

Basic Themes in Christian Theology

- SIN:** An expression of human selfishness whereby we put our own interests ahead of others in the things we say or do. Sin is recognizable by its effects - the damage done by human action or inaction. The more harmful the effects, the more serious the sin.
- GRACE:** The presence of the Holy Spirit within us that stirs and sensitizes conscience, reinforces faith, animates love, and moves us to do the right things.
- CHRIST:** The Redeemer, the One who lays down his life for his friends, often as a sacrificial lamb who allows himself to be crucified in a way that breaks the cycle of violence by absorbing it, hence overcoming violence and sin, and rendering unnecessary human vengeance and retribution.
- CHURCH:** The community of faith, the community of moral action, the community of the sharing of gifts, the community of worship.
- FAITH:** The gift from God that enables us to know and trust in God. It's not quite the same thing as knowing the way we know something scientifically. It's more of a knowledge from the heart. It's partly intuitive. In a less spiritual interpretation, it's anything that an individual or a group believes with strong conviction.
- SACRAMENT:** A special event or moment with special sacredness. A sacrament is a symbol of something bigger than itself, but it is more than a symbol. It helps that "something bigger" to happen. For example, the sacrament of marriage symbolizes and mirrors the love that two people have for one another, but also helps it to happen and grow. There are many special "sacramental moments" in our lives in addition to the regular sacraments we participate in at church. God working through the sacraments is another indication of God being incarnated in our physical, concrete world.

Analyzing the Problem

Is it:

- Purely personal - perhaps a matter of personality styles not meshing, or a problem of someone being excessively driven by ego, a desire for power, or greed. In other words, an individual spiritual issue that needs to be confronted lovingly?
- Cultural - a situation in which an individual or group behavior mirrors a pattern of attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors in the larger community? What might be some strategies of communal conversion?
- A policy problem: Did this situation occur because of an unjust policy at the level of an institution, corporation, or government? What are the ethical principles that should be considered? What might be the most effective actions?
- Corruption or fraud - a scam of some sort? How can the community exercise responsibility to protect itself?
- Seriously flawed public policy from the perspective of human dignity obligations? What political / public education steps are needed to change it?
- A problem of unintended consequences? How can it be corrected?
- A combination of some of the above?
- Others?

Resources:

Definitions of justice: Commutative, Distributive, Social

Hollenbach's three strategic moral priorities:

- 1) The needs of the poor take priority over the wants of the rich;
- 2) The freedom of the dominated takes priority over the liberty of the powerful; and
- 3) The participation of marginalized groups takes priority over an order which excludes them.

