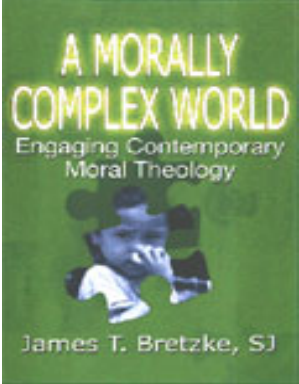


Finding the Key
 For Our Lives
 In a →

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Some Reflection 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?

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

Sources & Methodology for Catholic 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.

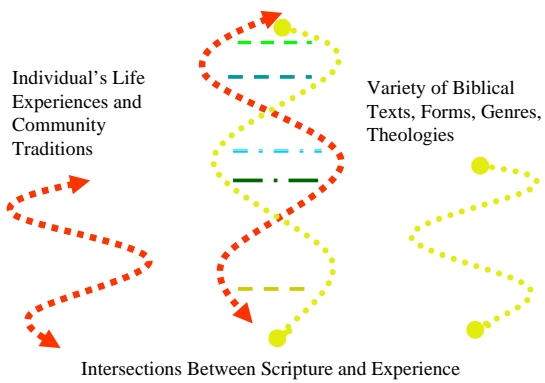
Attend to the Sacred Claim with True Discernment of Spirits



Multi-Strand Double Helix Model of Scripture and Ethics

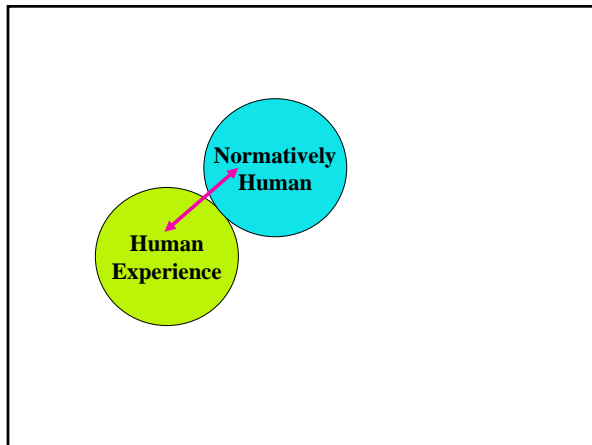
Individual's Life Experiences and Community Traditions

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 Dialogue



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

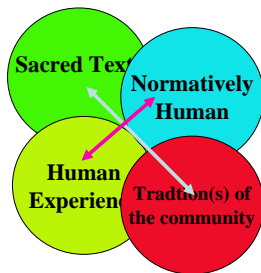
- stresses the "becoming" aspect of our moral nature,
 - such as genuine moral growth and integration, often expressed in terms of moral character, and what aids this process, such as an understanding of our moral identity (e.g. as disciples of Jesus),
 - coupled with a guiding moral vision, which in 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.



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?

Levels of Natural Law Moral Norms

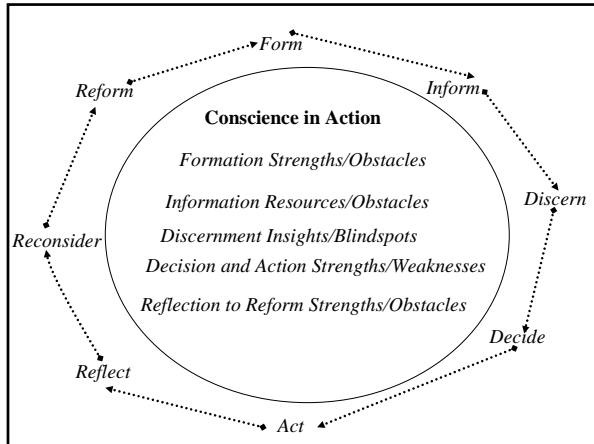
- Universal Precepts
 - Middle Axioms
 - Concrete Material Norms
- *Always* binding, expressed as abstract truths, such as “drive safely”
 - *Generally* true, in most cases (*ut in pluribus*) but exceptions exist
 - Apply to a specific situation but are more open to both *change* and *fallibility*

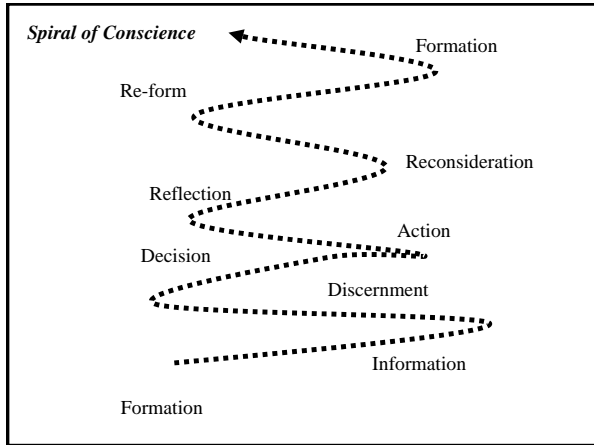
CONSCIENCE-BASED MORAL LIVING

- *Sanctuary* of Conscience
 - Sacred Place: Where we meet God
 - Safe Place: No outside authority may enter
- *Primacy* of Conscience
 - Always follow your conscience
 - ***Even when “erroneous”***

In the depths of his or her conscience, the human person detects a law which she or he does not impose upon themselves, but which holds them to obedience. Always summoning them to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to their heart: do this, shun that. For human persons have in their heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of human persons; according to it they will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of the human person. There she or he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in their depths.

Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, #16





Erroneous Conscience

- Vincible Ignorance
 - Can be overcome and therefore the person is culpable
- Invincible Ignorance
 - Not easily overcome & the person is NOT culpable
- "If the ignorance is invincible, or the moral subject is not responsible for his erroneous judgment, the evil committed by the person cannot be imputed to him. It remains no less an evil, a privation, a disorder. One must therefore work to correct the errors of moral conscience." **Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1793**
- "Vincible" and "Invincible" Exist on a

Gaudium et Spes, #16: “Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity. The same cannot be said for a man who cares but little for truth and goodness, or for a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, # 1790:“A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. If he were deliberately to act against it, he would condemn himself. Yet it can happen that moral conscience remains in ignorance and makes erroneous judgments about acts to be performed or already committed.”

Erroneous Conscience Summary

- Vincible Ignorance
 - Can be overcome
 - Person is culpable
- Invincible Ignorance
 - Not easily overcome
 - Person is NOT culpable
- These exist on a spectrum

Rationalization and Conscience

- Probably the biggest problem for most good people is not “erroneous” or “doubtful” conscience
- But rather the self-deceptive techniques of rationalization we seem to pick up so easily along life’s path.

Moral Discernment & Ethics

- *Not* just what is “right” or “wrong”
- *Not* “WWJD”
- *BUT* what is the Spirit of God making possible for me/us in the here and now
- Requires reading the “Signs of the Times”
- As Distinguished from the “Spirit of the Age”

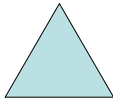
Three Legs of Moral Discernment



Openness to God's Spirit



Individual Effort



Community Discussion

Moving To a Pastoral Application

*Casistry with a Human Face:
Navigating A Morally Complex
World*

You are on the pastoral team of a parish in which Elena Bartoli, a young mother who is 3 months pregnant, has been diagnosed with advanced uterine cancer. She is 28 years old, married, and a mother of a two-year old boy. The doctors urge her to have a hysterectomy immediately, in the hopes of arresting the cancer. However, the doctors do admit that her chances of survival even with the hysterectomy are even at best (i.e. 50%). However, if she decides to carry the baby to term the doctors warn her that she probably will die before the baby is born, and that the baby's chances of survival are only about 30-40% even if carried to term. Elena is a fervent Catholic and wishes to give her unborn baby every reasonable possible chance of survival. Her husband and her family have urged her to talk with you and she agrees...

What is "Casuistry"?

- From the Latin *casus* for "case"
- Moral analysis method which sought to identify
 - The morally relevant features
 - The morally relevant principles
- And then use these to come to an evaluation of the case, which could be applied to similar cases

Pastoral Guideline Questions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1) What is your pastoral role & is what is being asked of you legitimate? • 2) What are the morally relevant features of this case? • 3) What presuppositions are brought to this case by you, by others? • 4) What kind of further information would you need to obtain? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5) What are the morally relevant principles involved? • 6) What pastoral goals do you have for your response to this person(s)? • 7) How would you strategize & organize your pastoral response? • 8) Most importantly: →
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The Most Important Guideline

- With and for whom is reconciliation most necessary?
- Keep in mind that the key to the whole pastoral encounter is *not* deciding who is “right” or even what the “correct” decision is,
- But rather, how can this person be brought into deeper communion with God and God’s family
- Thus, center on reconciliation!

Some Additional Pastoral Points

- Present the “Big(ger)” Picture
- Help people to see the complexity and ambiguity of concrete moral situations
- Move them beyond the natural tendency to look for simple clear-cut “black and white” answers

Facilitate Adult Responses

- Avoid being cast in the role of the “expert” answer person
- Help people to make and “own” adult decisions; to take responsibility for their own choices in this area as well
- Stress looking at all the morally relevant features
- Indicate the role of prudence in decisions

Two Key Concepts in Decisions

- Sanctity and Primacy of Conscience
 - Sanctuary
 - A Holy Place
 - A Safe Place
- Hierarchy of Values in resolving conflict of duties
 - Not every value or duty is absolute
 - Conflicts are bound to occur
 - Doing the higher duty is morally responsible

Confront Sin and Failure

- Don't try to absolve people from all guilt
- Recognize the limits of a therapeutic model
- Stress the reality of rationalization and moral failures in all our lives
- Give a brief catechesis on the traditional understanding of sin
- Which is the topic of our last talk...

Ambassadors of Christ: *Our Ministry of Reconciliation in the Church Today*

Confronting Sin and Moral Failure in a Gospel Manner

Some Initial Scripture Passages

- John 8: 1-11 (Woman Caught in Adultery)
- Romans 7: 14-20 (Power of Sin in Paul)
- Matthew 18: 21-35 (How Often to Forgive Question Answered with Parable of Unforgiving Slave)
- John 20:19-23 (Mission to Forgive Sins)

Fishers of Persons

- What does it mean to “catch” someone?
- **Not** in the web of sin, but in the net of God’s grace
- Thus, the primary Gospel response to sin and injury is *not* punishment and retaliation,
- but forgiveness and reconciliation.
- St. Paul speaks of this as being a “ministry” of the Church, and in this spiritual ministry we are all

“Sin” as Seen in Jesus’ Ministry

- Call to Metanoia (Conversion) linked to...
- Call to Discipleship linked to ...
- Jesus’ own mission...
- A mission of liberation and healing
- **NOT** a mission of condemnation & punishment

The Our Father

- “Forgive Us Our Sins
- As We Forgive the Sins of Others”
- Object of Prayer and of God’s Grace
- Reciprocal Nature of Forgiveness
- And a Sacred Claim on Us.

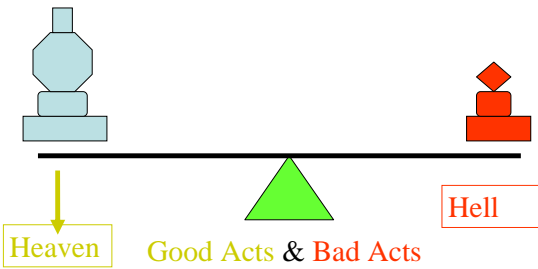
Conditions Necessary for Mortal Sin

- Grave Matter
- Sufficient knowledge, awareness and reflection
- Sufficiently "Full" Consent of the Will
- These three conditions must be simultaneously present **before** the act is committed.

Pre-Vatican II Notion of Sin

- State of Grace and State of Sin were often presented as a sharply dichotomous position, like the “on” or “off” light switch
- One day you could be in the state of grace, then the next in mortal sin, then back in grace, and so on
- Belief that the act alone changed the balance...

Moral Acts and the State of Grace



But what if the balance shifted?

Be careful!!

Moral Acts and the State of Grace



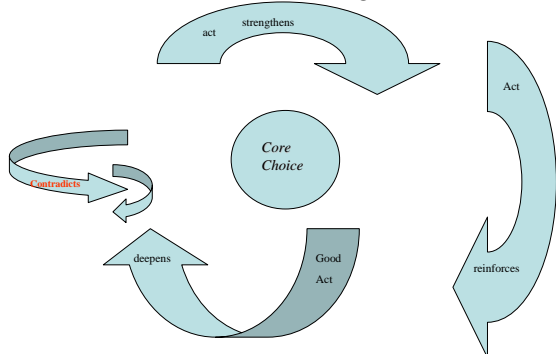
But Is This a Sound Vision?

- While this approach seemed to fit very well with both the notion of sin as a grievous act
- And with the notion that our good acts pleased God
- Is this approach actually in accord with the best possible understanding of how God is, and how God deals with us? ...

God *ALONE* Knows Our State

- Jeremiah 17: 9-10: "The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse-- who can understand it? 10 I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings."
- 1 Cor 4: 3b-5: "I do not even judge myself. 4 I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me."

Post-Vatican II Understanding of Sin & Grace



Analogy of the Marriages of Bob & Carol and Ted & Alice

- Bob & Carol marry
- Marriage relationship has more “downs” than “ups”
- Each becomes progressively more self-centered
- And hateful to the other
- Ted & Alice marry
- Marriage relationship has more “ups” than “downs”
- Love bond is strengthened and grows
- Each grows closer to the other

But comes an act of infidelity

- Bob is unfaithful to Carol
- This is a single, serious act
- A final straw
- Which symbolizes and effects the end of the relationship
- Ted is unfaithful to Alice
- This is a single, serious act
- But since their marriage is strong
- Though weakened the union survives

Insights of Vatican II Theology

- Helps us to see more clearly the *Relation* aspect of the States of Grace or Sin
- Takes more seriously the core nature of this relationship and how our individual acts can either strengthen or weaken this relationship
- Helps us differentiate sin along a *spectrum* of venial to serious to mortal

Spirituality for the Ministry of Reconciliation

- Basic twin dynamics
 - Sin-->repentance-->conversion (on the part of the sinner primarily)
 - Sin--> forgiveness-->reconciliation (on the part of God, and the community)
- Confession of sin--not denial; forgiveness of sin--not “obliteration” of the fact of sin

The Key Pastoral Moral Guideline

- With and for whom is reconciliation most necessary?
- The key to the whole pastoral encounter is *not* deciding who is “right” or even what the “correct” decision is,
- But rather, how can this person be brought into deeper communion with God and God’s family
- Thus, center on reconciliation!

A Jubilee Spirituality

- Biblical Understanding of the Jubilee
- Restoration of the *status quo ante*
- Human participation in God’s creative forgiveness
- The Season of the Lord’s favor
- Cf. Luke 4: Program for Jesus’ Ministry

Spirituality for the Long Haul

- We are still a pilgrim church, an *ecclesia semper reformanda*.
- Thus, need to deal with, but also live through,
 - my own sins
 - and the sins of others,
 - and of the institution

Further Marks of this Spirituality

- Spirituality of discernment and dialogue
- Spirituality of growth and liberation
- Spirituality of involvement
- Spiritual of ministry: Ambassadors of Christ

And one more Gospel passage...

- Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt. "Two men up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee... prayed 'God I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner?’ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.” Luke 18: 9-15

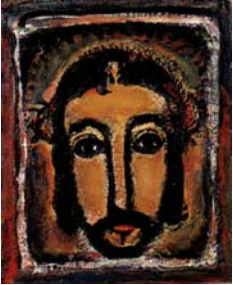
How does this passage speak to us??

Therefore, Judge Not!

- 1 Cor 4: 5: “5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God.”

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



What Might Shift?

- *If* we integrate Jesus' mission of forgiveness and reconciliation as a response to sin and moral failure
- What might change?
- Different emphases?
- Different insights?
- Different pastoral responses?
- Let's check the big picture



Prayer of St. Theresa Avila

- Christ has no body on earth but yours
- No hands on earth but your hands.
- Yours are the eyes through which He looks out with compassion on the world.
- Yours are the feet with which He chooses to go about doing good.
- For as He is the Head, so you are the members
- and we are all one in Christ Jesus.

Web-Sites & Contact Information

- USF Web-site: (has many resources)
<http://www.usfca.edu/fac-staff/bretzkesj/USFWebIndex.htm>
- E-mail: bretzkesj@usfca.edu
- P.O. Box 1881, Milwaukee, WI 53201-1881
