

# Catholic Moral Teachings and Spiritual Practices for Human Relations

## Catholic Practices for Healing, Reconciliation and Peace

Rev. Wilfred Tyrrell, S.A.  
Duchesne Center for Peace and Justice

### Introduction

I have been asked to present Catholic practices for healing, reconciliation and peace for human relations. I will draw on the confluence between the spiritual life and the moral life within the Catholic tradition<sup>1</sup> as a source for the “Liberation from Relational

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1. Here are some principle guiding scriptural texts on “true religion,” and by that I mean, as I believe scripture does too, that the life of the Catholic is both spiritual and moral or it is not an authentic Catholic life at all: Mi 6:8 (true religion); Mt 25: 31–36 (Christo-existential); Ja 2:14–26 (faith & works/spiritual & moral life). Also, see: Dt 10.12; Eccl 12.13; Mi 6.8; Ja 1.27; Rom 13.10; and Mk12.33.

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Suffering between Persons” through healing, reconciliation and peace.

The Christian religious myth, at least as Catholics understand it from the Book of Genesis, is that God created all things, and God declared all things in their very essence as “good.” So too were man and woman created by God and were declared “very good” in their very essence as an act of the Creator God. And it is from here that the biblical narrative evolves relating again and again the various disobediences of humanity—individually and corporately—and witnessing to God’s numerous attempts to redeem his chosen people. The New Testament is an appendix to this religious narrative about a definitive reconciliation between disobedient and errant humanity by an ever merciful and just God revealed in the person of Jesus the Christ.

### A Catholic Anthropology

Catholic anthropology understands that the human being’s fundamental orientation and telos/end is directed toward God, however imperfect human nature may be. And secondly, human nature is constitutively social.<sup>2</sup> The person is a self in relationship to God found within community. Two works by Charles Taylor that specifically address the relationship of religion and the social horizon in which religious question arise are: *Varieties of Religion Today* and *The Ethics of Authenticity*.<sup>3</sup> *Varieties of Religion Today* seeks to address, with ideas that promise to transform current debates

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2. See Aristotle’s *Politics*:

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-politics/supplement3.html>

3. Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002); and *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991).

about religion and secularism, the public and cultural conditions in which religious questions are formulated and asked. Taylor's *The Ethics of Authenticity*, demonstrates the present need to avoid both modernity's philosophical legacy of Western culture's malaise and its descent into nihilism and relativism. He advocates facing the moral and political crises of our time by introducing the notion of authenticity—the self-fulfillment and self-realization of our humanity. An essential ingredient of human authenticity is the moral factor understood in the religious sense as an openness to the transcendent (however understood) as well as the human. In this way, the tradition of common values, the common good, and social commitment are once again reassessed.

Sr. Mary Garascia states: “The social aspect of the person—the person as social and political animal—its interconnectedness with other persons and things in the world is deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition.”<sup>4</sup> Augustine recognized the interdependence between the behavior of the person and the world order. Aquinas also talked about individual conscience, but emphasized the social duties of people thereby continuing the deep and consistent Catholic teaching of the social nature of the person and thus of a more social form of spirituality. I quote Garascia again, who confirms the current Catholic spiritual ethos:

In this century the social nature of the person has been restored to prominence in Catholic teaching through two main themes. An older image of the person who becomes

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4. Mary M. Garascia, “Theological Anthropology,” in *Introduction to Theology*, ed. Thomas Rausch (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1993), 122.

holy through life in the Christian community has been recovered. A second and newer theme speaks to the obligation of persons to participate in and transform the social order.<sup>5</sup>

Here, no one really can be saved alone; reconciliation with the full people of God is an essential condition—salvation is corporate in nature.<sup>6</sup>

Ruben Habito, a practicing Roman Catholic, former Jesuit priest, and Zen Roshi in the Sanbo Kyodan lineage of Zen, teaching at Southern Methodist University's Perkin's School of Theology, addresses the confluence and symbiotic relationship between the spiritual path and the moral life:

This realization has tremendous implications in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres of our lives, for now there is no one and nothing that is not an essential part of my very self. . . . This means taking the path Jesus took, and making the same fundamental choices he made. . . . A concrete experience of solidarity with the suffering of living beings in this historical existence.<sup>7</sup>

This is the way of the Cross, the way to and the way of the Crucified Jesus. Habito continues connecting the spiritual and moral paths:

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5. Ibid., 123.

6. Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP, *Thirsting for the LORD: Essays in Biblical Spirituality* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1979), 246.

7. Ruben Habito, *Living Zen, Loving God* (Boston, Mass: Wisdom Publication, 2004), 8–9.

To contemplate the Cross of Christ, a long standing mode of Christian prayer and spiritual practice . . . enables one to open to a spiritual experience of plunging into the lot of suffering humankind, as Christ did on the Cross . . . to behold and see as one's own the concrete ways in which living beings suffer or are made to suffer in our present day and age . . . to look at poverty and hunger, at the destitution and deprivation, at the discrimination and oppression, at the various forms of structural, physical and all kinds of violence that desecrate this sacred gift of human life.<sup>8</sup>

Habito looks into the true nature of human beings and sees the image of Jesus Christ, God made man through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. As such, it is an immediate existential identification with all of humanity.

I have briefly introduced the confluence between the spiritual life and the moral life of Catholics, and by implication, a possible point of religious convergence in interreligious dialogue: spiritual engagement as social. The prophet Micah sums up “the idea of God's demand of the interior holiness and moral integrity, seemingly within the moral ability of anyone who believed in God's presence”:<sup>9</sup> “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your GOD” (Mi 6.8). Now, I would like to start by contextualizing from the biblical and Franciscan tradition to which I belong and to define the terms “healing, reconciliation, and peace.”

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8. Ibid., 9.

9. Stuhlmüller, *Thirsting for the LORD*, 239.

### Context: To be an Atonement Franciscan

I am a Franciscan of the Atonement. To help contextualize the intersection between St. Francis of Assisi and Fr. Paul of Graymoor, or between what it means to be Franciscan and what it means to live out the Atonement of Christ Jesus, evokes an incarnational life of *metanoia-penance*. *Metanoia* means a “change of mind,” of the inner self and of the heart. It means conversion and repentance. Repentance is a sincere turning away, in both the mind and heart, *from sin and self* toward God. Sin is the cause of the ruptured relationship between humans and themselves, the human community, God and the Cosmos. Sin is disobedience to and rebellion against God's will, word, and law. The third order regular/religious life<sup>10</sup> centers upon the love of God manifest in the Atonement, which places us squarely in the penitential Franciscan tradition characterized by *metanoia* in action through communal prayer and contemplation, poverty, humility, penance, reparation and reconciliation. To be Franciscan means to follow Christ Jesus after the manner of the life of St. Francis of Assisi, by the very grace of the Holy Spirit. Francis assimilated the values of Christ's life, especially loving-compassion. Like Christ, Francis identified with the least (Mt 25:31–46). The centrality of and assimilation to Christ Crucified and the Cross of Christ, the existential participation in and incarnation of gospel values, and the kenotic “letting go” of self and one's longings so that God is manifest are ever present in the life of the believer constitute what it means to be Franciscan. Our particular Atonement charism issues forth from our Franciscan roots which are distinguished by a particular emphasis on the

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10. *Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis and Commentary*. ed. M. Carney, O.S.F. and T. Horgan, S.A. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Franciscan Federation, 1982).

gospel value of repentance as highlighted by St. Francis of Assisi and as interpreted by Paul of Graymoor through the kaleidoscope of the Atonement.

Evangelical living, after that of Francis, consists in the compassionate deeds of the Christ, establishing justice, promoting peace, and doing good for all to show that the Kingdom/reign of God is at hand. The Atonement signifies the process of “bringing together,” the reconciliation of humans with God in Christ.<sup>11</sup> St. Paul states the paradox: the crucifixion had become the very power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24) in the kenotic movement of redemption.

Fr. Paul Watson, co-founder of the Society of the Atonement with Mother Luranna White, in 1898, understood his purpose as a Christian, and then more deeply as a Catholic, in terms of Romans 5:1: “And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” This is the foundation text for our religious community of men and women. Contextually speaking, we are saved, healed, made whole, and brought to peace through the very life of Christ! Our charism is to reconcile that which is divided, to heal that which is broken, and to make whole that which is lacking in the personal and social spheres—to bring about peace, to facilitate true *shalom*, by God’s grace in Jesus Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit! The manifestation of the Atonement is demonstrated through the apostolic works of reconciliation: praying and working for, and dialogue in, Christian Unity and interreligious understanding; hospitality to the homeless and rehabilitation for the

11. Trevor Hart, “Redemption and Fall,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 194–96.

drug addicted; parochial ministry within the Universal Church; and retreat work.

The effect of the Cross of Christ Jesus changed not the heart of God, but the heart of women and men. The simple Hebrew verb *allassein*, in *Katallassein*, means “to change” as in transformation—changing shape. It is the hearts and minds of human beings that need to be reconciled, not God. “It is entirely against Pauline thought to think of Jesus Christ as pacifying an angry God, or to think that in some way God’s wrath was turned to love, and God’s judgement was turned to mercy, because of something which Jesus did.”<sup>12</sup> It is sin and human beings’ participation in sin that create the rupture between God and humanity. It is the Atonement that turns sin into penitence; human rebellion into the surrender to God’s will and word; our enmity turns into love by faith in the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ upon the Cross. “It cost the Cross to make the change in the heart of human beings.”<sup>13</sup> This is the transforming and transformative power of love, God, and God’s presence in the world.

## Elements of Catholic Spiritual and Moral Practices: Healing, Reconciliation and Peace<sup>14</sup>

### *Healing*

The Biblical notion of healing is the bringing about of a state of physical and/or spiritual health. Scripture recognizes a close link

12. William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1974), 164–68.

13. *Ibid.*, 168.

14. I have relied heavily on the following works: John L. McKenzie, S.J., *Dictionary of the Bible* (N.Y.: Touchstone, 1995), and Barclay, *New Testament Words*.

between physical and spiritual health, with healing often being seen as an act of compassion and mercy of God as the author of healing, and the very image of salvation in Christ.

From the Hebrew and Greek: (*rapha'*; *therapeuo* (to serve, cure); *iaomai* (to heal); *diasozo* (to bring safely through a danger, trouble, to save, to make perfectly whole) as in Psalm 68:19–20: “Blessed is the Lord, he carries us day by day, Yahweh our salvation. Our God is a God who saves, to the Lord Yahweh belongs all escape from death.”

- Literally, healing means making whole or well, as in Ecclesiastes 3:3. In this way, it occurs in prayers for restoration to health (Nm 12:13; Ps 6:2; Jer 17:14). 1 Peter 2: 24 states: “For by his wounds we are healed, and also in declarations as to God’s power to restore to health.” (Dt 32:39; 2 Kgs 20:5–8).
- Metaphorically healing is applied to the restoration of the soul to spiritual health and to the repair of the injuries caused by sin (Ps 41:4; Jer 30:17).
- The restoration and deliverance of afflicted land is expressed in 2 Chr 7:14; Is 19:22. This has environmental implications for spiritual healing.
- Healing is applied to the forgiveness of sin (Jer 3:22) and the making whole of the human person.

### Reconciliation

Human beings are reconciled from a state of brokenness, estrangement and hostility that comes from the stain of sin. Atonement, at-one-ment, or making one/reconciling comes from the Hebrew term “*kapper*,” to cover, conceal or remove an obstacle as to

reconcile. So the sin and guilt for which atonement is made is voided and annulled; it is no longer an effective obstacle to reconciliation to oneself, the community, to God, or the world!<sup>15</sup> All things are made new!

In Greek, the terms *hilaskesthai*, *hilasmos*, and *hilasterion*<sup>16</sup> are used to connote reconciliation or the very means of reconciliation. For example, “*hilasterion*” means the very mercy seat of God.”<sup>17</sup> Mercy, thus, reconciles us to ourselves, the human community, God, and the world.<sup>18</sup> Also, *katallasso*, *katallage*, and *katallassein*<sup>19</sup> connote reconciliation with God and God reconciling us with the world. It symbolizes peace-making. Here atoning for sins becomes “cleaning from sins,” washing away, as in Hebrews 1:3. In 2 Corinthians 5:18–20, God is the agent of reconciliation and human beings are reconciled. Christ is the means of reconciliation (Rom 5:11), which is extended to the world. The cosmic Christ brings cosmic healing and wholeness “making peace” (Col 1:20). Christians share in this movement and ministry of reconciliation as ambassadors of Christ, our Atonement! For Catholics and other Christians alike, it is in the Cross of Christ Jesus Crucified that we are healed, that Christ’s cross and death is redemptive: “For by his wounds you have been healed”! (1 Peter 2:24). These texts are crucial for our atonement Franciscan self-understanding and for ministerial pursuits within and as part of the church universal.

15. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 69–70.

16. Ibid.

17. See NJB (1985) OT: Ex 25: 16–17; 37: 6–7; and Lev 16: 2, 12–15 for *kapporeth*: mercy seat/throne of mercy of God. Also, NT: Rom 3: 24–25; Heb 9:11–28; 1 Jn 2:2

18. See Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2013), for an excellent exposition of mercy/loving-kindness/compassion as expressing the Hebrew *hesed*.

19. Barclay, *New Testament Words*, 169.

## Peace

*Shalom*, from the Hebrew for “peace,” connotes a rich and varied content. Peace is not simply the absence of trouble; it is everything that constitutes our highest good, human flourishing and wellbeing. Biblical texts reference “*shalom*” as a general sense of completeness, or more precisely as a condition in which nothing is lacking, a condition of physical and spiritual health and overall “well-being” and wholeness of life. It is a salutation of goodness used in both greetings and farewells, a gift from God, a resting in communion with God, the healing of a breach, standing in right relationship with oneself, others, God, and God’s creation.

In the New Testament, “peace” designates good order and harmony (1 Cor 14:33). It is a “word of power” from Jesus to his disciples as described in the resurrection stories and the Book of Acts. Peace/*shalom* is the fruit of spiritual mindedness (Rom 8:6), and is coupled with life in its fullness. Peace/*shalom* becomes almost synonymous with salvation in Jesus Christ. Peace is communion with God and Jesus through the Holy Spirit, *shalom* itself. It is also experienced by the believer as a state of interior calm and of harmonious relations with the Christian, creating bridges of relationships within the pan-human community, the ultimate experiential foundational connection with the Divine/God, and the cosmos. In Catholic theology, peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and a gift from God. Christ Jesus is our “peace,” our *shalom*!

### Catholic practices for healing, reconciliation and peace:

What follows is a partial list of various traditional spiritual practices and devotions that seek healing, reconciliation, and peace, not only for the practitioner but also for the human community, and the cosmos as well. The spiritual life, in a traditional Roman

Catholic context, refers to a life open to and being transformed by the Spirit of God, a basic kenotic and resurrected pattern.<sup>20</sup> Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and are destined to love and serve God and their neighbor as their very self. This image in humanity is dimmed or wounded through sin and needs radical restoration, thus the call to holiness and sanctification through the action of God’s Spirit and sharing in the holiness of Christ.

- ***Ascetical practices*** of the early Church Fathers and Mothers of the desert sought to empty themselves of the “false self” and the world by cultivating silence and solitude, fasting, celibacy, and voluntary poverty. “Spiritual guidance from accomplished teachers in the way and discernment of spirits: the ability to discern the texture, quality, and sound of the Spirit and voice of God from the many other movements occurring in the human mind and heart”<sup>21</sup> is essential for these practices.
- ***The Common prayer***, from the biblical mandate to “pray always,” emerged from Christianity’s Jewish origins and took on an institutional form in the post-apostolic period and then again in the monastic tradition and in the parish churches. Common prayer unites the present praying community but extends to all believers in the universal church, the Body of Christ. Sacred times for praying as community, liturgical cycles and *Lectio Divina* (“divine reading” and reflection), and

20. Wendy M. Wright, “Spirituality,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism*, eds. J. Buckley, F. Christian Bauerschmidt, and Trent Pomplun (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 389–402.

21. *Ibid.*, 391.

common prayer help transform consciousness through the mysteries of faith: the Incarnation, the Paschal mysteries, the Triune God, and the life of the Holy Spirit in the church.<sup>22</sup>

- **Contemplative prayer** is a quiet non-discursive practice of letting go and entering into the Silence of God. Contemplation in action brings to mind Thomas Merton. Contemplative prayer is a form of deep interior prayer within a communal context that strives to reach out to the world in ever more effective forms of presence as witness to, in solidarity with, and in service for others in an age characterized as materialistic, selfish, violent, impersonal, without purpose, enslaved to technology, dehumanizing, and godless.<sup>23</sup>
- **Recollection** is one of various spiritual disciplines seeking attentiveness to God's presence in the world. As Daniel Groody states:

Recollection is a way of consolidating the conflicting and scattered energies of our lives and focusing them on "the one thing necessary" (Lk 10:42), namely, loving attention to God and surrender to the transforming action of the Spirit. Recollection is a spiritual discipline of "collecting" our scattered lives around a spiritual center.<sup>24</sup>

22. Ibid., 392.

23. Edward Malatesta, "Roman Catholicism," in *The Study of Spirituality*, eds. C. Jones, G. Wainwright, and E. Yarnold, S.J. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 527.

24. Daniel G. Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality and Justice: Navigating a Path to Peace* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 2007), 260–61.

Recollection brings one to a place of inner peace and wholeness, to one's center. As Yeats might suggest in "Burnt Norton," the spiritual center is "the still point in a turning world" where reality is expressed in a series of contradictions, or that unknowable that supports the center. John Baptist de la Salle, in his "Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer," states, "recollection serves to empty the mind of exterior things, to bring it back within itself, to keep it there and, consequently, to recollect the soul through the attention to God."<sup>25</sup>

- **Embodied participation** incorporates the best of the monastic tradition in community outside the cloistered walls, in the street with the people. A prime example of this new religious life was the mendicant community of Francis of Assisi. He, like other mendicants and preachers, sought the "intense identification with the One who was born naked and vulnerable and who died bereft and abandoned—a sharing in the absolute poverty of Jesus. . . . To experience this was to enter into the mystery of God."<sup>26</sup> Devotion to the Stations of the Cross, the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary, and the Holy Name of Jesus; visual meditation on the wounds of Jesus, the Rosary and the life of Jesus, sacred places, pilgrimages, penitential journeys, and enacting biblical scenes all demonstrate for Catholics that the faithful is transformed spiritually in the process where intimacy with God can be practiced in ordinary life and circumstances.

25. "Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer," in John Baptist de la Salle, *Spirituality of Christian Education*, eds. C. Roch, J. Calligan and J. Gros (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2004), 216.

26. Wright, "Spirituality," 395.

- ***Imaginative meditation***, like that of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, attempts “the conversion of the whole person and to create a process which could capture the intellect, memory, and will (considered the core elements of the person) for love, service, and greater glory of God. The motivation is apostolic and to form ‘contemplatives in action.’”<sup>27</sup> The Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a women’s Religious Order, also follow closely this Jesuit spirituality of healing the wounded heart of Jesus in the world. Likewise, a distinctive Jesuit practice is the “examination of conscience” at the end of each day, which now has become a common practice for many Catholics, to reflect on one’s motives and actions and to cultivate a consciousness of God’s presence and activity in one’s life and the world.
- ***Spiritual and corporeal works of mercy and social justice*** transform oneself in service to others for wholeness and holiness. To live a Christian spirituality is to attend to what is of God and to deepen in a life of conversion that has discipleship as its goal. Catholic spirituality insists on keeping strong the connection between prayer and praxis. Care for others and the world is referred to as the practice of the works of mercy. The *spiritual works of mercy* include: counseling the doubtful, instructing the ignorant, admonishing the sinner, comforting the afflicted, forgiving offenses, bearing wrongs patiently, and praying for the living and the dead. The *corporeal works of mercy* include: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting

the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. These deeds of compassion and justice for spiritual healing from relational suffering between persons are part of a Catholic’s duty to serve God in one’s neighbor. These too have become solid examples of spirituality that is theologically and biblically grounded in social analysis within the Catholic tradition in dialogue with the world known as social justice. Current Catholic spirituality addresses the themes of the common good, social interdependence, and justice, along with responsibility and participation in the world community and systems for human flourishing.

- ***Transformative engagement*** with life in the spirit is sacramental for Catholics. The contextualization of the sacramental principle—divine presence mediated through and present in physical reality and human experience—is this sense of allowing the extraordinary to break in on the ordinary. The seven sacraments of the Catholic Church—“efficacious signs of grace”—each in their own particular way demonstrate the comprehensive grace-filled presence of God in the life of the church, personally and corporately, as healing, reconciliation, and accomplishing peace/human flourishing and wellbeing.

## Conclusion

The Catholic response to the Holy is varied. There is an acknowledgement of brokenness and the need for personal, and social, healing and reconciliation, as well as for peace/*shalom* including wellbeing for all of creation. The various Catholic practices

27. Ibid., 397.

mentioned above present a sense of the Holy as present, active, and evoked within the community. And since Catholics are first and foremost members of a community, the church/the Body of Christ, God is the object of one's social actions as well, moved by love. The growing spiritual awareness of the interdependence of the Divine and others is a transformative awareness of the search for and the working toward a "just ordering" as mentioned in Micah. This is the Catholic conscience wrestling with the moral purposes and ordering of God—an obligation within the very context of spiritual grace and love. In the Catholic ethos, there is an intrinsic and significant relation between spirituality and morality; between the practice of one's devotion and worship to God and service to one's fellow human beings. The principal point of distinctiveness for the moral life of religious communities is precisely their openness to and awareness of the Holy in the world. For it is a world in need of liberation from suffering, the healing of wounds, the reconciliation of what is divided, and the bringing of wholeness and holiness as peace to a violent world.

*Fr. Wilfred Tyrrell, S.A. is a Friar of the Atonement, Graymoor, and a member of Graymoor's ecumenical and interreligious committee. He is also a professor at Manhattanville College where he is director of their Duchesne Center for Religion and Justice.*