

## Moral Theology: Love in Action

### SF TA203

Fall 2024  
Saturdays, 09/28 – 12/07 (Zoom)  
11:00 am - 12:30 pm (EST)  
Fr. Kerry Walters, Instructor  
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### Required Texts

Alberto de Mingo Kaminouchi, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics: A New Testament Perspective*, trans. Brother John of Taizé. Liturgical Press Academic, 2020.

William O'Neill, SJ, *Catholic Social Teaching: A User's Guide*. Orbis Books, 2021.

*The New American Bible*, revised edition (NABRE). Other translations may be used, although the NABRE is preferred. But please: No paraphrases like *The Message*.

### Description

As distinct from philosophical ethics, moral theology or Christian ethics is a response to God's call for humans to live abundantly. Consequently, it explores questions about how we should behave in order to enter into the wholeness God desires for us. The touchstone of proper Christian behavior is love (Matt 22:37-39). But in our increasingly pluralistic world, it's sometimes difficult to know what the loving thing to do is. How do we go about loving properly when confronted with issues such as immigration, climate change, political tribalism, poverty, sexual and ethnic identities, and violence? What theoretical principles and practical strategies can Christians call upon? And on what are they based?

Moral theology, a branch of systematic theology, addresses itself to these sorts of questions by offering suggestions on how to "Christianize" personal and social behavior through reflection on revelation, tradition, human nature, reason, and grace.

In this introductory course in moral theology, we'll spend some time focusing on the biblical and theological understanding of love and its relationship to happiness, virtue, and natural law before turning to concrete applications of it in the world. Throughout the course we'll refer frequently to the scriptural foundations that ground Christian morality.

By the end of the course, participants will have acquired:

- A rudimentary grasp of leading schools of philosophical ethics;
- An understanding of the scriptural foundation of Catholic moral theology;
- A deeper appreciation for the uniqueness of Catholic moral theology
- Familiarity with the connection between Catholic moral theology and virtue ethics;
- Familiarity with the connection between Catholic moral theology and natural law ethics;
- Strategies for putting Catholic moral theology into practice in a pluralistic society;
- Preparation for moral leadership in parishes.

## Requirements

The course will operate like a seminar, with minimal lecture and ample opportunity for discussion during our Zoom meeting times. On each Wednesday before our Saturday Zoom gatherings, I'll send participants a short video outlining the main points of the week's readings. This will allow us to hit the ground running during our sessions together.

I ask that you be conscientious in keeping up with the readings and attending the Zoom sessions. But I recognize that sometimes life gets in the way, so each session will be recorded to make sure that you can catch up if you absolutely must miss a class.

**Students in formation for Holy Orders** will be asked to write three short (no more than 3 typewritten pages) papers on assigned topics. In addition, and in consultation with me, you'll be asked to collaborate with your parish in the creation or maintenance of an outreach program that reflects one or more of the moral topics explored in the course—poverty, racism, gender identity, immigration, or violence. Finally, you'll be asked to write an end-of-term paper (no longer than 6 typewritten pages) reflecting on the role of deacons and priests as moral leaders. Fuller guidelines for these requirements will be provided in class.

**Students not in formation but taking the course for credit** have the same requirements with this exception: you'll be asked to write an end-of-term paper reflecting on your moral responsibility as Christians.

**Students who are auditing** the course are exempt from the course requirements, although asked to be diligent in attendance and reading and to participate fully in the class discussions. But you're perfectly welcome (and encouraged!) to take on any or all of the non-formation credit requirements.

**Final course grades for credit students** of Pass/Fail will be based on class participation and written papers. But individual assignments will receive the following evaluations:

**E** = Excellent (Approximate equivalent to: A+, A, A-)

**S** = Satisfactory (Approximate equivalent to B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-)

**U** = Unsatisfactory (Equivalent to F)

**W** = Withdrawal (Student withdrawal from course for any reason)

**WP** = Withdrawal Passing (withdrawal with course at least half completed successfully)  
**WT** = withdrawal based on exceeding the withdrawal time limit.

Accordingly, work rated “E” or “S” will be recorded as a Pass; work that is unsatisfactory will be recorded as a Fail.

Participants should also refer to the Institute’s Policy and Procedures (available on the Institute’s website at <https://ancti.org> ) regarding withdrawal from courses.

**Presence in Class on Cams.** All course participants should be aware of the requirements regarding presence in live online instruction: Unless specifically excused by the instructor, each participant is required to participate via a live camera and the participant’s presence must be seen as actively present on the camera view in the class. A static screenshot or similar static symbol is not permitted except for very brief periods of less than five minutes should a participant need to step away from the class for personal care. Should a somewhat longer period be required, the participant must secure the instructor’s permission, preferably in advance, and may be taken only with the instructor’s approval. Use of this exception should not be abused during any class session.

## Semester Schedule

- 09/28:** Christian Morality in a Pluralistic Culture. Kaminouchi, pp. 19-21, 51-54.  
**10/05:** Jesus & Aristotle. Kaminouchi, pp. 51-81. *(Paper #1 assigned; due 10/12)*  
**10/12:** Christian Ethics & Happiness. Kaminouchi, pp. 85-115  
**10/19:** Beatitudinal Virtues. Kaminouchi, pp. 116-156  
**10/26:** The Heart of the Matter. Kaminouchi, pp. 157-189. *(Paper #2 assigned; due 11/02)*  
**11/02:** Catholic Social Teaching: Dignity & Solidarity. O’Neill, pp. 1-30.  
**11/09:** Catholic Social Teaching: Justice & the Common Good. O’Neill, pp. 31-66.  
**11/16:** Love in Action: Poverty, Race, Identity. O’Neill, pp. 69-87. *(Paper #3 assigned; due 11/23)*  
**11/23:** Love in Action: Violence. O’Neill, pp. 89-107  
**11/30:** No class – Thanksgiving Break  
**12/07:** Love in Action: Immigration & Reconciliation. O’Neill, pp. 119-142. *(Final Paper assigned)*  
**12/14:** Final Paper Due

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*“Drawing more fully on the teaching of holy scripture, [moral theology] should highlight the lofty vocation of the Christian faithful and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world.”*

—*Optatam totius* (Vatican II document), 16

*“Christian identity is not primarily to be found in statements or debates or arguments, but in particular practices, commitments, and habits. Christianity is not principally something people think or feel or say—it is something people do.*

—Stanley Hauerwas, “Why Christian Ethics Were Invented”

*“Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything.”*

—Father Zosima in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*