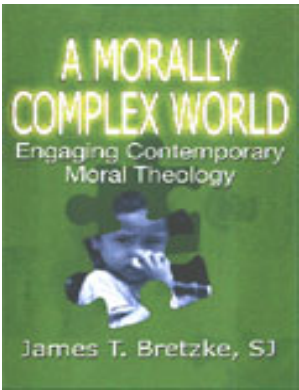


Finding the Key
For Our Lives
In a ➔

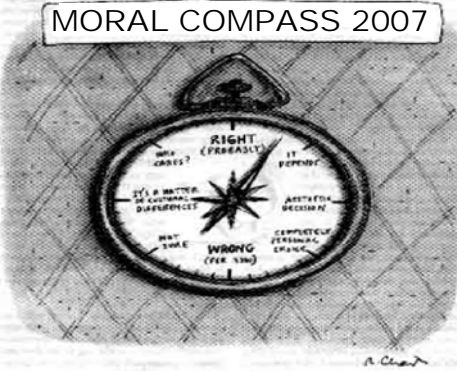
Presented by
Rev. James T.
Bretzke, S.J., S.T.D.

bretzkesj@usfca.edu



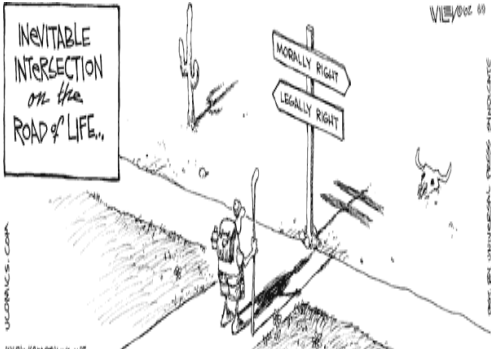
**A MORALLY
COMPLEX WORLD**
Engaging Contemporary
Moral Theology
James T. Bretzke, SJ

MORAL COMPASS 2007



Facing Life's Moral Dilemmas

INEVITABLE
INTERSECTION
on the
ROAD of LIFE..



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Some Starting Questions

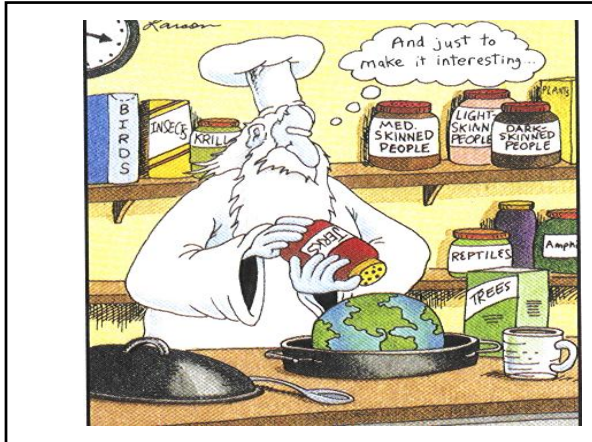
- Who Do We See Ourselves To Be?
- How Do We Look Upon God?
- How Do We Consider Right & Wrong?
- How Do We Consider Sin?
- What Should Our Response To Sin Be?
- How Do We Live In The World?

Historico-Theological Context

- The Context of the Israel Covenant
- The Role of the Prophets
- The Public Ministry of Jesus
- The Passion and Death of Jesus
- The Resurrection Experience
- Jesus' Commission to the Apostles

Community of Disciples

- We are all called, individually, to enter into this community of followers of Jesus Christ
- Look at the picture of the disciples in the Gospels
 - Not the “best and the brightest”
 - But chosen by the Lord, and those who in the last analysis remain with him,
 - And who are called to be fishers of persons and entrusted by Jesus with the Church's mission to make disciples of all nations



The Early Christian Community

- Early Tensions
- Christian Identity and the Moral Life
 - New Creation in Christ
 - Discipleship Community
- Efforts of the Church to Live a Gospel-Grounded Spirituality

Key Themes in Moral Theology

- Human Flourishing: *Gloria Dei vivens homo*
(The Glory of God is the Human Person Fully Alive)
- The Moral Person in the Moral Community
- Conscience and Its Development
- The Natural Law and Moral Norms
- The Common Good
- Understandings of Sin, Grace, and Redemption

Sources & Methodology for Moral Theology

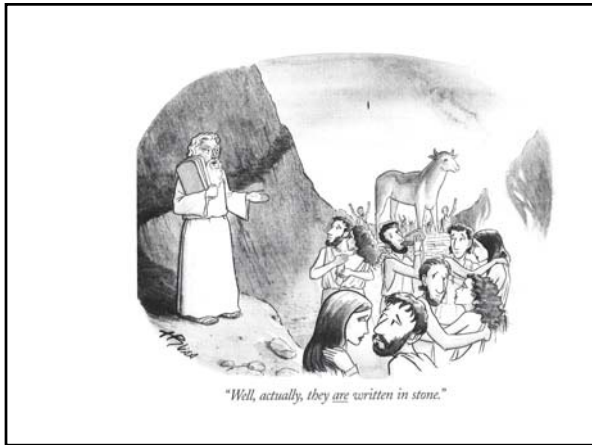
- Scripture: The Sacred Text
- Tradition: The wisdom of the community
- Human Experience
- Rational Reflection on the Truly Human

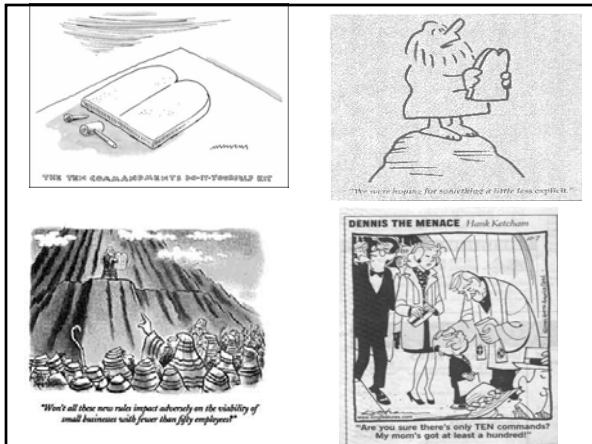


Sacred Claim Axis

- Scripture, as the revealed Word of God, must exercise a normative "sacred" claim on individual Christians and the whole Christian community
- However, this claim is grounded in the tradition of the community, and must also be in essential harmony with reason and human nature.







Scriptural Axis Cuts Both Ways

- Scripture comes out of the Tradition of the community, but it acts as the “norming norm” *norma normans* on both the individual and the community. No one stands above the Scripture (cf. *Dei verbum* #10)
- Both the individual and the community must seek and follow God
- This does *not* demand “perfection” of us, but rather ongoing conversion; We are all members of a Church always in need of and being reformed (*ecclesia semper reformanda*), or as Vatican II stressed, the Pilgrim People of God.

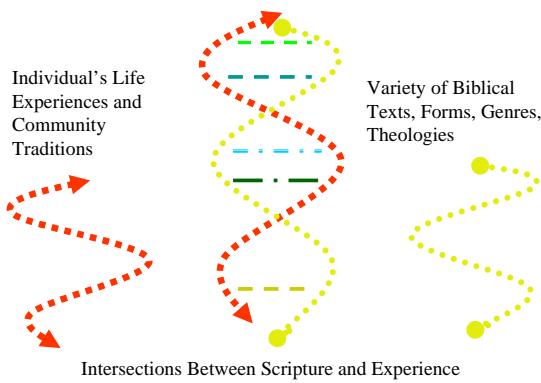
Attend to the Sacred Claim with True Discernment of Spirits



Multi-Strand Double Helix Model of Scripture and Ethics

Individual's Life Experiences and Community Traditions

Variety of Biblical Texts, Forms, Genres, Theologies

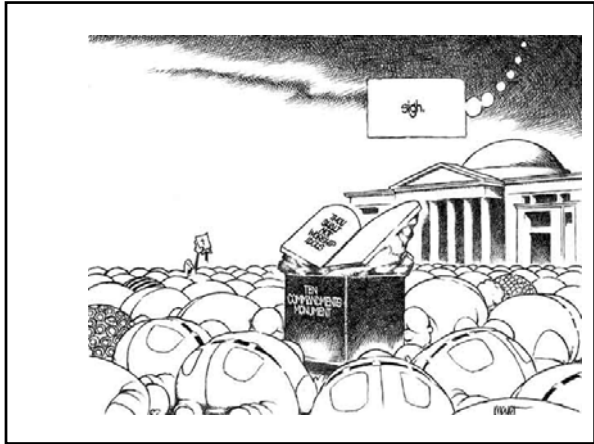


Sacred Claim vs. Sacred Cow

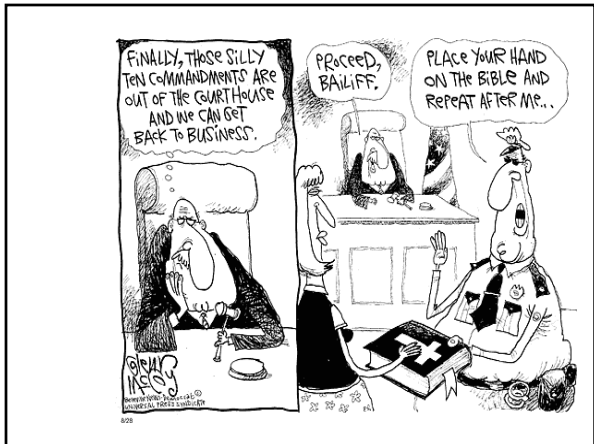
- The Scriptures are not “stand alone” sources
- If they purport to reveal God’s will for humankind, then what they reveal must stand in harmony with true human flourishing
- Some examples...
- Need to attend to the ultimate reference point of Scripture, which is God-with-us

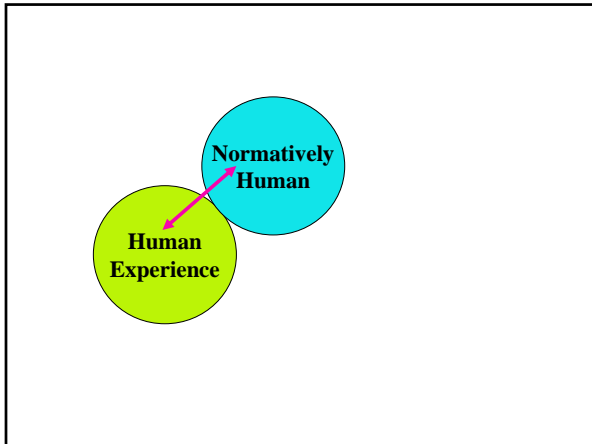












Rational Claim Axis

- Since the Roman Catholic view of moral agency is grounded *primarily* in an understanding of the natural law we begin our consideration along the “Rational Claim” axis
- However, keep in mind that both poles of this axis *must* figure in the discussion, and that the starting point is in human experience

The Rational Axis Also Cuts Both Ways

- Our reflection often *begins* based on human experience; but once we can establish a principle as being normatively human it does bind on us as a *norma normans [non] normata* moral norm
- However, given that key aspects of human nature include culture and historicity, any moral principle must be tested, verified, retested, and refined according to human experience, which may change according to time and/or place

The Rational Claim Takes Effort



And Community Discussion

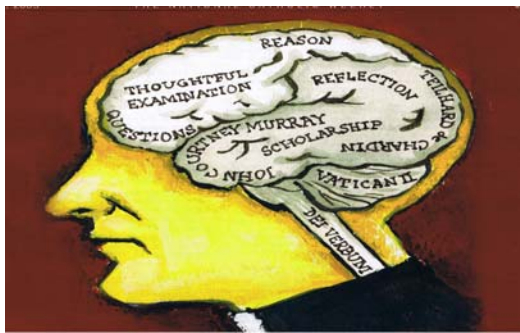




Summary of the Moral Sources

- The Sacred Claim Axis
 - Scripture
 - Tradition
- The Reason Claim Axis
 - Data from Human Experience
 - Understanding of Normatively Human
- Both Axes Operate in Each Person

But Are The Sources So Neat?!



Source Content Questions

- What is *used*, and why?
- What is *ignored*, and why?
- What is *rejected*, and why?
- What is *reinterpreted*, and why?
- Which source(s) is (are) **decisive** when there is a conflict, and why?

Two Basic Moral Theories

- Deontology (duty-based)
- Teleology (goal-based)

Moral Theory #1: Deontology

- The word "deontological" comes from the Greek *δεον*, [deon] which means "duty."
- Deontological ethical theory stresses clear moral norms which establish parameters, or limits, of what must not be done (prohibitions and proscriptions)
- as well as prescriptions of what must be done.
- The latter are given as moral duties which often indicate at least a certain basic minimum set of moral expectations

Moral Theory #2: Teleology

- Comes from *τελος*, [telos] the Greek word for "end."
- In general teleological ethics stresses two aspects of a moral telos,
 - end-as-goal, which should orient proper moral action, and
 - end-as-ideal, which furnishes a goal and a vision which supports us in our ethical growth and moral striving

Contra Naturam

- “Against nature”
- Not against the “laws of nature”
- But against the “nature” or purpose of a faculty of the human person
- Thus, contraception was wrong since it frustrated the “nature” of sexual relations in blocking procreation.

Further Points on Teleology

- stresses the "becoming" aspect of our moral nature,
 - such as genuine moral growth and integration, often expressed in terms of moral character, and what aids this process, such as an understanding of our moral identity (e.g. as disciples of Jesus),
 - coupled with a guiding moral vision, which in turn is sustained and nourished by the virtues to be cultivated and the vices to work against and to root out.

Teleology and Discernment

- In moral conflict situations:
 - i.e., in cases when one is confronted with the dilemma of having two or more "evils,"
 - one must always choose the lesser evil, or when faced with two or more options which seem to be good, then one must choose the better one.

A Last Reminder

- The foregoing discussion has been situated largely along the “Rational Claim” axis, moving from human experience to an understanding of the normatively human
- Both poles of this axis (human experience and reason) are indispensable
- However, for Christians, the Sacred Claim axis of Scripture and Tradition must also play a role in our moral reasoning.

Criteria for Moral Discourse



Six “C’s” of Moral Discourse

- Comprehensive (to the situation)
- Comprehensible (to the target audience)
- Consistent (internally and externally)
- Credible (dialogical and realistic)
- Convincing (to the target audience)
- Christian (the ultimate “test” criterion)

1st C: Comprehensive

- **Comprehensive** in relation to the issue and problem, i.e does it treat the problem and issue in its complexity and completeness?
- Are there aspects, etc., which tend to be ignored, condemned as irrelevant, etc.?
- .Move to a "thick" description rather than simply a "thin" description of the issue.

2nd C: Comprehensible

- Is the mode of discourse comprehensible by a wide variety of people coming from different backgrounds and faith traditions?
- Does it use philosophical and/or religious concepts which people use and understand?
- .Be careful, especially in pastoral work, of using too much "jargon"; yet, make sure that key concepts are understood
- It is incumbent on **us** to make ourselves understood

3rd C: Consistent/Coherent

- Are the modes of argumentation and positions taken internally **coherent**
- And externally **consistent** with similar issues, cases, etc.?
- Examples of being "pro-life" but against welfare for children
- Or for animal rights AND abortion on demand

4th C: Credible

- in the sense of being "believable" by all sides involved in a debate/issue, etc., such that we could admit that a person of sound reason could logically hold this position
- We need to be careful to treat counter-arguments **also** in a credible fashion, i.e representing these positions fairly and not caricaturing them,
- And asking that our opponents do the same for us.

5th C: Convincing

- Modes of argumentation that move from being merely credible to one that convinces, in the light of counter-arguments, treated fairly
- Does the argument convince me/others? Why? or why not?
- If an argument or line of reasoning does not convince, then what is our further response? Repeat it, more loudly? Use sanctions of authority or coercion?
- Or revisit and reform the argument?

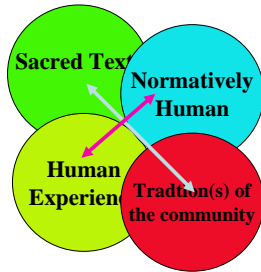
6th C: Christian

- Does the moral discourse, position, theory, response, application, etc. take into account the *Christian* nature of our moral life?
- Does it take into account adequately the aspects of Christian theology, such as sin and forgiveness, in the context of grace, the Cross, Redemption, Resurrection, Eschatology? the Community of (imperfect) disciples in a Pilgrim Church?
- This sixth "C" does integrate and critique the first 5 "C"s

Bring it all together

- Both Axes, Sacred and Rational Claim
- Six C's of Moral Discourse
- Our Christian understanding of moral goodness grounded in our relationship with God

Recall Our Methodology of Moral Theology



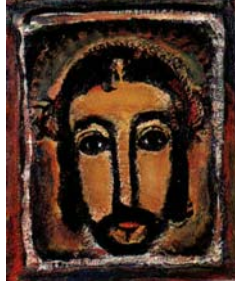
What Might Shift?

- If we move to integrate the Sacred Claim Axis, what might change?
- Different emphases?
- Different insights?
- Different pastoral responses?



Neither the Answers Nor the Processes Are Simple....

- Need for genuine search for the truth
- Need for openness to the Spirit *wherever* it moves
- Need for prayer
- Need for dialogue



St. Augustine's Guideline

- *In fide, unitas; in dubiis, libertas; in omnibus, caritas*
 - "In faith, unity; in doubt, liberty; in all things, charity."
 - Attributed to St. Augustine, this is an important principle of Christian discernment: unity in faith is important, but in cases of doubt a plurality of opinions and practices should be allowed, and the over-riding principle must always be charity towards each other.
