

The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults

Morality

by Fr. Antony

The Catholic Church teaches that the morality of human acts depends on: the object chosen, the end in view or the intention, and the circumstances of the action. The object, the intention, and the circumstances make up the “sources,” or constitutive elements, of the morality of human acts.

There is a moral conscience in every person, which enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and avoid evil. Conscience is the law of mind, or a judgment of reason, by which he or she judges the action which is performed, going to perform or in the process of performing. “Deep within his conscience, man discovers a law, which he has not laid upon himself, but which he must obey. Its voice is ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil...For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. . . . His conscience is man’s most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths” (CCC. 1776). This conscience enables him to act responsibly.

The church clearly teaches that sin is a revolt against God and offence against neighbor. “Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as “an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law” (CCC. 1849).

The Scripture warns us about so many kinds of sins. “*Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God*” (Gal 5: 19-21). According to the teaching of the Lord, the root of sin is in the heart of man, in his free will, “*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, unchastity, theft, false witness, blasphemy. These are what defile a man*” (Mt 15: 19-20).

Sins can be distinguished according to their objects, according to the virtues they oppose, or according to the commandments they violate. They can be classified in many ways, but always rightly evaluated according to its gravity. The official teaching divides the sin into mortal and venial sins.

Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God’s law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it. Mortal sin, by attacking the vital principle within us - that is, charity - necessitates a new initiative of God’s mercy and a conversion of heart which is normally accomplished within the setting of the sacrament of reconciliation (CCC. 1855-56).

When the sinner’s will is set upon something that, of its nature, involves a disorder, but is not opposed to the love of God and neighbor, such sins are venial. For a sin to be mortal, it should be a grave matter, and should be committed with

full knowledge and deliberate consent. It presupposes knowledge of the sinful character of the act, of its opposition to God's law. The grave matter is always based on the Ten Commandments. It results in the loss of sanctifying grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes the eternal punishment. But venial sin weakens charity, and it becomes a hindrance for spiritual growth.

The Catholic Church also has a clear vision on the issues like killing, abortion, euthanasia, suicide, contraception, etc. and teaches clearly that they are against the Divine Law and thus, a sin. Pope John Paul II says "The Second Vatican Council in a passage which retains all its relevance today forcefully condemned a number of crimes and attacks against human life. Thirty years later taking up the words of the Council and with the same forcefulness I repeat that condemnation in the name of the whole Church, certain that I am interpreting the genuine sentiment of every upright conscience: "Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person ...whatever insults human dignity...whereas people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others like them are infamies indeed. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator". "No word has the power to change the reality of things: procured abortion is the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence" (Evangelium Vitae, Section 58) .

The Church also, fulfilling the role given it by Christ as the identifier and interpreter of apostolic Scripture and apostolic tradition, has constantly condemned contraception as gravely sinful. "The Church has always taught the intrinsic evil of contraception, that is, of every marital act intentionally rendered unfruitful. This teaching is to be held as definitive and irreformable. Contraception is gravely opposed to marital chastity, it is contrary to the good of the transmission of life (the procreative aspect of matrimony), and to the reciprocal self-giving of the spouses (the unitive aspect of matrimony); it harms true love and denies the sovereign role of God in the transmission of human life".