

The component parts of Moral Theology.

Moral Theology is principally made up of two other sciences, that of Moral Philosophy and that of Canon Law, without however being identical with either of them singly or with both of them put together. We will examine how each of the two sciences named enters into Moral Theology. And first of Moral Philosophy. That science has two branches—Ethics, which deal principally with the theory of right and wrong, and the exact import of those two ideas; and Natural Law, which defines what actions are obligatory or wrong of themselves and by the nature of things, antecedently to any positive law, human or divine, but not of course antecedently to the Eternal Law, which is the will of God enacting whatever the nature of things requires. Ethics concern the Moral Theologian much as Biology is the concern of the Physician. The latter must have correct biological notions, the former right ethical notions. A biological *fad* might set a doctor wrong in his practice in a nice point and extraordinary case, where he would have to be guided by theory rather than by routine and direct experience. Many patients in bygone ages suffered from their doctor's biological *fads*, ideas of "humours," "vital spirits," *contraria contrariis*, and so forth. In like manner, one who held the utilitarian view of morality, which we presume is not a correct ethical notion, would be likely to be over liberal in allowing deception or the taking of life, where the public good seemed to require it. He would not have that idea of the sanctity of human life, or of divine truth, or of heavenly purity either, which comes of sound ethics, and is necessary in practical issues to enable us firmly to refuse to barter golden right for brazen expediency.

The Confessor not necessarily a controversialist in Ethics.

On the other hand the Physician need not remember all the grounds and arguments on which his correct biological notions rest. It is well that in youth he should have made some study of these grounds, and even have been examined in them as in a point of preparatory learning, previous to his taking his degree: but this learning is after all only preparatory, and the increase of it, or even the retention of it, is not necessary to that competency of science and skill, which warrants him, not only in bearing the name, but in doing the work of a Doctor of Medicine. Nor need the Moral Theologian and practising Confessor be versed in the controversies which lead to correct conclusions and to the refutation of errors in Ethics: though it is well that some of his youthful ardour of inquiry should have been expended upon these points.

All Natural Law practically contained in Moral Theology.

Not the whole of Ethics, then, enters into Moral Theology. But when we come to inquire how much knowledge of Natural Law the