

LIVES THAT ARE HOLY, HEARTS THAT ARE TRUE

Recently I was asked to teach a class on Moral Theology for the Deacon Formation program. Sounds like a “yawner” doesn’t it. It was a course I myself took in formation four or five years ago and at first, I have to admit, did not excite me much. So, to clarify, it isn’t the study of morality (as we think of it) as much as it is the study of the divine origin of what is “right” and “wrong” with GOD as the source. Thus the Theology part, or the study of the Divine. This may sound like an “ice cream headache” in the making, but this speaks directly to the choices and behavior of humanity and in turn shapes the world we live in. My personal methodology is to take this subject out of the classroom and place it into the “daylight” of trying to live the Beatitudes. How can this understanding be applied **AND** useful in the moment to moment activities that shape our lives. Still not interested? Consider what the rampant “relativism” in society is attempting to do. Have you heard the terms “This is my truth”? We are deciding when life begins (for our convenience), we are deciding our gender (according to our feelings), and we are devaluing religion (because we are too busy and see it as irrelevant). Marriage and family, the foundation of the **Divine relationship**, is being whittled away because WE want something less demanding. We are placing a higher value on our personal comfort and ignoring those around us who struggle. We are deciding what is good and what is bad because of what we desire. Many have said to me, “Is this so bad?”. My answer is always, “Can we have a world with every individual deciding their own version of the truth?” Can we isolate emotional or mental abnormalities in such a process? If we censor one “truth”, how can we not censor another? How could we possibly censor religious extremism... even if it is violent? That is their truth. This is the subject of **Moral Theology** and I can’t imagine too many subjects being more essential to understand within the context of modern society.

So, in theology there are two main branches: **Natural or dogmatic theology**, and **Moral** or divine behavioral theology. One deals with the nature or “character” of **GOD**, the other is basically humanity’s intersection with **GOD’s** word. We seem to be on-board, most of the time, with who and what we see **GOD** as...the dogmatic or unchanging image of our **MAKER**, creator of all that is seen and unseen. The **GOD** who is LOVE. At least in theory. The difficult part is where it collides at the cross-road of **Who GOD** is and **What** is asked of us as **HIS** creation. It should be said here that this conundrum only exists for those who believe. I understand the world of non-believers. They have no constraints, no boundaries, no limits to their behavior...aside from civil laws and possibly a general sense of decency (in their opinion). Even in that regard, where do the standards of law come from. **Theology** tells us it is the natural structure of, or the nature of **GOD’s** creation that gives us these inclinations. **Theology** also tells us that while we are born with the “natural” gifts of kindness and love, we are not fully formed

in these virtues until later. We often refer to this process as the **formation of conscience**, or...character. As I speak to young people on this subject, my point is not to define moral decisions for them as much as I want them to understand the source and origin of good and moral thought. They will find the **Truth** in the process of their own lives, mostly through reflection and experience...if they so choose. But this whole process depends on a certain basis of assumption: sound moral decisions, ones that make the world a better place, must become part of the emotional and rational thought processes that we cling to in life. As we move from infancy to childhood, and on to adulthood, the imperative is a life enriched with a desire and love for **GOD**, a basis in knowledge of **GOD**, and...a desire to serve **HIM**. We must desire to make our world better for any of this to hold meaning. This was the **choice Jesus** faced as well.

Here we should consider something often over-looked in our scripture study. Jesus, in HIS fully human nature was in need, from **HIS** childhood on, of being formed and matured into **HIS** relationship with the **FATHER**. This is often overlooked. **HIS** scripture study was primarily the **Prophets** and the **Psalms**. This study, and the guidance and example of **Mary** and **Joseph**, is what shaped **HIS** conscience. How do we know this? Because this is true of all humanity, of which **HE** was fully a member. So, the next time you feel insignificant as a parent or grandparent, remember that we all **are in need of guidance**. The challenge is where does this growth comes from. Movies and television, computer games, music, pop culture, sports ...or **the living presence of GOD on earth, the Church**? If you are of parenting age, or older, how do you view the way society has progressed the past thirty years or so? In hindsight, what decisions would have made a difference in the outcome?

This is **Moral Theology** and it is arguably ground zero for our discipleship of **Jesus** as well as the battleground with evil for the destination of our souls. Society can only deny the existence of **Heaven** for so long before it starts to resemble truth for some people. It won't change reality, but it undoubtably has the ability to redirect our **path of holiness**. For sure, this struggle has existed since the Resurrection. It is nothing new. The real difference today is the relative nature of our public discourse, the exclusion of GOD's word from our governance, and complacency of Western civilization. We can only ignore the desires of **GOD** for so long before the "wheels" of social justice start to come off the bus. This is Natural Law. Consequences. We, as Catholic Christian believers, must voice our defense of what is Good and Holy as the Church has defined for two thousand years. **Morality** is our voice in the matter.

"Creating Holy Moments"

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Comments, Questions, Random Thoughts?

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