Fundamental Moral Theology


The manuals of moral theology used to train confessors after the Council of Trent (1545-1563) were divided into three volumes;

1. fundamental moral theology—
   a. ultimate end of human beings (telos)
   b. nature/ingredients of human acts—free act of will w/sufficient knowledge and intention of purpose
   c. grounds for judging right/wrong actions
      a. law—objective norm for moral acts
      b. conscience—subjective norm of moral agents
      c. sin
      d. virtue (character)

j. morality of specific actions
   a. Jesuit/Redemptorist manuals—10 Commandments
   b. Dominican manuals—cardinal and theological virtues

k. moral obligations arising from sacraments (celebration and reception thereof) based upon requirements of canon law (e.g., go to confession once per year, etc.)

Pre-Trent—Catholic theology shifted from university setting to seminary
Post-Trent—moral theology cut off from sacred scripture, dogmatic theology, and spiritual theology; now closely allied with canon law—legalistic, extrinsic (external act), and minimalistic: Q = whether particular acts = right or wrong in light of 10 Commandments and laws of the church

Fundamental moral theology = prolegomena to special moral theology
prolegomena (plural of prolegomenon)
Etymology [pro-before + legein-say = prolegein- say beforehand]
An especially critical or discursive introduction prefaced to a literary work; preliminary remark; figurative: serving as an introduction to something.

Fundamental moral theology—explains the why behind the judgments of concrete issues; examines the foundational concerns that underlie concrete judgments

Traditional concerns of fundamental moral theology include the ultimate end of humans, the nature of human acts, the grounds for judging human acts, sin, and virtue. These concerns have been and are being rethought in light of how the intelligibility of theological and moral convictions is rooted in stories. A related development is the attempt to link fundamental moral theology more intimately with “special moral
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teology,” i.e., the morality of specific actions. One important aspect of this development is a renewed interest in moral casuistry as a way to sort out the practical implications of narrative convictions.