

Our Moral Life in Christ

Student Workbook

featuring

Dear Mark and Maddie

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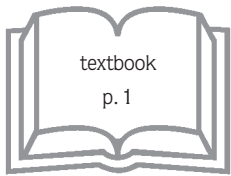
The Didache Series

– SEMESTER EDITION –

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Chapter 1

THE BASIS FOR MORAL THEOLOGY

Dear Mark and Maddie —

I always thought of myself as a good Catholic. I mean, like my family and I always go to Mass on Sunday, and we celebrate things like Christmas and Easter at home. I'm not saying I'm perfect or anything, but when I'm with my boyfriend and out with my friends, I stay away from most of what some of the other people in my class are doing... you know what I mean. But lately I have been wondering why. My brother went away to college last year, and he says that we need to be more open-minded. He says that nobody really knows the truth. He learned that right and wrong depend on the feelings and experience of the individual, and that religion makes people puppets instead of independent thinkers. At least that's what they told him in college. What if he's right? How do I know all this Christianity stuff is true?

Sure, I have seen a lot of my friends get into a lot of trouble with alcohol and sex. Many of them spend most of the little time they are at home arguing with their parents. I guess it's no wonder they want to escape to the parties all the time. I want to do the right thing, but it seems I'm missing out on a lot of fun, too. How do I know what is true?

— A Wondering and Wandering Senior

After reading the chapter, write a response to this letter:

Dear Wondering and Wandering:

INTRODUCTION

1. We can use the analogy of a sports team when it comes to our Catholic Faith. If we want to live a moral life in Christ, we need to study our “playbook.” In terms of our Catholic Faith, that means the Bible and the Catechism. The foundation for our Christian morality can be found in the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes.

Write the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes in the space provided. If you have forgotten them, you will find the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21. The versions of the Ten Commandments from Exodus and Deuteronomy, along with the Traditional Catechetical Form, may be found in the back of this book or in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* immediately preceding no. 2052. The Beatitudes may be found in the back of this book, in the Gospel of St. Matthew 5:3–12, and in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1716.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

THE BEATITUDES:

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2. Distinguish between objective morality and subjective morality.

3. What is moral relativism?

4. Recall an example of when you have seen people being guided by moral relativism or subjective morality. Explain it.

WHAT THE MORAL LAW IS NOT

5. Morality governs many human actions and choices, but the word “morality” is often associated with laws governing sexual activity and human reproduction. What are some other areas and examples of human activity where objective morality applies?

6. We are told that morality is not just a list of precepts and “thou shalt nots.” Look again at the Ten Commandments. Seven of these commandments begin with “You shall not.” Can you rewrite these commandments as positive statements beginning with “You shall”?

7. The claim that Christian morality (especially as described by Catholic teaching) is not about a lot of rules would raise objections from many who see the Church in this light. How would you explain the reality?

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MORAL LAW

8. Below are some cases where the cardinal virtues might be applied. Write the name of the cardinal virtue that would be called upon to resolve each case, and then write a brief explanation beneath each as to why you think the virtue you wrote applies to the situation.

_____ Mike loves to play video games. The interactive games on the Internet are especially attractive to him. He can sit at the computer for hours, sometimes even losing an entire night's sleep playing games, and, once in a while, he looks at pornographic Web sites.

_____ Melissa has had ambitious career plans ever since she started high school. She demands a lot out of herself and pushes herself hard. Recently her sister's baby died. During and after the funeral, Melissa has been questioning her values and the real meaning of her life.

_____ Jorge and Carissa have been dating for a few months now. Jorge has been getting more assertive in the physical dimension of the relationship, and Carissa has been equally receptive to Jorge's advances. They have both talked about "not wanting to go too far," but once they get together, neither seems to be able to control himself or herself.

_____ Kevin owns a T-shirt printing business. Oftentimes he finds himself having to cut his own pay to make sure his workers are paid their full wages on time.

9. The theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity (or love) are mentioned in relation to the cardinal virtues. The theological virtues originate in the New Testament (cf. 1 Cor 13:13 and 1 Thes 1:3). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that these virtues “are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life” (CCC 1813).

How would the theological virtue of faith inform and give life to the cardinal virtue of fortitude in the case of Jorge and Carissa (cf. Question 8)?

How would the theological virtue of hope inform and give life to the cardinal virtue of prudence in the case of Melissa (cf. Question 8)?

How would the theological virtue of charity (or love) inform and give life to the cardinal virtue of justice in the case of Kevin and his T-shirt business (cf. Question 8)?

10. A bishop was visiting a class of candidates for Confirmation. In his discussion with the group, he asked them: “How do we know what is good and what is evil? What is it that makes something good or evil?” According to the text, what is the answer to this question?

MORAL LAW AND FREE WILL

11. What is the cause of the flawed nature that we inherit from Adam and Eve?

12. Read the following excerpt from St. Paul's letter to the Romans: "We know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh, I serve the law of sin" (Rom 7: 14–25).

St. Paul is one of the architects of Christianity. Does he claim to have mastered sin in his own life? How does he describe his own moral struggles?

Do these moral struggles take away from St. Paul's moral authority or enhance it? That is, given this self-confessed state of St. Paul's own life, does he have any business telling other people how to live theirs?

How does St. Paul resolve this interior conflict? (Hint: Review Rom 7:24–25; 1 Cor 15: 10)

MORAL LAW AND GRACE

13. When do we receive sanctifying grace?

14. When do we receive actual grace?

15. While we need grace to conform ourselves to God's will, there are certain aspects of obeying God that come more naturally than others. What would some of these be?

16. Many today have a tendency to excuse their sins and imperfections by saying, "Hey, I'm only human," "Nobody's perfect," or "I'm just doing the things any normal sixteen-year-old does." Of course, we are human. Humans are not perfect, and every human must struggle with temptation, but is it inevitable that we are going to keep sinning, or is it possible for us to avoid all sin?

MORAL LAW AND THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION

17. Review the letter from "Wondering and Wandering Senior," and answer the following questions:

Has this young lady been called by God? How?



OUR MORAL LIFE IN CHRIST

How has she already responded to God? What more does she need to do?

Christian morality consists in striving to live as Christ did. How is she doing so, and what more should she be striving for?

18. Which of the following individuals is the holiest: A married woman, an elderly widower, a teenage girl, a nun, or a Catholic priest? Why?

19. Which of the individuals in the previous question is called to a higher level of holiness?

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VOCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

20. Read how the book defines “discipleship.” How does one become a disciple of Christ?