

# ***Message sent from on high: morality is top-down***

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By Brent Mattson

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**I**n a world where scientific law seemingly dictates all, it's natural moral law, not gravity, that really keeps us grounded.

C.S. Morrissey, a philosophy professor at Redeemer Pacific College, said people often forget natural moral law looms above the laws of man. He was speaking at

an April 2 lecture at Our Lady of the Assumption Parish.

“It's that unwritten thing: don't do anything bad or stupid,” Morrissey said.

Pope John Paul II reminded us that the first principle of natural law is to “do good and avoid evil.” The Pope said that our nature pushes us to do good.

The fact that natural law is unwritten makes it a struggle to grasp, Morrissey said.

“No legal recipe captures what it is to be like Jesus,” he said, “He didn't write anything down; He was too busy living it.”

Morrissey stressed that natural law is not impossible to discern.

“Anyone with an intellect has,

in principle, access to the truth,” he said. “The natural moral law is simply the truth about human acts: that is, whether they are good or evil.”

He added that it's sometimes hard to know that truth, but through reflection, and lessons from history, people can differentiate good from evil, and, therefore, under-

stand natural law.

“Pope Benedict says reality is your guide,” Morrissey said. “Some things are not indifferent morally; some things are absolutely and always wrong.” Deliberately taking innocent human life, for example, is something that is always wrong.

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# Do good, avoid evil: unwritten law

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Morrissey said that throughout the 18th to 20th centuries, some modern philosophers tried to empirically catalogue and completely codify a definitive natural moral law.

Jacques Maritain, who helped draft the UN's Declaration of Human Rights, warned that we could not entirely capture the natural moral law in writing. He said that natural law is only fully expressed by the human life lived well, best exemplified by Christ's life.

"Only when the Gospel has penetrated to the very depth of human substance will natural law appear in its flower and its perfection," Maritain wrote.

Natural law, Morrissey said, pertains to what is unchanging, universal, and unwritten in human nature. Conversely, positive law expresses the variable customs and culture of a society and can be documented.

For example, Morrissey said, speed limits are positive laws: "It's the community saying 'caution in a school zone is positive.'"

Between natural law and positive law is the law of nations, which Morrissey said pertains to moral issues that do not vary as much as speed limits, because it deals with justice on an international scale. The law of nations tries to define non-variable human rights, as Maritain did when helping write the Declaration of Human Rights.

“Gospel must penetrate to the very depth of humans.”

– Jacques Maritain

This “universal conversation of civilization,” Morrissey said, means laws of nations express truths closer to natural law than positive law.

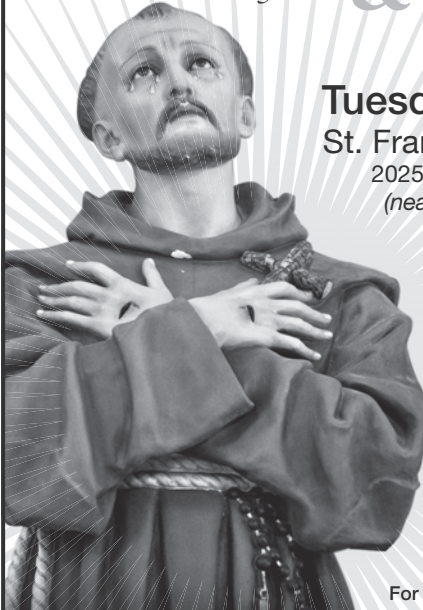
All written laws, in order to be

just, “have to flow down from, and be in accordance with, the unwritten natural law: do good and avoid evil.”

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