

What Moral Theology Is About

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1. Morality, Dogma, and the Christian Story

- (a) Christianity is not primarily about “morality”
 - i. A common mistake, and a failure of evangelization and catechesis.
 - ii. This is called “moralism.”
- (b) What Christianity is about: being alive with God
 - i. Deification and Grace
 - ii. Eden
 - iii. Sin
 - iv. The Story of Israel
 - v. The Gospel
- (c) Theology: Coming To Understand God’s Revelation
- (d) The Shape of Reality: *Exitus—Redditus*
- (e) The Catholic Contours of this Picture
 - i. Trinity
 - ii. Incarnation
 - iii. Redemption
 - iv. Grace
 - v. The Church and the Sacraments
 - vi. **Morality.**
 - vii. Eschatology
- (f) Morality is the study of how to flourish as a human being.
 - i. Everything flourishes by performing its proper actions
 - ii. Everything resembles God in its own way by performing its proper actions
 - iii. Human beings do this in a special way, because they are rational creatures.
 - iv. And God has elevated our capabilities of knowing and loving, so that they lead us to Him.

2. What Moral Theology Studies

- (a) Bad Ideas
 - i. Duties, Obligations, and Rules
 - ii. Altruism
 - iii. Consequences of Actions
 - iv. Avoiding Hell and “Going to Heaven”
 - v. Happiness as Self-Fulfillment

- (b) Good Ideas
 - i. *Eudaimonia* — Happiness as authentic human flourishing
 - ii. Blessedness — Happiness as being friends and children of God.
- (c) Isn't this selfish? No.
 - i. Naturally, we participate in the common good. (Natural notion of justice).
 - ii. Supernaturally, we participate in the kingdom of God. (Biblical notion of justice).
- (d) "Because, as St. John Damascene says, man is made after the image of God, inasmuch as intellect and free choice and the ability to act through oneself are signified by 'image', after having treated above of the exemplar, namely God, and those things which proceed from the divine power according to his will, it remains for us to consider his image, that is, man, inasmuch as he himself is the principle of his work, as having free will, and power over his work."¹
- (e) "Christian ethics is the branch of theology that studies human acts so as to direct them to a loving vision of God seen as our true, complete happiness and our final end. This vision is attained by means of grace, the virtues, and the gifts, in light of revelation had reason."²
- (f) *Moral theology is the study of how to act so that we can flourish in the way that God wants us to.*

3. Philosophical Ethics and Moral Theology

- (a) The relationship between faith and reason
- (b) The relationship between the natural and the supernatural.
- (c) We can argue for the truth of natural morality from reason alone and debate philosophically
- (d) We can defend the truth of supernatural morality from objections of philosophers

4. The Sources of Moral Theology

- (a) Reason
 - i. Distinctive feature of Catholic moral theology
 - ii. Some features of a good human life are understandable in precision from our call to share God's life
 - iii. So we can understand our moral life somewhat from human reason alone, in precision from what we know from the Bible and from Church teaching
- (b) Revelation
 - i. The Bible: Accounting for genre and position in salvation history; taking an integrated, holistic view
 - ii. Tradition as Context
 - iii. The Magisterium as a Christ-given interpreter
 - iv. Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium are tightly integrated. Anytime you think one, always think the other two implicitly

5. Metaethical Perspectives

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1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Proemium* to the *Secunda Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*. My translation.
 2. Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr. M. Thomas Noble, O.P. (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1995) 8.

- (a) Consequentialism
- (b) Deontology
- (c) Eudaemonistic Virtue Ethics
- (d) A Note on Two Problematic Tendencies
 - i. Emotivism
 - ii. Relativism

6. Themes in Catholic Moral Theology

- (a) Anthropology
- (b) Happiness
- (c) Teleology
- (d) Freedom
- (e) Human Action
- (f) Virtues and Vices
- (g) Moral Weakness and Sin
- (h) Law and Obligation
- (i) Grace and the Spiritual Life