



HIGHLIGHTS FOR TALK 6

IS THERE RIGHT AND WRONG, AND WHO DECIDES?

- ❖ When God made the world, He gave it rule and order. Laws prevent meaningless disorder. They ensure that created things have the necessary freedom to be what they are and to fulfill their ends.
- ❖ The studies of chemistry, physics, and biology reveal physical laws, which give the material world its structure and govern its operation.
- ❖ Like all laws, physical law is derived from the eternal law. Every kind of authority in the world depends upon the fundamental authority of God and His plan for Creation.
- ❖ By God's design, man stands in special dignity above the rest of visible creation because he is composed of a physical body and of a soul that is spiritual.
- ❖ Moral actions (i.e. behaviors and abilities that are distinctly human) are not predetermined by physical law. While man's body is subject to physical laws, his moral actions are determined by his intellect and free will. That is not to say that man's intellect and will have no law to follow. There is a law that gives order to the moral conduct of man, and it is called the "natural moral law" -- or "natural law".
- ❖ According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the natural law is the objective link between the mind of God and the mind of man. (*Summa Theologica, Treatise on Law*)
- ❖ By the light of natural reason, man is aware that he was born in freedom with the purpose of seeking after what is good. This basic knowledge is intuitive -- we have a sense for knowing it simply because of how we are made. From it follows the first principle: **Do good, and avoid evil.** The natural law is summed up in this simple rule. If we do what we know is good and avoid what we know is evil, we fulfill the natural moral law as apprehended by our reason.
- ❖ The natural law is fixed and universal; it is part of man's nature. But the natural law is not obeyed automatically like the law of gravity is. God gave man free will to choose either to obey moral law or to reject it. ("Free will" correlates to freedom in the "horizontal" sense -- i.e. freedom that is fulfilled in the act of choosing itself. It is simply the freedom to choose between alternatives.)
- ❖ God gave us the gift of free will so that we could love Him -- not as slaves, but by free choice as His children. To complement the gift of free will, God gave us the natural law as a check against harmful conduct that helps us stay on the pathway to happiness.
- ❖ Like a good father, God expects us to walk within the safety of the natural law's protection. However, if we are deficient in reason, we are capable of going "off the rails" by throwing ourselves outside the natural law into the chaos of sin (i.e. unnatural human behavior).
- ❖ Genuine love entails a commitment of self-sacrifice that cannot be made under constraint. There is no greater privilege than having the ability to love, but love can only survive in an environment of freedom and responsibility.



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- ❖ Moral law has two different forms of expression. One is the natural law, which is written into man's nature (i.e. understood by our reason). The other is the moral law as revealed by God directly in the Ten Commandments. These ten formal laws identify our "fundamental duties toward God and toward our neighbors" (CCC 2072).
- ❖ Obeying the Ten Commandments keeps us free, since "the more one does what is good, the freer one becomes" (CCC 1733). (Here we are speaking of freedom in the "vertical" sense -- i.e. freedom that is fulfilled not just in the act of choosing itself, but in choosing *well* -- in choosing what is *good*.)
- ❖ Observance of the moral law produces peace, happiness, and justice in the heart of a person and in society. Immoral actions produce pain, bigotry, division, and war.
- ❖ Virtues such as respect for one's elders, fidelity in marriage, courage under fire, and honoring the dignity of the human person have been consistently upheld throughout the ages in every human culture.
- ❖ A major cause of moral confusion is the false assumption that freedom means the right to choose any actions -- even immoral ones -- and to call them good simply because they were chosen. This assumption is false because man cannot make something evil to be good. Choosing evil, in fact, destroys one's freedom to love well. People who labor to "free" themselves of moral norms are really just insisting on their "right" to be enthralled to sin.
- ❖ Though inclined toward good by our nature, sin has so weakened us that we now have a tendency towards evil, making it difficult to fulfill God's will. But God loves us and wants to give us the strength to overcome our sinful tendencies so that we can truly *be* ourselves. That is why we must pray to Him constantly and resolve to make good use of the graces He offers us, especially in the Sacraments.
- ❖ In our times, man has experienced unprecedented attacks upon vital areas of his moral life. To be precise, these attacks target women as their primary victims, because women are the hearts and souls of families. The family is the fundamental unit of human society, formed when a man and a woman consent to conjugal union in marriage. Designed and instituted by God, marriage and the family are "ordered to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of children" (CCC 2201).
- ❖ Strong movements in our culture are working to undermine the institution of the family and weaken people's resolve to avoid moral evils in matters related to human sexuality and respect for human life. These cultural movements aim to blunt our sensitivity to sin and evil by suggesting that we should be able to decide for ourselves whether something is right or wrong...which is nonsense, since we don't have the slightest control over moral reality. Even if every last person on earth felt that an immoral act was acceptable, that would simply mean that everyone was mistaken. As dark and confused as our moral perceptions may get, that simple law -- do good and avoid evil -- remains a constant light.
- ❖ "Love seeks to be definitive" (CCC 1646). The sexual act between a man and a woman expresses a deeply personal and total unity that demands indissolubility, faithfulness in constant mutual giving, and openness to fertility (CCC 1643). It follows that the sexual act belongs only within marriage. Marriage serves to protect both the spouses' love for each other and the fruits that come of sexual union -- i.e. children. Unfortunately, fear of inconvenience and commitment has led many to claim the "right to a trial marriage",



otherwise known as cohabitation. Such an arrangement reveals a deformed understanding of what sex and love are. Sexual union is a powerful and sacred communication that can only be handled safely within the secure fortress of marriage that God built for it.

- ❖ Within marriage, sexual union is furthermore essentially oriented “toward man’s exalted vocation to parenthood” (CCC 2369). The church traditionally celebrates larger families as “a sign of God’s blessing and of the parents’ generosity” (CCC 2373). Such a view is commonly scorned in today’s society due to the wide acceptance and use of contraception. Contraceptive practices deny the essential creativity of human beings: the reproductive power of sexual union. By stripping away the element of procreation, contraception turns sexual union from total self-giving into a pursuit of self-pleasure. Only for serious reasons that are not motivated by selfishness may a couple decide to space the births of their children. The legitimate, non-contraceptive method of doing so is called “Natural Family Planning”, or NFP.
- ❖ The contraceptive mentality logically and naturally leads to the evil of abortion. When procreation is rejected as essential to the self-giving of sexual union, it is an easy next step to devaluing a life that has already come to exist. Abortion is an intrinsic evil, meaning there is never an instance when it can be considered acceptable.
- ❖ The destruction of human embryos in order to harvest their stem cells for the purpose of advancing medical research is immoral. It is never acceptable to do evil to fulfill a good intention, or to take one innocent life to save another.
- ❖ Artificial insemination (e.g. “in vitro” fertilization) is immoral because it “infringes the child’s right to be born of a father and mother [who are] known to him and [who are] bound to each other by marriage” (i.e. by the marriage act) (CCC 2376).
- ❖ Marriage in this world is indissoluble; the union it forms cannot be dissolved or broken before the death of one of the spouses. Condemned in the Gospel by Christ Himself, divorce is immoral because it brings great harm to spouses, to their children, and to the whole of society. If it becomes too difficult for a couple to continue living together, the Church allows for their physical separation, though they remain married before God and are called to pursue the means to reconcile. A civil divorce does not alter the validity of a marriage in the eyes of the Church, so a divorcee may not marry someone else without committing the sin of adultery. There are some cases, though, in which, upon submission of evidence to Church officials, it is found that the required conditions of freedom and full consent were not present when the marriage vows were spoken. In these cases, the Church may make a judicial determination, called an annulment, that a real marriage never actually took place. The parties to an annulled marriage may then marry others as truly for the first time, provided that all obligations related to their previous union are fulfilled (CCC 1629, 1649, 2385).
- ❖ Homosexual attraction is a human disorder. There is no question that those who have same-sex attraction deserve our full respect, love, and consideration, since the disorder itself does not constitute a wrong -- it is simply a heavy cross. Like everyone else, homosexuals are called to live chastity in their state of life. That being said, it is wrong to pursue homosexual relations since “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered” and gravely immoral because “they close the sexual act to the gift of life...and do not proceed from a sexual complementarity” (CCC 2357). Therefore, it is unjust to seek civil sanction of the disorder through a “same-sex marriage” law. As there is by nature no such “right”, there can be no just law to implement it.



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- ❖ Euthanasia -- or “mercy killing” -- “constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator” (CCC 2277). It is not for us to choose when a person’s life should end. It is God alone who reserves the right to decide when death shall come for us, since our worth is measured not by our usefulness to ourselves or to society, but by our dignity as children of God.
- ❖ Recourse to the death penalty is only just if it is the only way to effectively defend other lives from an unjust aggressor. With the advanced penal system in place today, cases that genuinely call for the death penalty should be rare to non-existent.
- ❖ In the end, the moral law is what it is -- and it will always be so. The Church simply tries her best to get us to listen to it and to observe it for our own final good.