25:31-46). No doubt there will always be those who need our help and are in that sense poor, but the Gospel does not say that material poverty in the world cannot be overcome, instead it commands us to work to that end.

Christian hope, therefore, is hope that we really can bring justice and peace on earth and by the help of God this is possible. Some see in the passages of Scripture that speak of the end of the world as a great catastrophe proof that things will get worse and worse in history until Armageddon (apocalypticism). Yet the Bible also provides pictures of an era of peace and justice when the Kingdom of God is realized on earth (millenarianism, or utopianism). In fact the Church refrains from detailed teaching on future history, probably because these two biblical pictures represent the extremes of what is really *up to us* to determine. If we use God's grace we can make a good world; if we do not the world will go down in flames, though God will still triumph along with those who remain faithful. The threat of disaster will remain to the end, but the hope of victory will also remain if we trust not in our own power but in God.

Closely related to Christian hope, therefore, is Christian *asceticism* including the virtue of *Poverty*, so beautifully exemplified by St. Francis of Assisi. Asceticism is the practice of restraining our physical appetites from their tendency to selfish excess, now exaggerated by original sin and by our own addictions. We need to restrain them so they do not enslave us in addictions that frustrate the fulfillment of our higher spiritual needs. Poverty is contentment with the bare necessities of life so as to restrain our tendency to greed, consumerism, etc., that also dull our spiritual perceptions. What is important is that we are not blinded by the attractions of time so much that we lose sight of our real goal in Eternity.

## Readings

1. Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5

## Questions

1. Does the Virtue of Hope gives us certitude of salvation? How?
2. Explain the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer.
3. What do you think of the asceticism of St. Simeon Stylites (see *New Catholic Encyclopedia*) who for 36 years lived as a hermit on the top of a pillar?
4. What is the difference between the Hope that inspires Christian martyrs and the hope of persons who burn themselves to death in a demonstration in favor of a political cause?

5. Did Jesus on the Cross despair when he cried out, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me!"?

## 6b. Hope, Temperance, and Fortitude

Because we "here have no abiding city" (Heb 13:14) and Jesus' "kingdom" is "not of this world," the Christian virtue of Temperance leads to different decisions than those of reason. We fast and practice asceticism not to improve our health (though this is legitimate) but to avoid enslavement to the world.

"For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement of the eyes, and a pretentious life, is not from the Father but from the world. Yet the world and its enticements is passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains forever" (1 Jn 2:16-17)

By "world" here is not meant what God has created since this was "very good," but the sinful distortion of the creation that put it under the power of Satan, who is "The prince of this world." Thus Christians may and should enjoy God's creation since it is good. Yet we must always realize the danger that in the "world" in which we live and in our own nature wounded by sin, there is always the risk that we will become enslaved to "the world" and lose sight of our Christian goal. The virtue of Temperance or Moderation, especially in matters of food (and of course alcohol and drugs) and sexual pleasure, therefore, seeks a mean between extremes. While we are more likely to go the extreme of over-indulgence in pleasure, we can also sin against Temperance by going to the other extreme of not taking proper pleasure and recreation in life. Jesus was attacked by the Pharisees for eating and drinking with sinners whom he was seeking to convert. The Christian life of Temperance, therefore, avoids excess and addiction to any pleasure and prefers the simple joys that refresh and strengthen us for our responsibilities. Temperance directly concerns eating and sex since these are our strongest physical drives, but certain *Auxiliary* or Helping Virtues extend this moderation to other appetites. Thus Humility moderates our sense of self-worth, Docility our curiosity, Politeness our external behavior, Simplicity our tendency to consumerism, and Meekness our anger. Temperance is strengthened by the Gift of the Holy Spirit of the Fear of the Lord that makes us ever mindful that we are responsible to God for our squandering of his gifts.

From the beginning of the Church St. Paul praised celibacy and virginity (1 Cor 7), while at the same condemning those who taught that marriage is evil. He urged those who could choose to imitate the virginity of Jesus and his own celibacy to do so, since it would free them for more entirely spiritual efforts. Throughout its history, the Catholic Church has taught the same and in the West has required its clergy to give an example in this regard. It has also held in highest honor those, especially women, who would

dedicate their virginity to Jesus as their bridegroom, a symbol of the heavenly Wedding to which we are all invited. It has not relaxed this to permit the Latin clergy to marry, as in the seventh century the Eastern Church did for priests who were not also bishops, and as the Reformation did for all its clergy. Although other religions than Christianity have also practiced celibacy as an ideal for spiritual growth, in Catholicism it is a symbol that reminds all, including the married, that "here we have no abiding city." To the degree that this symbol is lessened in the Church, the greater our risk of forgetting that our goal is eternal life in which, as Jesus said, "there is no giving in marriage" (Mt 22: 30) because like the angels we will form one family with the Trinity.

The Early Church especially honored Virgins and Martyrs. While the former witnessed to the value of Temperance, the latter witnessed to the Virtue of Fortitude or Courage. Hope requires us to endure our troubles on the Way of Life in the face not only of temptations to immoderate pleasure, but especially of fear. No fear is greater than that of death, yet the Martyrs endured that fear of suffering and death in imitation of Jesus on the Cross, in witness of truth. Besides our physical instincts for pleasure and the avoidance of pain, we have aggressive drives that are necessary for self-preservation and for defense of our families and country. These *irascible* or emergency drives help us to attack a danger, or to make the effort to flee from it, or, when we cannot escape, to survive as well as we can. Fortitude is the virtue that moderates this drive so that we do not go to either extreme. We know when to fight, when to flee, and how to endure. It is even more important to the Christian life that centers on the Cross than is the virtue of Temperance. The Auxiliary Virtues associated with Fortitude that deal with less terrifying dangers than death are Nobility in seeking to do important things in spite of the risk of failure, Generosity with our possessions, Patience with the lesser trials of life, and Endurance of these trials over long periods of time. Fortitude is strengthened by the Gift of the Holy Spirit named also Fortitude.

Obviously Temperance and Fortitude and their associated virtues are closely related to Hope since there would be no point in struggling or enduring if we had no hope of ultimate victory. Our Faith tells us that Christ has conquered and we will conquer with him, while Hope gives to our will that strength by which we carry on the spiritual struggle, so evident in the life of Jesus and in special way in the life of St. Paul. John of the Cross tells us that the reason most Christians do not attain the higher levels of holiness and mysticism is primarily their lack of courage that causes them to keep back sliding when the Way of Life gets tough. We are like the Hebrews who, when they reached the borders of the Holy Land, feared to meet the enemy, and thus turned back to wander endlessly in the desert.

Without Hope, Faith dies, and without the practice of Temperance and Fortitude we cannot make much progress on the Way of Life because these flow from Hope and strengthen it. Pleasure is good only when it facilitates our doing the right thing. For example, God makes eating pleasurable, but it is good to take this pleasure only when it encourages moderation in eating and drinking. Otherwise it becomes addictive and enslaving and makes us place our hope in the world not in heaven. Courage is good when it facilitates us sticking to the Way of Life in spite of difficulties and crosses, but

aggression can turn into destructive violence, or unreasonable fear can hold us back from achieving anything. There is a holy anger, like that Jesus showed when he cleansed the temple and denounced the Pharisees for their contempt for the little ones, but there is a wicked anger like the jealousy of the religious leaders who crucified him.

### Readings

1. Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, Chapter 6
2. St. Paul, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*
3. *The Book of Revelation*

### Questions

1. When is pleasure morally good and when is it morally bad?
2. Why is marriage good if celibacy is better?
3. Do you really think that Jesus got angry? How did he deal with anger?
4. What is your understanding of why Christian virginity is an important value?
5. How do you think regular meditative prayer increases the virtue of Hope?

---

## 7a. Love: The Unity of Christian Life

The Old Testament speaks of love of God and neighbor, but the word "love" is not prominent. Rather the key word is "justice"; the keeping of the Law and respect for the rights of God and neighbor dominate. What the Old Testament looks forward to is not so much a union with God as the coming of God's Kingdom as a world order of peace and justice over which God is the glorious King of his restored Creation. The individual looks forward to being an accepted citizen of that well-ordered Kingdom. Obviously there can be no real love of our neighbor if we do not respect the neighbor's rights and thus show the neighbor true justice. Hence for the Bible Love and Justice are closely related although Love is the greater virtue since it goes beyond respecting what the neighbor deserves to seeking for the neighbor perfect happiness, even when that is not deserved. This is why we say that God's mercy is greater than his justice. This does not mean, however, that God is not just, since if He permitted injustice without punishment of the injustice he would not really love those whom the injustice injures. Justice, therefore, is in the service of love.

Yet in the Old Testament the relation of the human individual to God is also highly personal. For example, many of the *Psalms* are outcries of praise, of fear, of frustration, of passionate love, of despair addressed to God as if He were a parent or friend or even felt as an enemy, and the same is true of *Job*. This is indeed an "I-Thou" relation, often symbolized in the *Prophets* and *The Song of Songs* as a relation of child to father or mother, or of lovers, as in the marriage covenant of God and Israel. The Old Testament God is an awesome Presence of which no image is possible, yet He is truly present. What each person does is important to God, and He is ever watchful and concerned for our welfare.

Jesus interpreted the Old Law in the light of the Great Command of Love of God and neighbor which he said summed up "the law and the prophets." It is equivalently stated in the Sermon on the Mount as the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do to you" (Mt 6:12) which is also said to sum up the law and the prophets. In this way Jesus united the whole of moral life and established the Eucharist, the sacrament of love that unites us all in the community of the Trinity. In God, the Father and the Son are united in the Holy Spirit. Each Divine person gives his life *totally* to the others. The Father gives Divinity to the Son, so that they are absolutely equal, and so does the Father give his Divinity totally to the Holy Spirit *through* the Son. No created person can give their very being and existence to another as the divine persons do, but they can love and give according to their capacity.

It is essential to note that the "love" we are talking about here is in Greek *agape* not *eros*. That is why Latin authors translate it not as *amor*, sexual love, but as *caritas*, in English "charity." In current usage, however, "charity" has taken on the connotation simply of doing good to someone. Aquinas notes that genuine love while it is indeed seeking the good of another (benefaction) is also a desire for *union* with the one to whom we wish good, while we can do good to someone without wanting to be with them. Thus true love is a friendship where persons share a *common good* that is the good of both persons as persons and unites them in a community of life. Christian *agape* is that kind of sharing each other's life. Even more it is sharing each other's life *in Christ, in God*. The good we seek for our neighbor is that we should live together for all eternity in the Trinity. Because people often use "love" to mean romantic sexual love, attraction, or desire, or just a kind of benevolent sentimentality, the truly Christian message of love often gets lost. The virtue of *agape*, as Jesus taught, enables us to love our enemies in that we seek their salvation and hope to be their friends forever.

Thus Christian love unifies Christians in the community of the Church here on earth in preparation for their eternal unity in the community of the Trinity. Thus St. John says,

What we have seen and heard [the Incarnate Word] we proclaim to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his son, Jesus Christ (1 Jn 3).

But the virtue of Love also unifies and integrates each individual Christian in her or his own personhood because it is the principle that unites the other virtues and their acts. Because we love God and neighbor as we rightly love ourselves. So we are temperate

or moderate in our worldly pleasure to be free to think and act for our own higher good and for that of others. Because we love, we have fortitude or courage so as to be able to defend those we love and endure suffering so as not to fail them. Because we love, we seek a just society in which all can flourish. Because we love God, we believe in him by Faith, and Hope to be united to him. Finally Love is its own reward because it is union with God and those we love. No one is excluded from that love, even our enemies, because we know that God can convert them and make them lovable once more and able to love us. Love is supported by the Gift of the Holy Spirit called Wisdom which flourishes in mystics and Doctors of the Church like Saints Augustine, Gregory the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, and Therese of Lisieux.

### Readings

1. Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, Chapter 9 (note we have left 7 and 8 to the next lesson).

### Questions

1. List different meanings of the word "love." Is hate always contrary to love?
2. Why does the love of friendship require friends to live together or meet or correspond frequently?
3. What does it mean to say that Jesus loves *you* and that *you* love Jesus?
4. Why is God closer to us in the New than in the Old Testament?
5. How does Christian love unify the whole of the Way of Life?

---

## 7b. Love and Justice

Since Jesus taught that Christian Love sums up the Law and the prophets it sums up the Ten Commandments which are the center of the Old Covenant that is fulfilled in the Great Commandment of Love and Neighbor. But as I have said already, one cannot really love unless one is first just to others and, in a sense, to oneself, since we cannot honestly love others unless we love the self that God meant us to be. This justice requires us first of all to keep the first three of the Ten Commandments. (1) To belief and honor only the one true God and not to substitute for this true God a false god or idol. (2) To show respect for God's Name, i.e., to give Him priority in all that we think, do or say. (3) To strive that his Kingdom come, i.e., that his will be done by all. This form of Justice is called the Virtue of Religion, or the consistent ability to show reverence and obedience to God.



In the Fourth Commandment (Protestant and Jews number the commands somewhat differently), we are told to "honor your father and mother" and this kind of virtue is called the Virtue of *Obedience*. It also applies to obedience to the laws of our government (the Virtue of *Patriotism*), and to others having authority for us. In all these cases we must obey legitimate authority as long as it remains within its proper limits, but we must always "obey God rather than man" if authorities exceed their proper limits.

The Fifth to Eighth Commandments express our respect for the rights of others. The Fifth Command against killing the innocent protects our fundamental right to life and security. The Sixth Commandment demands that we not commit adultery or make wrong uses of sex other than its proper use in marriage for which God designed it. Adultery also destroys the fundamental love and trust of the couple on which family life depends. Thus it injures the community of the family that is the basis of all human society and without which children cannot be properly educated. By the Seventh Command we must not steal, because people have a right to such private property as is necessary for them to carry on their own life and work. Without such private property the continuity of family life is imperiled. By the Eighth Command we must not lie, because this destroys the trust necessary for social life not only of the family but of the larger community and deprives others of their rights to the information they need and that is one of the chief benefits of community.

The Ninth and Tenth Commandments make clear what Jesus was to emphasize in the Sermon on the Mount, that external obedience to others' rights will fail if we do not realize that injustice begins in the interior of the heart. Thus these Commandments forbid us to deliberately consent to wrong desires, for example, desires to get wrong sexual pleasure (Ninth Command) or envy of another's goods (Tenth Command).

Justice in the strict sense has three aspects. First we must pay our debts to others (*Exchange Justice*), since all social trust is based on this kind of fairness. Second, as citizens or officials we must seek fairness in the distribution of the common good of the community (*Distributive Justice*), so that the needs of all are met. Third, we must obey the legitimate laws of the community without which the rights of all cannot be preserved (*Legal Justice*). Today when we talk of "social justice" we mean the last two of these, namely obedience to laws that distribute the goods and services of the community to all members according to their needs. This does not require exact equality, but rather that each contribute to the community what they can above what they need and that each receive what they need but cannot supply for themselves. Auxiliary Virtues associated with Justice are Patriotism in relation to our country, Truthfulness on which all fairness to others is based, Gratitude to others for what they do for us, and Leniency that makes us less harsh on those who may have infringed our rights. The Gift of the Holy Spirit that strengthens Justice is the Gift of Piety that makes us respectful of others and reverent to those in authority.

Especially important in the Social Doctrine of the church is the *Principle of Subsidiarity*. This Principle is based on the fact that people usually know their own needs and circumstances better than anyone else does. Hence in any community in the

hierarchy of authority (a) those most immediately affected should make the practical decisions. At the same time (b) those in authority at higher levels who have responsibility for the unified action and common good of that wider community also have the duty to supervise decisions made at a lower level. If it becomes evident that these lower level decisions are unjust or inadequate for the common good the higher authority must intervene to supply this defect. Finally (c) this higher level has the duty not to retain decision in such matters that require correction but to help those at lower levels improve their decision making, then return it to that level. This is summed up in the term "participation" in a community, whether secular or ecclesial. Any community is healthiest when it has a high level of cooperation in its life and mission by its members at every level. St. Paul in *1 Corinthians* 12, explains this by comparing the Christian community to the body of Christ, which has many members, each contributing its special gifts to the whole, but within a certain order of authority, and all respecting the contribution and needs of the others.

### Readings

1. Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, Chapter 7 and 8
2. John Paul II, *On the Centenary of Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum (Centesimus Annus)*, 1991.

### Questions

1. What is "subsidiarity"?
2. What is "social justice"?
3. Why can there be no true love without true justice?
4. How can mercy be greater than justice?
5. Explain *1 Peter* 3:13-17 urging Christians to respect the Roman Government when the *Book of Revelation* portrays the Roman Government as "the whore of Bayblon." (Rev 17-18)?

---

## 8a. Christian Life in the Modern World

Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, 1965, analyzed the modern world and its special needs. Positively, advancing science and technology make possible the solution of many human problems of health, poverty, and communication under which the world has labored for centuries. Also more democratic and participatory

forms of government and sensitivity for some human rights surpasses most government of the past. But negatively technology has been abused, consumerism along with poverty has grown, the environment is raped, violence and the culture of death is fostered, family and morals decay, and moral relativism and skepticism and ignorance of God and eternal life seem on the increase.

The basic reason for this paradox is the weakness of a divided Christian Community that prevents it from preaching the Gospel of justice and peace. This division of Christians that resulted from the schism of the Eastern Church in the eleventh century and of the Reformed or Protestant churches in the sixteenth century led to terrible religious wars. These in turn led to disillusionment with Christianity among the European intellectual elite in the last half of the 1600's who then turned to the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was essentially an anti-Christian substitute for religion, based on hope that the rise of modern science and technology could solve human problems apart from any revelation from God. This Enlightenment, or Secular Humanism, however, found that modern science, at least as it was interpreted by Kant and other philosophers, was "value free" and hence did not supply a value system necessary for any philosophy of life to function for a culture. Hence within the Secular Humanism of the Enlightenment the movement of Romanticism arose which taught that since no system of values and morality is supplied by nature or by God's revelation, it must be invented by humanity like a work of fine art. Hence in our times morality is believed to be relative to a particular culture; invented by geniuses and disseminated through literature, films, and television, it is accepted in a purely pragmatic manner without any claim to be founded in a deeper truth that transcends human free choice.

The result is that our culture, subject to constant change, is deeply polarized into "conservatives" who fear change and "liberals" who put their hopes in it. This division has also entered the Church. The liberals appeal to the Bible for a "liberation theory," and favor gay rights, sexual freedom, inclusivism, and "free choice" of abortion, but deny or ignore the Bible's moral norms as outmoded and oppressive. Conservatives, on the other hand, in reaction to the liberals, appeal to biblical fundamentalism, yet support a free market economy, are nationalistic, militaristic, racists, etc., but also favor strong families, are pro-life, and support traditional moral norms. Among Catholics this polarization tends to take the form, not so much of denying the values favored by the other side, as placing a different emphasis, accenting the values they favor and neglecting the others. Catholic conservatives emphasize family values and say little about social justice, while the Catholic liberals make the opposite emphasis. Both exaggerate the faults of the other side and both betray an unconscious influence of secular humanism, the conservatives by accepting the free-market, the liberals by accepting excessive emphasis on personal choice.

Thus American culture tends to be essentially "libertarian" emphasizing individual autonomy at the expense of social solidarity and rejecting the guidance of authority even when that authority is God. This appears among conservative Catholics in their lack of concern for progressive Vatican II teachings and in their political conservatism

that rejects government interference with business. With liberal Catholics it appears as ignoring Church teachings about private morality.

If we are to recover the genuinely Christian morality that Jesus taught, not as it was sometimes defectively understood in the past, we must examine the roots of our culture and see how we got into our present mess. Two basic reforms are needed. The first was provided by Vatican II in its promotion of ecumenism. We must overcome the scandal of the division of the Church in the past by winning back the Christians who separated themselves from the Catholic Church. This can only be done by patient dialogue and a good example of Christian life motivated by love. It cannot be achieved by compromising the truth of the Gospel, but that Gospel must be freed of historical accretions that have sometimes obscured it and led to the divisions in the first place.

The second basic reform that Pope Pius XII began and Vatican II and John Paul II have continued is still in its first stages. That is to assimilate modern science and technology into our Christian thinking and way of life as Sts. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas and others assimilated to the Gospel the good things of pagan Greco-Roman culture while purifying it of what was evil. In the field of moral theology this means making use of what modern science has truly discovered about our human body, our psychology, our social structures, and our history. This assimilation of the results of modern science, however, also requires a rethinking that frees that science from the distortions of Enlightenment philosophy. With this better understanding of human nature and the world in which we live, our moral theology can also be deepened.

## Readings

1. Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, 1965.
2. Vatican II, *Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis redintegratio)*, 1964.

## Questions

1. How do you understand the terms "liberal Catholic" and "conservative Catholic"?
2. Are you a conservative or a liberal? What good can you see in the other party's positions?
3. What was the Enlightenment? How is it still an influence today?
4. What is "moral relativism?"
5. What is your understanding of the work of Vatican II in the history of Christian moral teaching? Are you sure this is what Vatican II really said?

## 8b. The Splendor of Moral Truth

The Encyclical *The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis Splendor)* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* make clear that true human happiness here and for eternity can be accomplished only by forming a *Community of created persons. This Community of human persons must be centered in the Community of the Three Divine Persons who are the one and only God.* Christian morality, therefore, means making the right choices of means that will lead us on the Way to Eternal Life. Making such choices consistently is possible only if we use the graced virtues given us in baptism and cultivated by following the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the development of doctrine expressed definitively in the Church by the bishops headed by the bishop of Rome.

Such morality, therefore, is founded on Truth and this moral Truth was given to the Jews in the Old Law summed up in the Ten Commandments and brought to perfection by Jesus in the Great Commandment of Love of God and Neighbor. Such Christian love, however, must be rooted in Faith and kept alive by Hope that with God's help we can certainly reach our goal not only as individuals but as the community of the Church open to all humanity. This Faith is made practical by the Virtue of Christian Prudence supported by the Holy Spirit in his gifts of Understanding and Wisdom. The Hope that is rooted in Faith is freed of worldly enslavement by the Virtues of Temperance and of Fortitude, the first controlling our appetites for pleasure, the second controlling our emergency appetites of fear and aggression. Finally, Love that gives life to all and includes all the virtues is made practical by the Virtue of Justice which enables us to escape selfishness and concern the rights of others. This Love, however, must above all be love of God. In fact it must be the love by which God loved us first in his Son Jesus Christ and thus made it possible to love him and our neighbor in return with the same love with which he loves us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is why in the *Apostles' Creed* we express our faith in the "Communion of Saints," that is that all those who have followed the Way of Life or who are following it now already form the beginning of the Kingdom of God and pray to God for all the others.

Jesus himself is the center and head of this Kingdom that is his mystical Body, but the first of its citizens is his mother the Blessed Virgin Mary who is also the Mother of the Church. Mary was the perfect product of God's long education of the Chosen People whose faithfulness in its Remnant was fully realized in her. Even in her conception she had been freed by Christ from all sin and constantly grew in every virtue just as we are freed in baptism to grow in all the virtues. She, however, unlike us, remained completely faithful to this spiritual commitment. By her intercession she leads the entire Communion of Saints to pray for all.

In this way God's plan in his Creation is restored and completed. To our first parents, symbolized in the Bible as Adam and Eve, was given the responsibility of transmitting the promises and grace of God to all humanity. By freely departing from the Way of Life they exiled their descendants on the Way of Death. To this original sin has been added

to our world all the distortions of God's creation that have resulted by the consequent sins of all humanity throughout history. Entering this distorted world the Way of Death seems open to every child and the Way of Life closed. But God has chosen to open the door again to us by the Incarnation of his son, Jesus, who has established the new Community of the Church in which we can be reborn in baptism and nourished by his Body and Blood in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the true Tree of Life from which Adam and Eve and their descendants would have received immortality if only they had been faithful.

We often speak today of "spirituality" as if it were something different from morals and moral theology. This distinction is a modern one with no deep roots in Catholic tradition. According to the Bible and Sacred Tradition, Christian morality and Christian life are themselves a "spirituality" since they are life and progress in the Holy Spirit of God. The Fourth Part of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is devoted to the Lord's Prayer and to Prayer in general, i.e. to spirituality as the culmination of the Life in Christ described in Part III of the same *Catechism*. In our time not a few Catholics look for "spirituality" in New Age, "creation-centered theology," Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism and various techniques of meditation. It is sad that these Catholics are ignorant of the fact that in the Catholic Church the greatest mystics and spiritual guides are to be found and that meditative prayer should be a part of the life of every Christian.

In speaking of Christian morals we must be clear in our own mind that the Bible as well as Sacred Tradition do not present the good life as the mere following of rules or moral norms. Moral norms or laws are good and necessary guides that show us the true Way of Life and warn us against the pitfalls of the Way of Death. Yet much deeper and more fundamental are Faith, Hope, and Love centered in Jesus Christ, lived by the power of the Holy Spirit in which we grow through the Sacraments centered in the Eucharist that is Jesus himself actively uniting and forming the Christian Community, the Church. No spirituality is deeper and more accessible to every baptized Christian who prays with the Church.

## Readings

1. Read the three encyclicals of John Paul II based on the Three Persons of the Trinity and containing a profound modern spirituality: *Rich in Mercy (Dives in Misericordia)*, 1980 on the Father, *The Redeemer of Humanity (Redemptor Hominis)*, 1979 on the Son, and *On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World (Dominum et Vivificantem)*, 1986.

## Questions

1. What is the relation of Christian spirituality to moral theology?
2. What is the Communion of Saints?
3. What is the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Church?

4. How do you understand the Christian Covenant in comparison with the Mosaic Covenant?
5. What is the measure of the morally good and the morally bad in a biblically based Moral Theology?