INTRODUCTION TO MORAL THEOLOGY

I. THEOLOGY

Theology is God talk, or the science of God, the knowledge of God through revelation. It is the science of Christian revelation. Theology according to St. Anselm is "fides quarens intellectum" or faith seeking understanding.

Theology is "the science which interprets, explains, defends and unfolds divine revelation." It has spiritual, pastoral & even "political" dimensions and ought to be always a contextualized, lived and prayerful theology.

In a real sense, every Christian is a theologian - a spontaneous theologian: he or she is obliged to reflect upon his faith and its demands on the various situations of life. According to Protestant theologian Karl Barth, two things are required to be a responsible Christian: to read the newspapers and the Sacred Scriptures daily. Why? One has to read the newspapers to know the situation of the world and of the country, and the Bible to interpret that situation - the signs of the times - according to faith. In the Catholic tradition, the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures is done in the community and officially by the Magisterium of the Church.

We also have professional theologians. We have, then, a twofold reflection of faith: the spontaneous reflection of every Christian, and the deliberate, methodical and systematic reflection of the theologians.

Theology is specifically one science: God is One. Theology takes up everything within God's horizon: it deals with God and the things that have relationship with God, either as principle or end. St. Thomas divides his famous Summa Theologiae into three parts: First Part (I) studies God; Second Part (II), Man's Journey to God, and Third Part (III), Christ as the Way to God (Incarnation, Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, Sacraments and the Last Things).

Theology has no subjective or specific parts. It has, however, different integral parts - different treatises. We speak of Dogmatic Theology, Moral Theology, Theology of Hope, etc. It is mainly divided, according to content, into dogmatic and moral theology. Dogmatic Theology guides us in the contemplation of the truth about God One and Triune and his Creation: it is orthodoxy. Moral Theology points to us how to do the truth in love: it is orthopraxis.

Our Christian faith constitutes the basis of our theology. It comprises four main elements: First element: what we must believe - the Creed. Second: what we have to receive to be able to all good - the Sacraments. Third element: what we ought to do - the Commandments. And fourth: what we should pray and hope for - the Our Father.
Christianity is not a morality, but radically an experience of the paschal mystery. However, Christianity implies necessarily a morality, a way of being and acting. Once a person believes in Christ, she or he will inevitably face this moral question: "What must I do?" (Acts 2:37)

II. MORAL THEOLOGY

The human person is fundamentally a moral or ethical being, that is, she or he is fundamentally free - and responsible.

"Moral" is often used in common parlance. People talk of moral (good) and immoral (bad) things; and of moral, immoral or amoral people. We call immoral a person who knowing what he should do does not do it, or does the opposite: he possesses moral sense but has no moral strength. We call a person amoral when he does not have a moral sense, that is, he is blind to some moral values. A person is moral, we say, when he or she knows what is good and usually does it, and what is evil and ordinarily does not do it.

For some Christians, a person is moral if he performs some good deeds. This is true, perhaps, but no necessarily so. A person, a Christian is moral if he or she is good and does good things. The radical question of ethics and Christian ethics is not what must I do? But rather, what - or who - must I be? A morally good person has good, loving options, attitudes and actions. St. Francis say in his life written by Carlo Carreto: "What counts is not to do, but to love."

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, "Moral Theology studies the human person as the image of God." The human person is the image of God by creation and by redemption, and therefore moral theology points out to him the way to be a good image of God, that is, a good creature and child of God. Moral Theology points put to us the way to follow Jesus Christ, the way to be his disciples.

St. Thomas gives a second definition of Moral Theology: "Moral Theology studies the movement of the rational creature towards God." This definition stresses the fact that life is a movement towards personal and communitarian realization; it is becoming more what one is, a journey to God - to happiness, to perfection, to love.

Moral Theology is a science, a normative science: the science of what man ought to be (man is a project, a becoming), by reason of what he is (a creature and child of God). The human person becomes the fundamental criterion of ethics and morals. The human person is reality - what he or she is - and possibility - what he or she can become. According to Albert Camus, "Man is the only creature capable of not wanting to be what he is." The task of Moral Theology is to guide Christians - and men and women of good will - to become more and more good human beings, that is, free and responsible, and good Christians that is real followers of Christ.
The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) begins the treatise of Christian ethics (or Moral Theology), entitled *Life in Christ*, with the admirable text of St. Leo the Great: "Christian, recognize your dignity" (CCC 1691). The human person, every human person possesses a unique dignity and inalienable human rights. As human beings and as believers in Christ, we are all social beings, members of the human family and the family or people of God.

The people of God, the community of disciples is called to live a moral life, to be missionaries of morality in the community. The Christian community is, according to the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), a Community-in-Mission that exists in order to evangelize, that is, to proclaim the Good News of Christ. This proclamation includes morality. John Paul II writes in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor or the Splendor of Truth*: "Evangelization also involves the proclamation and presentation of morality." (VS 107)

**III. PARTS OF MORAL THEOLOGY**

Moral Theology is usually divided into General and Special Theology. *General Moral Theology* considers the fundamental moral principles, values and categories while *Special Moral Theology* discusses the ethics of the person (including bioethics) and social ethics; it takes up, above all, the human and Christian virtues - the moral virtues, the theological virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

CCC considers Moral Theology in Part III and is divided into two sections. *Section One* (General Moral Theology) develops the following topics: man as the image of God, his vocation to beatitude, freedom, morality, conscience, virtues, sin, social justice, law and grace. *Section Two* discusses the Ten Commandments. The Catechism for Filipino Catholics studies the moral life of the followers of Christ in Part Two.

The most important encyclical on fundamental moral theology is *Veritatis Splendor*, regarding certain fundamental questions of the Church's moral teaching, issued by St. John Paul II.

**IV. SOURCES OF MORAL THEOLOGY**

The two main sources of theology - and of Moral Theology, too - are: the Sacred Scriptures and Tradition. Moral Theology considers human conduct from the light of reason enlightened by faith.

Moral Theology is theology, which is one. Hence, Moral Theology argues from divine authority, that is, from the *revelation of faith*. As a true science, Moral Theology also uses *reason* to argue its propositions and premises.
Moral Theology considers human experience: the collective moral knowledge through the ages, and the particular problems and "signs" of every age. In the context of a possible global ethics, Christians work with other believers and non-believers in the search for common human values and equal human dignity and rights. Moral Theology builds on human ethics; it connects with revelation (faith) and culture (natural theology); it is a bridge that links both.

In the context of Christian revelation, it is important to point out the substantial relevance of the Magisterium of the Church. Vatican II: "The Church is, by the will of God, the teacher of truth. It is her duty to give utterance to and authoritatively to teach, that Truth which is Christ himself, and also to declare and confirm by her authority those principles of the moral order which have their origin in nature itself" (DH 14, DV 10).

In the modern context, we may define Moral Theology with Timothy O'Connell: "The portion of the theological enterprise which attempts to discern the implications of revelation for human behavior, to answer the question: 'How ought we, who have been gifted by God, to live'?

Indeed, God has gifted us! By ourselves, we can do little, in fact, nothing. But we are not alone: God is with us, and with him as the psalmist tells us, we can scale any wall (cf. Ps 18:29). With the grace and love of God - offered to all - we can do almost everything. St. Paul asked himself: If Christ is with us who or what can be against us? No one and nothing! (cf. Rom 8:31-34). Christian ethics or Moral Theology relies on God's grace and the help of prayer.

V. METHOD OF MORAL THEOLOGY

The way of Moral Theology, then is faith and reason, or reason enlightened by faith: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth." (FR)

Traditionally, we spoke of positive, scientific and casuistic methods of Moral Theology. We also speak of moral reflection and of moral analysis. Moral reflection is ordered to appreciate, understand, interpret, and solve the moral problems of our times. It contemplates man in his mystery and in his freedom and responsibility - in the process of self-realization. It builds on a system and a scheme of moral theory and praxis.

Moral Analysis is achieved through the various concrete ways or methods: the analytic method (conceptual), the descriptive method (experimental), the cause-effect method, the evaluative method, the comparative method, etc.
VI. GOAL OF MORAL THEOLOGY

Ethics is the science of correct doing. Christian ethics is the science of correct Christian "doing" - doing the truth of faith in love. Christian ethics or Moral Theology is the science of Christian praxis. The goal of ethics is human happiness through right living. The goal of Christian ethics or Moral Theology is eternal salvation through a life in Christ, who is the perfect model of humanity.

Moral Theology tries to help us do the right thing in our lives. It can give direction and meaning to our lives. It teaches us the art of living: "How all and each one can be happy." Moral Theology helps the human person in the Christian journey towards happiness.

The ultimate goal of Christian ethics is the beatific vision of God in heaven in the company of Our Lady and the saints and our relatives and friends - and of all God's friends.

The proximate goal of Moral Theology is continuing conversion, integral liberation, or holiness. This ongoing conversion implies - be reconciled with God and neighbor (II Cor 5:20), and "to put on the new self" (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). It means to say no to sin and yes to God.

The immediate goal of Moral Theology is to develop "moral adulthood," that is, the ability to make decisions and to assume responsibility.

In a world permeated by poverty, violence and injustice, Moral Theology has an important word to say - a word to transform the world into a just and fraternal world.

God's question to Cain, "what have you done to your brother?" questions all human, and Christians in particular - questions us about the men and women and children (born and unborn) who are killed or die of hunger or merely survive while some of our brothers and sisters waste the resources God created for all.

The end of Moral Theology is to help us walk by the way of God. "Ask where the good way is and take it and find peace for your soul" (Jer 6:16). The Psalmist prayed: "You will reveal the path of life to me" (Ps 16:11).

Paul before his conversion, persecuted those who followed the Way (Ac 22:4; 9:1-5). What is the Way? It is "the way of salvation" (Ac 16:17), or "the way of the Lord" (Ac 18:25). In a real sense, Christian morality is the morality of the Way. And the Way for us is Christ (Jn 14:6). In truth, "the following of Christ is the essential and primordial dimension of Christian morality" (VS 19).

Jesus the Christ is the Way - the way of love (I Cor 13). When all is said and done all that matters is love - God's love and our loving response to it. On the way, and at the end - at the end of every day, of every year, of our life - we shall be examined on love: on love of God, love of ourselves, love of neighbor, preferential love for the poor, sick and abandoned, love of creation.
VII. RENEWAL OF MORAL THEOLOGY: CHARACTERISTICS

Moral Theology is about Christian life, and life is a never-ending process of development, a continuing effort to become better - as children of God and brothers/sisters of one another.

Moral Theology interprets human experience and the changing currents of thought with the light of Christian revelation. Some moral principles are essentially unchangeable, but they have to be applied to different situations and changing circumstance. Hence, there is evolution of dogma and the development of the moral doctrine. For instance the teaching of the Church on war or on the death penalty today is not the same as it was in the time of Saint Augustine or Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Theologian Pinckaers says that the renewal of moral theology is "neither a break with the past, nor its lazy repetition." Renewal involves fidelity to tradition and creative openness to the future. Authentic theological renewal implies going back to the sources and being open to the world. It has been said, that a good symbol of true renewal is a man walking: he has one foot on the ground of tradition and the other foot in the air going faithfully and creatively forward. This renewal would be the authentic re-founding of moral theology.

Vatican II (1962-1965) represents a point in of departure for the renewal of the Church and her members - priests, religious men and women, and lay faithful. This renewal includes two basic elements: first, it entails a deepening in the knowledge of faith and in conversion; and, second, it implies the reading and interpretation of "the signs of the times" according to the word of faith.

With regards to the renewal of Moral Theology, Vatican II said: "Special attention needs to be given to the development of moral theology. Its scientific exposition would be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching. It should show the nobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful, and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world" (OT 16). Moral theologians explain that the renewal of Moral Theology ought to be biblical and scientific in exposition, and that the primary object of Moral Theology is "the nobility of the Christian vocation," and its consequent object, "to bring forth fruits in charity for the salvation of the world."

A seminal insight of Vatican II: "Every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling" (UR 6).

The theologians' task is: "To hear, distinguish and interpret the many voice of our age, and to judge them in the light of divine revelation"(GS 44). They help the Church to which they belong read and interpret the signs of the times, which are messengers of the Word of God: "The Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (GS 4).
Some characteristics of a renewed morality:

A **dynamic morality**. Human life is dynamic. It is a process of development and growth. The Christian is on a journey, and he is a pilgrim of God. Hence, there is not a static morality valid forever.

A **personalist morality**. The basic moral category is conscience not law - as external law. The Christian is, above all, under a regime of grace, not law (cf. Rom 6:14). Christian morality is centered more on subjects (persons) than on objects; more, on internal disposition than external rules. Moral Theology ought to help human persons discover themselves and their tasks; it is committed to the service of the cause of the human person. This represents the foundation, the main criterion of ethics and morality.

A **positive morality**. Like the moral theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas, a renewed moral theology speaks more of virtue than is vice, more of goodness than of evil. It tries to help develop positive attitude of kindness, dialogue, tolerance and compassion. It is, then, a morality that underlines more announcing the Good News than denouncing evil and injustice, although these have to be denounced. It is a morality that underlines the culture of life instead of the culture of death. Our main problem isn't so much our sins, but our lack of virtues.

A **God- and Christ-centered morality**. Moral Theology is Theocentric and Christocentric. The central mystery of our faith is the mystery of the Blessed Trinity - One God in Three Persons. It is a moral theology focused on the three theological virtues: *tria haec* - faith, hope and charity. It is a moral theology of the Way to God, of Christ as the Way to the Father - and to love.

*Biblical and sacramental morality*. "Sacred Scriptures is the heart of theology" (OT 16; DV 7). A renewed moral theology is rooted in divine grace. The Sacraments are effective signs and sources of man's sharing in the life of the Blessed Trinity - in the life of Christ. The Sacraments are seeing not mainly as objects but as sources of Christian moral commitment.

*Personal and communitarian dimensions of morality*. We are not only individual human beings but also human persons and, therefore, essentially open to others: we are social beings. We are not autonomous beings but also relational. As it was said: "*Solus christianus, nullus christianus*" - a solitary Christian is not a Christian. A renewed moral theology stresses not only the autonomy of individualism but also the responsibility of collectivism.

*A scientific, dialogical and ecumenical morality*. Moral Theology is a science in dialogue with ethics and other religious ethical visions (inter-religious dialogue), especially Christian (ecumenism). In our pluralistic and secular society, moral theology tries to contribute its share to the global values of tolerance, freedom, justice, truthfulness, solidarity and peace.
A *morality of praxis more than of theory*. Moral theology is the normative science of Christian praxis (reflected action). It studies the interaction of theory and praxis "as mutual fertilization." Jon Sobrino writes: "It is more important to do than to understand." And we add: still more important than to do is to be - to be and become more what we are!

Therefore, and to conclude we say, the center of gravity of a renewed moral theology may be formulated as follows:

From static to dynamic; from law to conscience. In this context, there is a re-conversion to Christ as the entitative principle, to Sacred Scriptures as the primary principle of knowledge, and to charity as the operative principle of human conduct. (Orduna).

Abbreviations:

CCC - Catechism of the Catholic Church
DH - Dignitatis Humanae
DV - Dei Verbum
FR - Fides et Ratio
GS - Gaudium et Spes
OT - Optatam Totius
UR - Unitatis Redintegratio
VS - Veritatis Splendor

**SOURCE:**