

Natural Law in Moral Theology Today

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Natural law or natural moral law refers to the nature of the human person, a rational ethical being. Natural law *in moral theology* focuses on Christian theological ethics, and *today* refers to our modern times, meaning concretely from the time of the Second Vatican Council or Vatican II (1962-1965) and onward.

Three subtopics are developed in the following pages: first, some highlights of the historical development of the natural law theory; second, natural law theology today; and, third, the teaching of natural law through other relevant current expressions of or connected with natural law.

1. Historical Development of the Natural Law Theory

This section underlines, first, some points of the history of the natural law theory and, second, some criticisms to the traditional conception of natural law.

Highlights in the Development of the Natural Law Theory

The natural law theory is greatly influenced by Greek philosophy, particularly Aristotle, by the Stoic School, principally by Cicero, by Roman law, represented by Gratian and Ulpian, and by Christian tradition, in particular by St Augustine and, above

all, by St Thomas Aquinas, whose great impact continues up to our days.¹

The natural law tradition begins – to a certain extent – with Aristotle, who talks of natural law as the basic law of human nature. For him and for other Greek philosophers, to live well means to observe the natural law as perceived by reason. Tullius Cicero for his part speaks of natural law as “right reason in agreement with nature.” He adds: “It is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting.” Cicero describes natural law as “*secundum naturam vivere*,” or to live according to nature, which is the ideal of perfection, the path of happiness. For him, as for Seneca, God is the author of this law.²

St Augustine’s understanding of natural law was influenced by Neo-Platonism, and continued in Augustinism up to the 13th century. St Augustine connects natural law with eternal law, which he defines as “the divine reason or the will of God commanding that the natural order of things be preserved and forbidding that it be disturbed.” God is the creator and governor of the world and natural law is an inclination “to preserve the order of the universe.”³

¹ For a brief history of the development of the natural law theory, see in particular E. Chiavacci, “Ley natural,” *Diccionario enciclopédico de teología moral*, ed., Leandro Rossi and Ambrosio Valsecchi. Madrid: Ediciones Paulinas, 1975, 2nd Ed., pp. 558-563. See also J.R. Flecha Andrés, *Teología moral fundamental*. Madrid: BAC, 1994, pp. 244-248.

² Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1254 ab; Cicero, *De Republica*, III, 22, and *Pro Milone*, 4, 10; Gratianus, *Decretum*, I, 5, prol. See Alfredo Panizo, O.P., *Ethics or Moral Philosophy* (Manila: UST, 1964), pp. 61-62; J.R. Flecha Andrés, *o.c.*, pp. 243-244.

³ St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, Bk. 22, chap. 27: CSEL, 25, 621; E. Chiavacci observes: “The original intuition of the moral precept is present in all human beings and when facing any option: its ignorance is due to sin and to the bad will of sinners” (*l.c.*, p. 59 b). See Enrique Colom and Angel Rodríguez Luño, *Elegidos en Cristo para ser santos. Curso de Teología Moral Fundamental*. Madrid: Ediciones Palabra, 2000, p. 307; Flecha, *o.c.*, 243-245. Interesting what we read in St Athanasius: God did not want us just to exist; he “also wanted his creatures to be good.” *Discourses against the Arians: Oratio* 2, 78: PG 26, 311; quoted in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, III, Sixth Week in Ordinary Time, Tuesday (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), p. 207.

The conception of natural law reached its summit with St Thomas Aquinas, who studies law in his fundamental or general moral theology.⁴ For St Thomas, natural law is the law of reason, man's rational participation in eternal law. For the Angelic Doctor, natural law is a chapter or question (I-II, 94) of the treatise on *law*, which is defined (I-II, 90) as an ordinance of reason for the common good made by him/her who has care of the community and promulgated. Natural law is connected with *eternal law* or the plan of divine wisdom directing all activity and all change towards the final end: God is the creator of the human nature and its basic inclinations as perceived by reason. Moreover, natural law is the foundation of *positive laws*.⁵

Criticisms against the Natural Law Theory: Yesterday and Today

On the long journey of the natural law theory, natural law has gone through rough and narrow roads. At one time or another, the theory has been criticized, attacked, ridiculed and even rejected by some.⁶

Among the attacks against the conception of natural law yesterday are positivism and rationalism. With the Franciscan school, and more radically with Ockham, came nominalism, and positive *voluntarism* with the corresponding disappearance of the illuminating function of reason. Speculative as well as practical reason does not have the ability to know the truth by way of deducting universal principles nor the ability to discover concrete precepts. Truth only comes with the affirmative answer to this question: "If God asked you to hate him, would you hate him?" What matters, then, is the will of God.⁷

⁴ Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II.

⁵ *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 94; I-II, 90, 1; I-II, 93, 1; I-II, 96, 4; I-II, 109. Natural law is not properly the law of nature – of the order of nature – but the law of reason, hence natural moral law, which entails "to act according to reason" (I-II, 91, 6).

⁶ E. Chiavacci, *l.c.*; Richard M. Gula, S.S., *Reason Informed by Faith. Foundations of Christian Morality*. Mahwah, New York: Paulist Press, 1989, p. 220.

⁷ For this part, we rely mainly on E. Chiavacci, *l.c.*, pp. 561-562, 566.

Afterwards, the other extreme to voluntarism appeared, that is, *rationalism*, or the almost absolutization of reason as the manifestation of the will of God. Thus, by the hand of a strict deductive method, natural law became rigid and legalistic, to the point of including, besides the fundamental principles or precepts, the smallest ones. This strict, unbending rationalism with its corresponding moral deductionism sidelined if not forgot altogether the Sacred Scriptures. Thus reason became like a goddess.

From the 17th century up and including the first half of the 20th century, "the dominant conception of natural law" was very different from the one of St Thomas Aquinas. Natural law – rationalist and secular – was then almost wholly disconnected from faith. This deductive, rationalist conception of natural law was found, according to Chiavacci, in most of the textbooks of moral theology up to and before Vatican II.⁸

Other criticisms hurled at the natural law theory came – and come – from *Protestant theologians*, in particular Karl Barth, who says that the knowledge of nature from Christian revelation is much, much superior to the knowledge coming from philosophy. For most of them, Catholics give too much importance to nature and natural law to the detriment of faith and Sacred Scriptures.⁹

Furthermore, serious attacks against natural law in the 19th and 20th centuries came from Freud, Marx and Darwin. Freud emphasized the *id* to conclude that we are victims of our own being, and that we are not really free because "our unconscious rules our lives." For Marx, we are not free either: we are victims of society – of ideologies and superstitions. For his part, Darwin said that we are animals; freedom is an illusion; we can be trained but not really educated; in fact, "we use each other, not because of nastiness, but because there is no alternative."¹⁰

⁸ E. Chiavacci, *l.c.*, pp. 661-662.

⁹ See Charles Morerod, "Nature and Natural Law in Catholicism and Protestantism," in PAV, *The Nature and Dignity of the Human Person as the Foundation of the Right to Life. The Challenges of the Contemporary Cultural Context*, *l.c.*, pp. 110-122; J.R. Flecha Andrés, *o.c.*, p. 244; K.H. Peschke, SVD, *Christian Ethics*, Vol. I: *General Moral Theology*. Manila: Logos Publications, Inc., 3rd Ed., I, p. 104.

¹⁰ See Timothy E. O'Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1978, pp. 139-154.

Among the many "isms" which obviously reject the natural law theory are skepticism, utilitarianism (with proportionalism), situationism (situation ethics), postmodernism, and relativism.

Writes S. Pinckaers: "Without doubt, one of the determining causes of the present crisis in Catholic morality is the questioning if not the jettisoning of the teaching on natural law."¹¹ Among some contemporary Catholic theologians, "the crisis of natural law resulted from the crisis following the publication of *Humanae Vitae*" of Paul VI (1968).¹²

Richard Gula is one of the contemporary dissenting theologians regarding the natural law traditional conception. He presents well the stand of the dissenting theologians. In his textbook of moral theology, Gula discusses natural law in two chapters. In Chapter 15, he presents "The Natural Law in Tradition," and in Chapter 16, "Natural Law Today." He defends critically the natural law tradition and is against voluntarism and legal positivism. He praises the teaching of the Church on social ethics, but not on sexual ethics and bioethics.

Theologian Gula criticizes strongly some points of the traditional teaching on natural law, and proposes a new way of understanding natural law today. According to him, natural law itself is "a highly ambiguous notion." Natural law is not "natural." It cannot be identified with physical, chemical or biological laws of nature. Moreover, it is not "law": it is not a written code of precepts with the corresponding sanctions. A clear disadvantage of the natural law tradition is that Christian morality is handled by philosophy, not theology.¹³

¹¹ Servais Pinckaers, "Veritatis Splendor: Human Freedom and the Natural Law," *Ethics & Medics*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (February 1995), p. 3.

¹² A Laun, "Natural Law," in Pontifical Academy for Life, *The Culture of Life: Foundations and Dimensions*, p. 158. In his book *Ethos et Eros*, T.R. Lana presents and explains well the teachings and implications of Paul VI *Humanae Vitae* (Tamerlane R. Lana, O.P., *Ethos et Eros. The Ethical Link of Love-making & Lifemaking in Christian Marriage*. Manila: UST Publishing House, 1997, pp. 120-130, 172-175).

¹³ Richard M. Gula, S.S., *Reason Informed by Faith. Foundations of Catholic Morality*, o.c., pp. 220-249.

Gula with other contemporary theologians accuses St Thomas Aquinas of not being consistent. The Angelic Doctor's conception of natural law is, according to Gula, mainly Aristotelian, that is, natural law as "*recta ratio*" or the rational character of natural law; but St Thomas also allowed Ulpian to creep in (Ulpian defined natural law as "that which teaches all animals"). As a consequence, today sexual ethics and the medical ethics of reproduction are permeated by biologism or physicalism. As wholly an "order of reason," natural law is not tied up with physicalism. The main criticism of *Humanae Vitae* by Gula and other dissenting theologians is, besides its "inadequate concepts of natural law," its overemphasis on "biologism."¹⁴

The author of *Reason Informed by Faith* proposes a world-view different from the "classicist" world-view. In Gula's world-view, natural law is "order of reason," and not "order of nature." This new world-view takes "experience, history, change and development seriously."¹⁵

2. The Natural Law Theory Today

Criticisms against the traditional natural law theory help improve the study and teaching of natural law, which is a fundamental theme of moral theology.

Faith enlightens reason to know the natural law and its basic moral implications and applications. As G. Grisez points out, "the

¹⁴ R. Gula, *o.c.*, in particular p. 224. Peschke, for his part, says that St. Thomas "is criticized for his narrow-minded, physiological understanding of natural law." He adds: "The natural law doctrine of Thomas Aquinas is a good illustration of the dangers of anachronism" (Karl H. Peschke, *o.c.*, I, p. 95, footnote 4).

¹⁵ R. Gula mentions, among the dissenting theologians the following: Charles Curran, Richard McCormick, Bernard Haring and others (*o.c.*, p. 247, and footnote 13). See K. H. Peschke, *o.c.*, I, pp 109-111, and 235. See also Franz Bockle, *Fundamental Moral Theology*, Trans. N.D. Smith, New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1980, pp. 46-55. For a reaction to the dissenting theologians on the matter, see Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus, Vol. 1: Christian Moral Principles*. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983, pp. 196-199.

dictates of natural law and the truth of divine revelation are two agreeing streams from the same divine font.”¹⁶

What are the teachings of Sacred Scriptures with Christian Tradition, and the *Magisterium* of the Church on natural law? What is the place and content of natural law in moral theology and what is the relationship between natural law and the New Law?

Natural Law in Sacred Scriptures

The expression “natural law” comes from Greek philosophy, not from the Sacred Scriptures. However, the idea of natural law is found in the Old Testament, and particularly in the New Testament. The Old Testament speaks of vocation, of God’s call to his people, more than of natural law or of basic moral law.

Still there is in the Old Testament a basic morality, and general and specific moral precepts commanding good deeds. The Ten Commandments have traditionally been considered fundamental precepts flowing from natural law. As Chiavacci comments, before Antigone raised her voice against the abuses of the Emperor, the prophets challenged and judged the kings appointed by God: “Adam and Eve, Cain, Noah, Joseph and his brothers know what is good and evil and are judged in the light of an absolute unwritten law.”¹⁷

In the New Testament are repeatedly found the basic elements of natural law, particularly in St Paul who affirms that

¹⁶ G. Grisez, *o.c.*, p. 178. See Servais Pinckaers, OP, “Veritatis Splendor: Human Freedom and the Natural Law,” *Ethics & Medics*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (February 1995), p. 4.

¹⁷ E. Chiavacci, *l.c.*, p. 563, b. Sophocles writes in his *Antigone* on natural law as “the unwritten statutes of heaven which are not of today or yesterday but from all time and no man knows when they were first put forth.” (Quoted by Alfredo Panizo, OP, *Ethics or Moral Philosophy*. Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 1964, p. 61.) The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that the Ten Commandments “contain a privileged expression of natural law” (CCC, no. 2070; see also nos. 2071-2073). For St. Thomas Aquinas, the precepts of the Old Testament are all included in natural law (I-II, 100, 1. See G. Grisez, *o.c.*, p. 176). See also, L. Monden, Louis Monden, S.J., *Sin, Liberty and Law*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965, p. 92; James E. Keenan, S.J., *Moral Wisdom. Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition*. Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2004, pp. 105-120.

the Gentiles who do not know the law are a law to themselves, and have this law written on their hearts as witnessed by their conscience. Hence, the unbelievers may be – just like the Jews – holy or sinful persons (*Rom* 2:12-16). In the Gospels, the idea of natural law is found in the teaching on the indissolubility of marriage (*Mt* 19:4-9; *Mk* 10:5-9, 10-12), and also in the Golden Rule (*Mt* 7:12; *Lk* 6:31).

Christians believe that Jesus Christ reveals man to man himself, and that following Christ helps them become more what they are as human beings. For Christians, Jesus is the end of the law: “For Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified” (*Rom* 10:4).

Considering the reality of sin, divine revelation enlightens Christian believers on what is good, and grace with prayer strengthens them to follow Jesus, and to carry out the moral principles and precepts of natural law.

The primary principle of natural law and of Christian faith is love – as love of God and love of neighbor. Love of neighbor is underlined. For St. Paul, love of neighbor has primacy over the other commandments: “All the commandments... are summed up in this command: *You must love your neighbor as yourself*” (*Rom* 13:9; see *Rom* 13:8-10).¹⁸

Natural Law in the Teachings of the Church

Vatican II renews the traditional teaching on natural law. A good summary of the traditional teaching on natural law is found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), and – a brief synthesis – in the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*.¹⁹

Natural law is written on man’s heart. *Gaudium et Spes* (GS, no. 16) reads: “In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to

¹⁸ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, GS, nos. 22 and 41.

¹⁹ Vatican II, GS, nos. 16, 18 and 89; DH, 3 and 14; AA, 7. Summary: CCC, nos. 1954-1960. See also CBCP, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila: ECCCE and Word and Life Publications, 1997), pp. 224-239, particularly pp. 238-239, nos. 824-829 and 856-858.

obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil... For man has in his heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of man."

The Church can teach the truths of natural law with authority: "The Church is, by the will of Christ, the teacher of the 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 human nature itself" (*Dignitatis Humanae*, *DH*, no. 10). By her teaching on natural law the Church contributes to peace and fraternal and global solidarity (*GS*, 89).

Natural law may be known by *reason and revelation*. John Paul II writes: "The Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Roman thought" (*Fides et Ratio*, nos. 72 and 42). He adds that to speak of natural law today entails not to reject but to respect tradition. From reason and faith, the *CCC* (no. 1954) states: we know that "the natural law expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie."

Human natural law is connected with divine law: "The highest norm of human life is the divine law – eternal, objective and universal – [...] Man has been made by God to participate in this law, with the result that, under the gentle disposition of divine Providence, he can come to perceive ever increasingly the unchanging truth" (*DH*, no. 3).

Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (*VS*), describes natural law as the law of the nature of man and not of irrational beings: "God provides for man differently from the way in which he provides for beings which are not persons. He cares for man not 'from without' through the laws of physical nature, but 'from within' through reason, which by its natural knowledge of God's eternal law is consequently able to show man the right direction to take in his free action" (*VS*, 43).

John Paul II connects clearly natural law with *eternal law*. He affirms that the eternal law or the eternal reason of the Creator is present in the light of human reason, which is subordinated to God's wisdom, and his law (*VS*, 44; *DH*, 3). He describes natural law as "nothing other than the light of under-

standing infused in us by God" (VS, 40). He explains convincingly the necessary link between natural law and freedom – and also between natural law and truth and conscience. Freedom is an essential component of the nature and the dignity of the human person, and a condition of his moral life: "there can be no morality without freedom" (VS, 34). There is no separation between nature and freedom, but a harmonious relationship (VS, 50). The free person is rightfully autonomous, but not absolutely so: he is a creature of God, his image, and as such, subordinate to his Creator. Man's freedom – also his freedom of conscience – is not freedom *from* the truth but freedom *in* the truth (VS, 64). His freedom finds its fulfillment in the acceptance of God's law (VS, 35), including natural law.²⁰

The *Magisterium* of the Church underlines two essential notes of natural law, namely, universality and immutability. Natural law is universal, that is, inscribed in the rational nature of every human person. It is universal "in its precepts and its authority extends to all men" (CCC, 1956). The note of the universality of natural law, however, does not remove the individuality and uniqueness of each person (VS, 51).

Natural Law is also "immutable and permanent throughout the variations of history. The rules that express it remain substantially valid" (CCC, 1958). This immutability is compatible with the historical dimension of human nature, the developments of conscience and of the moral science. Indeed, the human person exists in a particular culture. There is a need to search and discover the adequate formulation of universal and permanent moral norms in the light of the different cultures and contexts. Nevertheless natural law is immutable: the human person is not exhausted by a culture, but transcends cultures (VS, 51 and 53).

Natural law, moreover, is "the necessary basis" for civil laws (CCC, 1959).

While recognizing "the possible limitations of the human arguments employed by the *Magisterium*" (VS, 110), *Veritatis*

²⁰ See John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, nos. 35-53; see also, his encyclical *Centessimus Annus*, nos. 53-58. "The human person is to act according to his conscience and in freedom" (CCC, 1782; *DH*, 3).

Splendor cautions against the dangers of relativism, pragmatism and positivism (VS, 112) and asks Christians, including theologians, for “loyal assent” to the *Magisterium* or teaching on dogma and morals (VS, 110; see no. 113). As did *Donum Vitae* earlier, VS faces squarely the position of those who criticize the *Magisterium* for apparently falling into biologism or physicalism, an accusation that does not seem to be true. The Church’s teaching does not separate the body from the soul: “It is in the unity of body and soul that the person is the subject of his own moral acts” (VS, 48). Indeed, the human body “shares in the dignity of the ‘image of God’, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit” (CCC, 364). Therefore, no obligations or duties flow from biological or physical laws but from the body as essential component, from the person as body-soul, as a moral subject. The ethics of sexuality and of reproductive technologies must be evaluated according to that unity, and the natural inclinations and corresponding fundamental ethical principles and precepts which express natural law.²¹

Natural Law in Moral Theology

Reading and teaching today the essential doctrine on natural law requires knowing St Thomas. Vatican II considers him a special guide in theology (OT, 16), it also makes recourse to him regarding the teaching on natural law (DH, 3, note 3). John Paul II states that

²¹ See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction Donum Vitae* (Vatican City, 1987), Introduction, no. 3. See also Wolfgang Waldstein, “The Capacity of Human Mind to Know the Natural Law,” Pontifical Academy for Life (PAV), *The Nature and Dignity of the Human Person as the Foundation of the Right to Life. The Challenges of the Contemporary Cultural Context*, 8th Annual Assembly (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003), p. 52; S. Pinckaers, *l.c.*, 3, b; G. Grisez, *o.c.*, pp.174-175; E. Colom and A. Rodríguez Luño, *o.c.*, pp. 318-323; T.R. Lana, *o.c.*, pp. 308-333. L. Monden writes: “In its classical meaning, the term ‘natural law’ has no connection with the physical or biological concept of ‘nature’... An action which is biologically ‘according to’ nature may very well be in conflict with the ‘natural law’” (*o.c.*, p. 88). A. Fernández states: “Certainly the conceptualization of natural law needs to be freed from certain biologisms and fixisms... The *Magisterium* of the Church has made the exact interpretation of the meaning and implications of natural law” (*o.c.*, pp. 226-227).

the Church has often made reference to the Thomistic doctrine on natural law, including it in her own teaching on morality (VS, 44). According to theologian E. Chiavacci, St Thomas "provided wings and liberating possibilities to the idea of natural law in the moral field as well as in the political field." Obviously, the Angelic Doctor has to be read contextually and translated culturally.

The most fundamental principle of natural law: "*Fac bonum et vitia malum*," or do good and avoid evil, is a self-evident moral principle, parallel to the theoretical principle of contradiction.²²

Traditionally, natural law is expressed by a triple interior inclination: "the inclination to preserve one's being, the inclination to preserve the species, and the inclination towards recognition and community" (A. Laun). The *primary precepts* or the *primary moral principles* – immutable and self-evident – express the three natural inclinations of our human nature. Thus, subsistence, responsible reproduction, and rationality and sociability constitute the bases of general ethical orientations. Hence, the preservation of life, the education of children and the love of neighbor are considered grave precepts of natural law. For St Thomas Aquinas the precepts of charity are primary principles of natural law.²³

The *secondary ethical principles* and even the *tertiary principles* of natural law are proximate or not so proximate conclusions of the first principles and not self-evident, and not so easily

²² St Thomas Aquinas, I-II, 94, and I-II, 94, 5. E. Chiavacci formulates this principle thus: the moral good is the fundamental orientation towards God; the moral evil exists only when a negative answer is given to the absolute call of God (*l.c.*, p. 560, a and b). (With all due respect, we do not agree with the interpretation of St Thomas made by R. Gula). Chiavacci asserts that the natural law is objective norm but not fixed, meaning its formulations are attached to a time and a culture or to a cosmic-biological nature; objectivity, yes, but not fixism, which, according to him, makes natural law "abstract and politically repressive" (*ibid.*, p. 566, a no. 3).

²³ St Thomas Aquinas, I-II, 100, 3. See A. Laun, *l.c.*, p. 155. See Antonio Royo Marín, O.P., *Teología moral para seglares, I: Moral fundamental y especial*. Madrid: BAC, 1957, pp. 108-109, no. 129. F. Bockle: "We begin with the principle that every man should exist and live according to what God's creative and saving word has made him" (*o.c.*, p. 50).

grasped by reason. One example usually given is the wrongness of adultery.²⁴

Are these distinctions still relevant today? What matters most is the core truth: The human person is a rational being and, therefore – as philosopher J.A. Marina concludes – “to live according to nature is to live according to reason.” The current teaching of the Church and of many theologians do not speak anymore, in particular, of secondary principles, but just of natural law and its first or basic and essential ethical principles, which orient us on what must be or not be done.²⁵

Today some authors call the fundamental general precepts of natural law *values*. For Chiavacci, for instance, natural law is not a catalogue of precepts but directives and values, headed by charity as total gift to God and neighbor, and the unity of the human family. In the interior of these orientations or values, are the operational precepts or norms which command or forbid

²⁴ It is easy to understand the first principles. It is less easy to see the secondary principles. It is not easy to see the third group of ethical principles and their application. For instance, St Augustine says that theft is punished by the law written in our hearts, and St Thomas agrees, but the Angelic Doctor says that it was not so for the Germans, as Julius Caesar narrates. (*Confessions*, 2, 4, 9: PL 32, 678; quoted also in I-II, 94; I-II, 94, 4-5; L. Monden, *o.c.*, p. 92; Gabriel Pastrana, *Medical Ethics. Ethical Reasoning in Medical practice*. Manila: 1971, Reprinted 1992, pp. 42-44. In some situations, majority of people in a given culture or situation, may be blinded by vice to a particular value or principle, like in the case of the Sodomites. “Should all nations commit it (Sodomism), they should also be held guilty of the same crime by the divine law” (St Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 8, 15; quoted by C. Morerod, *l.c.*, p. 112).

²⁵ J. A. Marina, *Ética para náufragos* (Barcelona: Ed. Anagrama, 1995), p. 213. Vatican II states that the principles of the moral order have their origin in man's nature itself (*DH*, 14). For its part, CCC talks of first and essential or principal precepts (CCC, 1955). Moreover, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* talks of the “unchangeable principles of natural law” and of “principal precepts” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, *l.c.*, nos. 153 and 140). See G. Grisez, *o.c.*, pp. 178-192; E. Colom and A. Rodríguez Luño, *o.c.*, pp. 329-332. E. Chiavacci, *l.c.*, p. 560, b. G. Grisez explains well what he calls the first principle of practical reasoning (“The good is to be done and pursued; the bad is to be avoided”) and of its primary specifications. E. Colom and A. Rodríguez Luño focus on the first principle of practical reason and first principle of natural moral law, the first principles flowing from the natural inclinations and of secondary precepts. Many moralists today talk of fundamental principles or precepts.

a concrete action. These operational precepts or norms may be fallible. The principles may be clear but not the application or conclusions, which may vary according to different situations and circumstances. As Flecha Andrés put it, "The study of history cautions us not to be excessively in a hurry to qualify as natural law what possibly is fruit of social perceptions of the moment."²⁶

Natural law possesses, as L. Monden says, "an inner and dynamic character. It is "the inner law of growth" – of becoming what we are. To a certain point, the understanding of natural law evolves. It may evolve rightfully or wrongly; it may go backwards and ossify. According to him, natural law "constitutes the norm of authenticity of the evolving sentiments of humanity." It includes being and acting: "*agere sequitur esse*, which means – A. Laun adds – "*agere sequitur bonum*."²⁷

Natural Law and the New Law

Natural law speaks of the universal commonality of our human nature. Whether believers or unbelievers, all human beings have a human nature that inclines towards goodness, self-fulfillment and perfection. Faith speaks of nature and – more so – of grace. As Urs von Balthasar affirms, with the coming of biblical revelation, the Christian knows that the recourse of

²⁶ See I-II, 94, aa. 5 and 6; F. Viola, "Natural Law: Stability and Development of its Contents," *l.c.*, p. 161; E. Chiavacci, *o.c.*, pp. 567, a, 4; J.R. Flecha Andrés, *o.c.*, p. 249. With due respect for Freud, Marx and Darwin, the human person is free and becomes truly free by creative fidelity to his nature of being human and the natural law that flows from it. T. O'Connell asserts: There is something universal in human nature; "there are laws of nature, whether we like it or not, in terms of which the future must be shaped" (T. O'Connell, *o.c.*, p. 142; B. Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, I, *l.c.*, p. 323).

²⁷ L. Monden advocates for re-formulations of natural law expressed in different cultures and philosophies, *o.c.*, pp. 88-91). See A. Laun, *l.c.*, p. 156; E. Chiavacci, *l.c.*, p. 566, b, 4; A. Fernández, *o.c.*, p. 228. Bernard Haring asserts that there are "abiding truths," and condemns "unlimited relativism." He adds these strong words: "No group, no nation, no part of the Church may impose any time-bound norms on others. This is a warning for all times against a superiority complex to lead to ethical colonialism, to dangerous tensions and even to wars" (*Free and Faithful in Christ*, *l.c.*, p. 324).

human freedom to nature must definitely take into consideration the mystery of grace, if it does not want to be based on itself.²⁸

In *moral theology*, then, natural law is a radically important law. It is grounded on God and grounds revealed law and the law of grace: "The natural law provides revealed law and grace with a foundation prepared by God and in accordance with the work of the Spirit" (CCC, no. 1960).

The *New Law*, however, is the most important law for the Christian. It is the law of Christ, the law of the Holy Spirit, the law of grace, freedom and love, which St Thomas describes as an interior law written by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the faithful and working through love.²⁹

Natural law finds its fulfillment in the New Law. As the radical tendency towards goodness, natural law is known by all through reason. However, natural inclinations may be practically obscured not only by ignorance and the cultural environment, but also by sins and vices. Divine grace strengthens one to do good and fight evil in the different situations of our life in the world.

The study of the New Law is still part of some treatises of fundamental moral theology, as it was for St Thomas and classical theology. Unfortunately, some other current textbooks do not include it anymore. (These authors exclude also the initial question of traditional Christian theology, namely the question on beatitude or happiness or the end.) According to S. Pinckaers, the

²⁸ H. U von Balthasar as quoted by J.R. Flecha Andrés, *o.c.*, p. 254 and footnote 37. Currently, there are contemporary authors that defend a natural law without God, while others prefer a natural law grounded on God. One of the latter group, Fulvio Di Blasi says: "Natural law without God easily becomes a *lex naturalis without lex*" (*God and the Natural Law: A Rereading of Thomas Aquinas*, Transl. David Thunder, South Bend, Ind.: St Augustine's Press, 2006, p. 68).

²⁹ St Thomas Aquinas, I-II, 106, 1. See John Paul II, VS, 24; S. Pinckaers, *l.c.*, p. 4; A. Fernández, *o.c.*, p. 228. John Paul II writes: "Grace enables us to possess the full freedom of the children of God... and thus to live our moral life in a way worthy of our sublime vocation as 'sons of the Son'" (VS, no. 18; see also nos. 23-25, 40, 102-105).

inclusion of the New Law within fundamental moral theology is the *conditio sine qua non* of the evangelical renewal of morals.³⁰

As *classical theology* puts it, grace does not destroy nature but builds on it and improves it. The Christian dimension of life includes all that is truly human and goes beyond it. It integrates "creation" and "redemption," "nature" and "grace," natural law and the New Law of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the normative content of moral theology includes and goes beyond the one of ethics. Even the teaching on natural law is seeing not only from ethics but also from faith, from God's plan of liberation and salvation. Christian ethics is ethics, but mainly an ethics of the Alliance and of the Covenant, and an eschatological ethics. It is an ethics of the following of Christ.

3. New Complementary Approaches to Natural Law

Renewing the classical natural law conception includes approaching the theory to concepts which attract our contemporary world such as human dignity and rights, values and virtues, and the primacy of love. The dignity of the human person and rights, virtue ethic, and the Golden Rule are considered today new expressions of or closely connected with natural law.

Natural Law: The Dignity of the Human Person and Human Rights

In ecological perspective, the word "creation" is preferred to the word "nature." Some authors assert that it is difficult to be responsible to nature, but not so to creation. Similarly, concerning natural law, some prefer to speak of "person" than of "nature" or of natural law.

The presentation of natural law in moral theology today has to be well grounded anthropologically and theologically. It ought to be rooted in a sound Christian anthropology: natural law is the law of being human. It refers to the nature of the human

³⁰ S. Pinckaers, "La Ley Nueva en la cima de la moral cristiana," in *Comentario a la 'Veritatis Splendor'*, ed. Gerardo del Pozo Abejón (Madrid: BAC, 1994), p. 486.

person, or the person as body-soul, as the unity of his biological and spiritual inclinations. The principles/precepts of natural law could be simply formulated thus: "*Act as a human person.*"

The human person is the *central criterion* of ethics, including social ethics: "Man is the source, the center, and the purpose of all socio-economic life" (GS, 63). Kant expresses it in his moral categorical imperative: "Act in such a way that you always take humanity, in yourself as in every person, as end and never as means."

Natural law, as CCC states, "expresses the *dignity of the person.*" The human person possesses unique dignity precisely because he/she is a person open to God, to others, and to creation. By reason of his dignity as a human creature, a rational and social being, the human person must be respected always. The principle of human dignity is a universal and unchangeable principle of natural law.³¹

In Christian perspective, the human person is the image and likeness of God, who created him and made him "little less than a god" (Ps 8:5), redeemed him through Christ and constantly renews him in the Holy Spirit. For Christians, and for many other believers, the loss of God is at the very root of the loss of man – of his/her dignity and rights.³²

Natural law, CCC says, "determines the basis for the fundamental (human) rights and duties." Another expression of natural law today is *human rights*. The human person possesses human rights, which are based on the dignity of the person and are ethically grounded on and flow from natural law. The natural law teaching can serve "as the foundation for the determination

³¹ The principle of human dignity is unchangeable but its application is not, e.g., slavery (F. Bockle, *o.c.*, pp. 50-51). See CCC, no. 1956; VS, 50. See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Vatican City, 2004, no. 140; Fausto B. Gómez, O.P., *Promoting Justice, Love, Life*, Manila: UST Publishing House, 1998, pp. 50-65.

³² See, John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*; also A. Laun, PAV, *The Culture of Life: Foundations and Dimensions*, l.c., p. 150. The human person is "the only creature on earth God has wanted for his own sake, who discovers his true self fully only in a sincere giving of himself" (GS, 24).

and defense of human rights” and duties. As the main principles/precepts of natural law flow from its natural inclinations, so also the fundamental human rights and duties.³³

It is stressed that fundamental human rights are *universal*, can neither be acquired nor lost, and do not admit degrees: those who possess them possess them in the same degree. Certainly, all persons have the same fundamental human rights; unfortunately, some – or many – cannot exercise their rights, even if they are equal to others!³⁴

To human rights, corresponding duties are necessarily linked. Duties are correlative with rights. John XXIII writes: “To one man’s right there corresponds a duty in all other persons; the duty, namely of acknowledging and respecting the right in question.” For instance, *is the duty to respect the right to life of unborn children fulfilled in abortion, or of those human beings punished with the death penalty?*³⁵

In his speech to the United Nations (New York, April 18, 2008), Pope Benedict XVI argued the close connection between human rights and natural law. After stating that human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent, the Pope added:

[Human rights] are based on the natural law inscribed on human hearts and present in different cultures and civilizations. Removing human rights from this context (the natural law) would mean restricting their range and yielding to a relativistic conception, according to which

³³ CCC, no. 1956; S. Pinckaers, *l.c.*, p. 3, a and b. Natural law “precedes and unites all rights and duties” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, *l.c.*, no. 140). “Natural rights spring from natural law. We cannot deny natural law and at the same time proclaim natural rights” (Pedro B. Gabriel, *Ethical Wisdom*. Manila, UST Printing Office, 1983, p. 64).

³⁴ See Leonardo Rodríguez Duplá, “Sobre el fundamento de los derechos humanos,” *Salmanticensis*, 43 (1996); E. Chiavacci, *l.c.*, p. 563, b, 5.

³⁵ C. Morerod says, in this context: “Perhaps in the future death penalty will be considered to be against natural law.” For many of us, the future is now! Charles Morerod, “Nature and Natural Law in Catholicism and Protestantism,” *The Nature and Dignity of the Human person as the Foundation of the Right to Life. The Challenges of the Contemporary Cultural Context*, *l.c.*, p. 112. See John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, nos. 30 & 91.

the meaning and interpretation of rights could vary and their universality would be denied in the name of different cultural, political, social and even religious outlooks...

The universality of natural law grounds for all peoples and cultures the recognition of fundamental human rights and makes possible the dialogue among cultures and religions.

The dignity of the human person and human rights, furthermore, ground the morality of *positive laws*. While natural law is "*mensura non mensurata*" (measure not measured), positive law is "*mensura mensurata*" (measure measured). For St Thomas Aquinas, positive laws are laws as far as they are derived from natural law. Positive laws opposed to the general precepts of natural law are not good laws. In these cases, St Thomas argues, laws must be disobeyed because they are not true laws but "*iniustae*," "*inhonestae*," that is, "*corruptio legis*" – against natural law. When a law is unjust, we argue today, it must be disobeyed – *conscientious objection* – because it is against my conscience, which is – if true and certain – voice of natural law. Unjust laws ought to be disobeyed and fought!³⁶

Natural Law and Virtue Ethic

Basic ethical principles promote values, and values and principles are practiced in *virtues*. Essential human values are also elements of natural law and another way of expressing

³⁶ Benedict XVI, Address to United Nations: New York: April 18, 2008: www.vatican.va. Pope Benedict XVI, *Speeches* 2008. See John Paul II, *CA*, 53-58; *VS* 32, 34, 41, 52; J.R. Flecha Andrés, *o.c.*, p. 243. St Thomas Aquinas: "Omnis lex humanitas posita intantum habet de ratione legis, inquantum a lege naturae derivatur. Si vero in aliquot a lege naturali discordet, iam not erit lex sed legis corruptio" (I-II, 95, 2). The Angelic Doctor says that a tyrannical regime is not just and, therefore, could be overthrown (II-II, 42, 2, ad 3). See L. Monden, *o.c.*, p. 94; E Chiavacci, *l.c.*, p. 561, a; Aurelio Fernández, *La reforma de la teología moral*. Burgos: Ediciones Aldecoa, 1997, p. 228. The virtue of *epikeia*, or equity, is a virtue which inclines us to follow the spirit and not the letter of the law that may make us slaves of the law (II-II, 120, 1-2). It implies the ethical dispensation of a positive law; in this case, *epikeia* upholds the superiority of natural law – the unwritten law – over a particular positive law: "the juridical serves justice," and the positive law, conscience (L. Monden, *o.c.*, p. 94).

natural law today. Another expression close to natural law ethic is *virtue ethic*.

Natural law, a law of reason, inclines the human person, a rational being, towards good. This inclination implies living according to virtue (*"vivere secundum virtutem"*): to act according to reason is to act according to virtue (*"agere secundum rationem est agere secundum virtutem"*). Acting sinfully, however, is acting against nature (*"contra naturam"*). Human virtues, then, are requirements of natural law.³⁷

J. Finnis believes – and proves – that a living natural law theory will be a virtue ethic: virtues dispose us to act “upon reasonable and right choices, and avoid unreasonable and wrong ones.” One can only say that “this is a virtuous choice and this not when one may identify the criteria, the principles and norms which identify some kind of chosen acts as reasonable and right,” or otherwise. An ethic of virtue, opposed to an ethic of natural law and principles is a dream, a mistake.”³⁸

As firm dispositions, virtues incline us to realize the principles and precepts of natural law – and to truly “catch” the essential values of the human person. After all, to be good is to be ethical, and to be fully ethical is to be virtuous. This is why some authors sum up the precepts of natural law thus: “*Live virtuously.*”

The fundamental perception of and orientation towards the good comes not from a free choice of the individual person but from our very nature as moral subjects. The knowledge of the virtuous ends of a good human life constitutes “a fundamental part of natural moral law.” In ethics, the *virtuous ends* are like basic principles of moral rectitude. The knowledge of the virtuous ends – says St Thomas Aquinas – belongs to natural reason and

³⁷ Cf. St Thomas Aquinas, I-II, 94, 3 and 71, 1 and 108, 1 and 3; II-II, 44, 2 ad 1, and 44, 4. See E. Colom and A. Rodríguez Luño, *o.c.*, 316; G. Grisez, *o.c.*, p. 176.

³⁸ J. Finnis, “Nature and Natural Law in Contemporary Philosophical and Theological Debates. Some Observations,” in PAV, *The Nature and Dignity of the Human Person as the Foundation of the Right to Life. The Challenges of the Cultural Context*, *l.c.*, p.101. See Fausto B. Gómez, O.P., *Promoting Justice, Love, Life*, *l.c.*, p. 66-90.

precedes prudence, just like the knowledge of the speculative principles precedes science. This knowledge is also the point of departure of the process towards the acquisition of virtues.³⁹

Natural law grounds the first principles of the ethical virtues. The first principle of natural law, of practical reason, is: "Do good and avoid (or fight) evil." It is a self-evident normative principle, which belongs to the habit of the *synderesis*. The fundamental role of the first principle is, according to Grisez, to provide "the basis for guiding choices towards overall human fulfillment." In this context, virtues – successes in self-realization – lead us to this integral fulfillment, to continued human flourishing.⁴⁰

The three groups of natural inclinations of natural law are rationally ordered by the virtues. Thus, the virtuous ends are practical principles; "The ends of the natural inclinations are goods for man only when recognized and regulated by reason." Hence, "moral good or evil can only be determined by virtues." "Moral good is in conformity with virtue while moral evil is non-conformity with virtue."⁴¹

An ethics of virtues implies also an *ethics of principles*. Principles and virtues fertilize one another. Without virtues, ethical principles may be no more than weak external guidelines; without principles, virtues may become too subjective. Ethically speaking, however, virtues are more significant than principles for only virtues make our actions and our own selves good. Virtues lead us to succeed as ethical being, to flourish as human beings, to love truly as creatures in the world and children of God. The principle of justice is: *Give to each person his/her due, that is, his/her rights.* The principle is good, but no one becomes just

³⁹ Cf. St Thomas Aquinas, II-II, 47, 7. See, in particular, Colom and Rodríguez Luño, *o.c.*, pp. 247-248, 324-330.

⁴⁰ G. Grisez, *o.c.*, p. 184; see F.B. Gómez, O.P., *A Pilgrim's Notes: Ethics, Social Ethics, Bioethics*, Manila: UST Publishing House, 2005, pp. 198-205. Cornelius J. van de Poel describes virtues as *successes in human self-fulfillment* and sins as *failures in human self-fulfillment* (Cf. *The Search for Human Values*, New York/Paramus/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1971, pp. 146-185).

⁴¹ Through the intellectual virtues of science and wisdom and – for believers, through faith –, the first principle of natural law is love of God and the love of neighbor. (E. Colom and A. Rodríguez Luño, *o.c.*, pp. 325-330).

by knowing the principle of justice. The virtue of justice inclines us firmly to perform just acts. The virtue of justice is good – a good operative habit – and it makes us good, just.

The acquisition of virtues through repetition of good acts, is necessary to become good ethical beings. Truly, as Peter Kreeft says, the highest purpose of ethics is “to make people good, that is, virtuous.” Virtues, then, are a great treasure, a moral mine. They dispose us strongly to obey the principles/precepts of natural law and also to obey just civil laws that are according to natural law, and disobey unjust or immoral laws – against natural law. Virtues help us use freedom well, form a true and certain conscience and shape a good moral character.⁴²

Natural Law and the Golden Rule

Human persons are social beings, members of the human family and creatures of God. The brotherhood of men is an essential principle of natural law. It is articulated in the *Golden Rule*, which is today another expression of natural moral law.

There are two formulations of the Golden Rule. The negative formulation is: *Do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you*. The positive formulation is: *Do to others what you want others to do to you*. The negative formulation is attributed among others to Confucius and the positive to Jesus Christ (*Mt* 7:12; *Lk* 6:31).⁴³

St Augustine describes the Golden Rule as “*vulgare proverbium*,” a popular proverb. He adds that the term “good” must be

⁴² See F. B. Gómez, O.P., *Promoting Justice, Love, Life, l.c.*, pp. 66-76; *id.*, “A Moral Philosophical Basis for Bioethics,” *Luz y Saber*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (June 2008), pp. 9-23. See also Edmund D. Pellegrino and David C. Thomasma, *The Christian Virtues in Medical Practice* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996), pp. 14-15.

⁴³ F. Viola formulates the Golden Rule thus: *Do not do unto others that what you would not they did unto you; Do unto others as you would they should do to unto you*. He states that the Golden Rule is “a traditional principle of natural law” (*l.c.*, p. 175). Confucius: “What I do not wish others to do unto me, I also wish not to do unto others” (*The Sayings of Confucius*, A New Translation by James R. Ware, New York and Toronto: The New American Library, 1955, V, no. 12; p. 40). See CCC, no. 1970.

entered: one must do unto others that which is good. St Thomas Aquinas says that all moral principles and norms are implicitly contained in the Golden Rule.⁴⁴

What is the meaning of the Golden Rule? Viola answers: "The good that I would like to be done to myself, *i.e.* that I desire as a good *for* me, as *my* good, must be desired as a good for others, *i.e.*, as a good *for* all and a good *per se*." Hence, the Golden Rule excludes the validity of positive laws and norms that discriminate between different kinds of peoples. It affirms the ontological, essential equality of all persons. It asks one to love the others, but not in opposition to love ourselves: "I cannot rightly esteem myself without esteeming the other as myself."⁴⁵

The Golden Rule – like the first principles-precepts of natural law – implies self-love and others-love. The human person is not only a unique individual but also and essentially a social being. True self-love is not selfish. Self-realization implies selftranscendence. "Self-realization is the consequence of selfless transcendence in the giving of oneself in love."⁴⁶ Self-realization is a never-ending process towards self-perfection, to becoming more and more what we are as a creature, a child of God, and a brother/sister to the others – all others.

Natural law is not, cannot be a selfish law, for the nature of the human person is social and, therefore, inclined naturally to the common good. Natural law is a kind of law and as any law it is *an order of reason for the common good*. Laws are not meant – ought not to – for the advantage of certain powerful groups in society, but equally for all, and particularly concerned with the

⁴⁴ St Augustine, *De sermone in monte*, II, sec 74; quoted by F. Viola, p. 176; St Thomas Aquinas, I-II, 91, 4; 99, 1 ad 2; 100, 2 and 3; see also I-II, 94, 4, ad 1; F. Viola, *L.c.*, p. 175, footnote 39.

⁴⁵ F. Viola, *L.c.*, p., 176-177. The brotherhood of man is a first principle of natural law, the law of man's nature. (See F. Bockle, *o.c.*, p. 49). Aristotle says that "a friend is another self" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, IX, 4, 1166 a 32; quoted by F. Viola, *L.c.*, p. 177).

⁴⁶ A. Laun, *L.c.*, p. 157; see F. Viola, *L.c.*, p. 178. F. Bockle writes: "By reason of his likeness to God, man perceives that he has an inclination and a duty towards self-realization..., a definite duty to act in a manner corresponding to his nature" (*o.c.*, p. 48). See also Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (Vatican City, 2004).

"disadvantaged." Positive laws that favor some citizens are not just laws; as St. Isidore of Seville says, these are not laws but "*privilegia*."⁴⁷

The Golden Rule is exercised in the ethical principles of *non-maleficence* and *beneficence*, of *co-operation* and the *common good*, of *justice* and *compassion*, and of *subsidiarity* and *solidarity*.

From natural law, from the dignity and rights of the human person, from a virtue ethics, and from the Golden Rule, comes the principles and virtues of justice and solidarity, the virtues that dispose us to work for the common good, which is the end of law and laws.⁴⁸

Natural law and freedom are not opposed but united. Freedom is also closely linked to justice and solidarity. Regrettably, as underlined by Chiavacci, there is still in our world opposition between freedom and justice, and a sure and practicable synthesis of both has not been found. Perhaps, the focus should be more on love – as solidarity – than on justice. The Golden Rule does this! (Of course, solidarity is justice plus compassion).

In a planetary perspective, there is searching for the global values and virtues of a *global ethics*. *Natural law, human dignity and rights, equality, justice and solidarity, freedom and truthfulness, tolerance and dialogue* are significant values of a global ethics for a global world. The conception of the traditional natural theory may help philosophers, ethicists and theologians to work for a global ethics, to search with other Christians and other believers and non-believers for common human values, principles and virtues, to unveil together the equal dignity and fundamental rights of every and all human beings.

Yesterday and today the question is asked: "*How do we know if our actions – and attitudes – are good and sources of happiness*

⁴⁷ St Thomas Aquinas, I-II, 90, 1 and 2); Vatican II, *DH*, 6; John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 57; J.R. Flecha Andrés, *o.c.*, pp. 240-242; L. Monden, *o.c.*, p. 89.

⁴⁸ Vatican II, *GS*, 30; J.R. Flecha Andrés, *o.c.*, p. 242; Fausto B. Gómez, O.P. "A Moral Philosophical Basis for Bioethics," *Luz y Saber*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (June, 2008), pp. 9-23.

or evil and sources of unhappiness? The traditional answer was: the actions that are in conformity with natural law and its fundamental principles and precepts are good and virtuous, while actions that are not in conformity are evil. Today the answer continues to be that for many. Some others – or many, perhaps – may prefer the following answer: our actions are good if they are in conformity with human dignity and rights, virtuous acts, and respectful of the Golden Rule.

Conclusion

Is slavery immoral? Are tortures, racism, and terrorism unethical? Are in vitro fertilization, genetic engineering and cloning ethically wrong? The concrete answers come from social ethics, sexual ethics and bioethics as grounded on the dignity and rights of the human person, on the natural law as the order of reason.

At the end of this journey, some basic points are underlined:

The reasonable criticisms of natural law from philosophers and particularly from theologians are always welcome. They help us renew the natural law theory for our time.

Natural law continues to be essentially and existentially important and relevant for all human persons and peoples, and, therefore, ought to be part of integral education and of philosophical and theological formation.

The natural law theory is still a needed part of the study of law in moral theology, in particular, its connection with eternal law, with positive laws and with the New Law.

In philosophical and theological perspectives, natural law may be articulated today in other closely connected formulations; in particular, as expression of human dignity, and as grounding of human rights, virtue ethic, and the Golden Rule.

As theology, moral theology today ought to link with ethics, with Christian anthropology, and particularly with spirituality. Grace and prayer are important chapters of moral theology, including the treatise of law and laws. Theologians are indeed theologians, not just philosophers. And theologians pray. They

need to pray: to understand, to love, to be humble, truthful, and compassionate – to *walk the talk*! A. Laun says that *Psalms* 119 is the psalm of the moral theologians: “Open my eyes that I may believe... Lord, teach me thy statutes... I find my delight in thy commandments... Let me not wonder from thy commandments” (*Ps* 119:18, 1b, 47a, 10b).

Natural law is the law of being human and living virtuously. For us Christians, it is the law which anchors the following of Christ, the Son of God and the perfect Man: “Whoever follows after Christ, the perfect man, becomes himself more of a man” (*GS*, no. 4).

Human life – and Christian life –, is centered on *love*, the primary principle of natural law, the value and virtue of life, the Golden Rule. When all is said and done, what matters is love – human and Christian love. Indeed, “to be is to love,” “to be a human being is to be a fellow human being,” “in the evening of life, we shall be examined on love” – only on love! □