Moral Theology

Intellectual Formation – Level Two

Course Description

This course will serve as an introduction to moral theology: its biblical roots, Church teaching that impacts it and its rootedness in the theological virtues.

Course Objectives

The objectives for the course *Moral Theology* are:
- To introduce the tasks of moral theology.
- To understand free choice, its reality and how it constitutes the character of persons and communities.
- To review conscience and its formation; discovering moral truths.
- To acquire a background for moral theology.

Course Requirements

1. Regular attendance and active participation at the first four sessions, and full participation in the last four on-line or video assisted sessions
2. Completion of assigned reading
3. One reflection papers (2 pages, double-spaced). An alternative assignment will be made if a participant needs an accommodation.

Course Text

Mattison, William C. *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2008. (Available in print and as an e-book)

Prior to First Gathered Session 1:
Videos:
- Ring of Gyges explanation
- St. Augustine - Our hearts are restless (1 min 53 sec): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6foflF7Itmc
- Fr. Robert Barron - Our restless hearts as proof of God's existence (6 min 22 sec): https://www.wordonfire.org/WOF-TV/Faith-Clips-new/Why-do-we-believe-in-God-.aspx

Readings:

- From our textbook "Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues"
    - Chapter 1: "Morality, happiness, and the Good Life", pp. 19-36
    - Chapter 2: "Intention, Good Acts, and Human Freedom", pp. 38-55
    - Chapter 3: "Why Virtue? The Moral Life As More Than Actions", pp. 57-72
    - Chapter 4 (partial): "The Virtue of Temperance: Living a Passionate Moral Life", pp. 75-92

Gathered Session 1 (Overview of Units 1 and 2)

Unit One Online – Prudence and Conscience
- "Introducing Moral Theology", chapter 5, pp. 95-111
- Online article: http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/virtue/cardinal-virtues/prudence/

Online Discussion: In the Catholic News Agency online article on prudence, the author summarizes our virtue-based approach to moral theology in a very simple way:

"Let's review: we want to be happy, and we want to pursue goods in a way that will make us happy. This means we have to learn how to act well, which in turn involves an acquisition of virtue. If that sounds complicated, let me put it more simply: virtue is about doing the right things, and if we do the right things, we will become happy."

This almost sounds too simple, or too good to be true. In your forum, share how this virtue-based approach to moral theology differs from what you may have heard growing up. Do you think most Christians would think this way about morals?

Reflection: In Disney's *Pinocchio*, the voice of conscience is represented by Jiminy Cricket. In the original Italian work *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1883), by the Italian writer Carlo Collodi, Pinocchio actually kills the cricket, which can be symbolic of the way we can kill the voice of conscience. Based on our readings in Chapter 5 of your textbook, what are some ways that we can kill the voice of our conscience, or become deaf to it?

This is an assignment that is submitted directly to your facilitator. Your reflection should be around 150 words.

Unit Two Online – Virtue of Justice
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs #2052-2082, #2083-2195, #1846-1876
- Online articles:
    http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/virtue/cardinal-virtues/individual-justice/
    http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/virtue/cardinal-virtues/social-justice/

Reflection: Mattison says of the virtue of *justice*: "Justice is not simply about the courts or law. It is about all right relations between people. There is justice or injustice whenever there are people working together."

What would justice look like in a school among the students? What would justice look like between the students and teachers? Between teachers and principal?

This is an assignment that is submitted directly to your facilitator. Your reflection should be around 150 words.

Online Discussion: CNA article: "Justice means to give others what we owe them, whereas Mercy means to give others *more* than what we owe them." Share with your small group an example of a time you recently saw someone giving to another *more* than what they owed them. What was your reaction to seeing this?

Unit Three Online – Virtue of Fortitude
- "Introducing Moral Theology", chapter 9, pp. 180-193
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs #74-141

Quiz: In the well-known *Serenity Prayer*, Mattison notes that it beautifully exemplifies the virtue of fortitude. In it, he says that "The *serenity* to accept the things I cannot change" is the same as what part of the virtue of fortitude?
1) Endurance
    This is the correct answer. "There are certain hardships in the alcoholic's life (and in all our lives) that cannot be eliminated or removed. Thus we must endure them. Serenity is stability in the face of hardship, which keeps one's spirit from being crushed. It is endurance, the primary act of fortitude that is fittingly placed at the start of this prayer."
2) Courage

Courage is not about accepting in serenity those things we cannot change, but just the opposite: the readiness to effect change. Try again!

3) Wisdom
   Wisdom is "asking for the help to see things clearly, so as to be able to act rightly." So wisdom would come before serenity, helping us to know if it's something we can change or should accept. Try again!

Online Discussion: What are some examples from everyday life that require fortitude? What do these situations reveal about what we've learned about fortitude in this chapter?

Unit Four Online – The Holy Spirit: The Gift of Grace for a Virtuous Life
- "Introducing Moral Theology", chapter 16, pp. 311-331
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs #1996-2029, #1810-1811
- Online discussion and activities…

Gathered Session 2 – Units Three and Four

Capstone Project: 2 page paper due one week after the last gathered session.