THE SIX “C’S OF GOOD MORAL DISCOURSE

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1. **Comprehensive** in relation to the issue and problem
   
a. Does it treat the problem and issue in its complexity and completeness?

b. Are there aspects, etc., which tend to be ignored, condemned as irrelevant, etc.?

c. Move to a "thick" description rather than simply a "thin" description of the issue.

2. **Comprehensible**, i.e., "understandable"
   
a. Is the mode of discourse comprehensible by a variety of people, ecumenical, etc.?

b. Does the language employ philosophical and/or religious belief systems which people use and understand?

c. Be careful, especially in pastoral work, of using too much "jargon" (fundamental option, intrinsically evil acts, etc.)

d. Yet, make sure that key concepts are understood

e. This involves being sensitive to the dynamic of "language games" of moral and theological discourse.

3. **Consistent and Coherent**
   
a. Are the modes of argumentation, usage of moral sources, positions taken, etc. internally *coherent*

b. And externally *consistent* with similar issues, cases, etc.?

4. **Credible**
   
a. in the sense of being "believable"
b. thus, a person of sound reason could logically hold this position

c. In this regard, the "credibility" or "plausibility" of our positions will have to be tested against the experts of a particular field.

d. E.g., if we are to discuss or pronounce on ecological matter we have to get input from experts in the field, as well as test our responses with them.

e. This whole area of "expert testimony" is a delicate area in matters such as marriage, sexual ethics, and the like, including business ethics, politics, etc.—areas in which the Church has been criticized for not developing a sufficiently credible and realistic moral discourse.

f. Thus, dialogue, with its concomitant methodology is key here. No genuine dialogue reduces or eliminates credibility.

g. However, a reluctance or refusal to dialogue will most likely have only the opposite effect of rendering one’s argumentation and discourse less credible (and not more credible).

h. As a “credibility” check I would suggest taking some guidance from both ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue—endeavors which have developed a certain methodology which strives to ground real credibility in oneself and the other.

i. In this line, consider the following passage taken from *Complementary Norms to the Jesuit Constitutions* in the section dealing with Ecumenical Activity: (CN#268):

   “It [ecumenism] seeks, namely, what unites rather than what divides; it seeks understanding rather than confrontation, it seeks to know, understand, and love others as they wish to be known and understood, with full respect for their distinctiveness, through the dialogue of truth, justice, and love.” (*The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996, emphasis added).

j. This is what I mean about a “credibility check”—to make sure that our articulation of the “other’s” position reflects a knowledge and understanding which they would own: “Yes, you have stated my position fairly, completely, and respectfully.”

5. *Convincing*
a. Modes of argumentation that move from being merely credible to one that convinces, in the light of counter-arguments

b. Is the counter-argument being stated fairly? Would its proponents recognize and own the recapitulation presented?

c. Does the argument convince me/others?
   i. Why?
   ii. or why not?

d. If an argument or line of reasoning does not convince, then what is our further response?
   i. Recast the argument?
   ii. Repeat it, more loudly?
   iii. Try to invoke sanctions of authority?

e. Recognize that “convincing” is not a matter of majority acceptance, polls, and/or political correctness.

f. An otherwise convincing argument may fail to convince because of the sin, hard-heartedness, lack of intelligence, etc., on the part of those addressed, and therefore would not be easily corrected by those engaged in the formulation of moral discourse.

g. In this sense we can say that Jesus Christ failed to “convince” a good deal of his audience as well!

6. The sixth "C" for moral theology: **Christian**

   a. Does the moral discourse, position, theory, response, application, etc. take into account the *Christian* nature of our moral life?

   b. Does it take into account adequately the aspects of Christian theology, such as
      i. Creation
      ii. Sin and forgiveness
iii. Grace

iv. Cross

v. Redemption

vi. Resurrection

vii. Eschatology

viii. Christian moral community of discipleship

c. This sixth "C" does not replace or supersede the previous 5 "C"'s, but is meant to be integrative as the organizing symbol.