PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC MORALITY

What Is Morality?

• Faith = the doctrines of the Catholic faith. What we believe.
• Morals = the principles of right and wrong re human conduct.
• The Church is our authority in regard to faith and morals.

Catholic Morality Is Based on Christ’s Teachings

• Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.
• Jesus came to teach us God’s ways and Commandments.
• Obeying Jesus’ moral teachings leads to life.
• Disobeying Jesus’ moral teachings leads to destruction for individuals and society.
• Example of pride: makes an individual feel very self sufficient, an attitude that eventually leaves him at a loss at times of sickness, death, loss of job and the like.
• Example of lying: leads to destruction of trust within society.

What Should Motivate Us To Obey God’s Moral Principles?

• His is the manufacturer. His Commandments are directions about what is best for individual humans and for society. Just like we ruin a kitchen appliance if you fail to follow the manufacturer’s directions, so too we ruin human life when we fail to follow God’s directions. God wants us to be happy here on earth. Obeying His Commandments leads us to happiness here on earth.
• We should respond to God’s love by obeying His Will. God loves us so much. He made us in His image. He gave us live and friendship. We sin. Nevertheless, God always saves us from our sins.
• We should not be motivated to obey God’s Commandments primarily because we fear hell or the loss of heaven.

What Causes Humans To Disobey God’s Will?

• God created humans with free will.
• Free will enables humans to make our own choices.
• Therefore, we are able to choose to do wrong, to sin.
• At the root of our problem is selfishness.

What Three Factors Determine the Morality of Human Acts Depend?

• The action or behavior itself. What is done.
• The intention. Why the person acts or refuses to act.
• The circumstances. The how, the when, the where of the action. The circumstances do not change the morality of an act, but determine the gravity of the sin.

Two Moral Principles

• The end (intention) does not justify the means (action). A person cannot murder Castro to make Cuba free.
• A good act (giving alms) can become sinful if done with the wrong intention (to receive praise).

What Is Sin?

• Sin is a thought, word or deed contrary to God’s Will.
• Sin is contrary to personal good and to the common good.
• Even a very private sin such as pornography on the Internet not only enslaves the person, but also destroys the dignity of others as it makes a person insensitive to others.
Traditionally, moralists have talked about mortal sin and venial sin. Mortal sin is serious and kills our relationship with God. Venial sin is less serious sin and is not deadly.

On What Does the Seriousness of a Sin Depend?

- The act itself, for example, murder vs. loss of patience.
- The circumstances, for example, mental illness would lessen a person’s culpability.
- The intention, for example, intention to incapacitate someone, but actually murder the person.

Three Conditions Necessary for a Mortal Sin

- The act must be a serious or grave matter.
- The person must have full knowledge of what he or she is doing.
- The person must have full consent, or freedom.

Conscience and Morality

- Our conscience is the inner sense about the moral good or evil of our action.
- Conscience includes an inner feeling about the obligation of doing the right thing.
- A person must always follow his or her conscience provided that it is a rightly formed conscience.
- A rightly formed conscience requires input from these three sources: (1) our ability to reason and think things over, (2) God’s revelation found in the Sacred Scriptures and (3) the teachings of the Church.
- An erroneous conscience comes from ignorance of the Scriptures, ignorance of the Church’s teachings, rejection of the Church’s teaching authority, the bad example of others,
addictions, being slaves to our passions, and a lack of charity toward others.

How Do Our Passions/Emotions Influence Morality?

• Our emotions (love, dislike, desire, fear, joy, sadness, anger, impatience, etc.) are neither good nor evil in themselves.
• Their morality depends on how we use them or what we do with them.
• The emotions are part of the circumstances of a human act.
• For example, anger can be used in a virtuous way to work against poverty. It can also be used in a sinful way to hurt our neighbor.

What Is the Difference between Moral and Civil Laws?

• Moral laws refer to the rules of conduct that are given to us by God and always include a moral dimension.
• Civil laws are man-made laws, and may or may not have a bearing on morality. For example, stopping at a stop sign may or may not be sinful, depending on the circumstances.

The Four Sources of Moral Law

• natural law
  a. The norms of behavior which arise from our ability to use reason to discern what is good and evil.
  b. Natural law is not written in books, but in our hearts or our conscience.
  c. Natural law is the basis for all of our civil laws.
  d. Natural law is not sufficient to establish moral law, but also needs the input of God’s revelation.
• The Old Testament
• The New Testament
• The teaching authority of the Church
  a. Catholics believe that the Pope and the Bishops have the teaching authority given them by Jesus Christ, who promised that He would not leave us orphans, but would send us the Advocate, the Holy Spirit.
  b. The Holy Spirit guides the Church in its moral teaching.
  c. It is important to remember that the Church taught with authority for 20 years after the death of Jesus without the New Testament. The very first books of the New Testament were not written until 50 AD. The 27 books of the New Testament were written between 50 – 100 AD. The apostles and disciples had only the oral traditions and the guidance of the Holy Spirit as they went about teaching during these first 20 – 70 years of the Church.
  d. Catholics accept oral traditions that have been handed down through the centuries as another source of God’s revelation to us.

The Bible Supports Our Belief about the Teaching Authority of the Church

• Jesus told his disciples, “Go TEACH all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”
• Jesus told them, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”
• Jesus promised them, “I will remain with you always.”
• Christ gave the keys of the kingdom (a symbol of authority) to Peter and his successors.
• St. John ended his Gospel with these words, “There are still many other things that Jesus did, yet if they were written about in detail, I doubt there would be room enough in the entire world to hold the books to record them.”
• The Acts of the Apostles and some of Paul’s letters clearly show that the early Church needed to make a moral decision on the acceptance of Gentiles into the Church.