Introduction: Values? Virtues? Morality? Is It All the Same?

We live in an age where words are manipulated, emptied of content, and reshaped at convenience. Among the most used—and most misunderstood—terms is *values*. We hear it in schools, companies, political campaigns, human rights declarations, and even in pulpits: "defend values," "transmit values," "educate in values." But what does that word actually mean? And why should we care about distinguishing it from age-old concepts like *virtues* and *objective morality*?

This article aims to clarify, through the richness of theology and Catholic tradition, why "values" are neither equivalent to nor legitimate substitutes for *objective morality* or *Christian virtues*. We will unmask the subjective, ambiguous, and even dangerous nature of this term when it is used to replace solid principles, and we will offer a practical guide to reeducate moral judgment in light of the Gospel and the perennial teaching of the Church.

> *"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness!"*
> *— Isaiah 5:20*

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1. Origin and Rise of the Language of "Values"

The term *value* has its philosophical roots in modern currents such as *ethical relativism*, *existentialism*, and *pragmatism*. It was popularized in the 19th century by thinkers like Nietzsche, who used the word to refer to those qualities that an individual or culture *considers* important or desirable, without any reference to an objective moral order.

Thus, the language of *values* emerges from a rupture with classical moral tradition. Where people once asked whether something was *good* or *evil*, now they ask whether it is *valuable* to them.

The problem is clear: goodness becomes *subjective*, personal, negotiable.

2. Virtues: The Moral Language of the Gospel and the Church

Throughout history, the Church has never spoken of "values," but of *virtues*. Virtues are stable dispositions of the soul, habits of good, which perfect man in his rational nature and orient him toward God. They are not mere "preferences" or "noble inclinations" but objective realities that elevate the soul.

Virtues are divided into two groups:

a) **Cardinal Virtues** (Human)

- **Prudence**: knowing what to do and how to act rightly.
- **Justice**: giving each their due.
- **Fortitude**: resisting evil and facing difficulties.
- **Temperance**: moderating pleasures and passions.

b) **Theological Virtues** (Supernatural)

- **Faith**: believing in God and all that He has revealed.
- **Hope**: trusting in divine promises.
- **Charity**: loving God above all things and neighbor for God's sake.

These virtues, received through grace and strengthened by practice and the sacraments, are what make man just in the eyes of God. They are the path to holiness.

3. So What Are "Values" Then?

The term "value" simply designates a quality that someone *appreciates*. It does not necessarily imply that it is good, true, or just.

A "value" can be:

- Individual: what I personally value.
- Cultural: what a human group considers important.
- Changing: what was once valued may not be anymore, and vice versa.

Example:

A society may say that "freedom" is a value. But freedom for what? To seek truth or to destroy it? To love or to sin?

Without a reference to objective morality, the "value of freedom" can justify both a religious vocation and an abortion.

This applies to many other "values": *tolerance*, *diversity*, *authenticity*, *inclusion*… Without a moral framework, they become empty or even dangerous labels.

4. The Ideological Replacement: From Virtues to Values

Replacing the language of virtues with that of values is not neutral. It is an ideological and pedagogical operation carefully designed. Throughout the 20th century—especially after the Second Vatican Council—many Catholic environments began speaking more about "Christian values" than about virtues, as if they were equivalent.

But they are not.

Quick Comparison:

Concept	Foundation	Nature	Stability	Purpose
Virtue	Objective moral law / God	Habit of the soul	Stable	Sanctification of man
Value	Human subjectivity	Preference or appreciation	Variable	Temporal well-being

This substitution has led to a soft, emotional, negotiable ethics. Today, people talk about "education in values" instead of *morality*. But what happens if the values being taught do not match objective moral truth?

5. The Pastoral and Spiritual Danger of "Values" Language

When a Catholic adopts the language of values uncritically, they risk justifying the unjustifiable. Since values are subjective, they can be used to cloak immorality in nobility.

Examples:

- The "value of compassion" is used to justify euthanasia.
- The "value of authenticity" is invoked to defend a lifestyle contrary to the Gospel.
- The "value of freedom" is promoted to support abortion or pornography.
- The "value of respect" is appealed to in order to silence the Truth.

This is the tragedy: **the language of values can be used to silence the voice of Christian morality**, to numb the conscience, and to build a tailor-made ethics centered on the individual rather than on God.

> *"The wise man is the one who builds his house on rock" (Mt 7:24).*
> *Values are sand; virtues are rock.*

6. Recovering the Moral Language of Tradition: A Theological and Pastoral Guide

A) **Formation of Conscience**

Conscience is not educated through "values," but through *Revealed Truth*.
It is urgent to return to teaching the Catechism, the Decalogue, Natural Law, the teachings of the saints and the Magisterium.

Recommendations:

- Read the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (especially §§1730–1845).
- Study the virtues with St. Thomas Aquinas.
- Meditate on the lives of virtuous saints such as St. Aloysius Gonzaga, St. Teresa of Jesus, or St. Francis de Sales.

B) **Family and Educational Pastoral Work**

Families must teach virtues, not just values. A child needs to know *what is good*, not just *what is appreciated*.

Practical Suggestions:

- Pray each night asking to grow in a specific virtue (fortitude, chastity, humility…).
- Read lives of saints together as models of virtue.
- Correct with charity but with clarity when values are invoked that contradict morality.

C) **Parish Life and Preaching**

Priests and pastoral agents must speak without fear about sin, conversion, virtue, judgment, heaven, and hell. The soft language of values puts souls to sleep.

Suggestions:

- Replace "Christian values" with "Christian virtues" in catechesis and homilies.
- Preach about the capital vices and their opposing virtues.
- Form Catholic leaders with firm identity, not with diluted language.

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7. Practical Application in Daily Life

What can I do today to move away from the language of values and return to the path of virtue?

✔ Examine your life: do you use words like "values" to avoid moral commitments?
✔ Learn one virtue each month and fight against its opposing vice.
✔ Educate not only in what is "well regarded" but in what is *good in God's eyes*.
✔ Review your decisions: are you guided by what you *value* or by what is *good* and *holy*?

> *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of*

> *God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."*
> *— Romans 12:2*

Conclusion: Returning to the Clarity of the Gospel

"Values" are soft concepts that modern culture uses to replace moral certainties. But the soul is not saved by having good values—it is saved by living in grace and in virtue. As the Church, we are called to recover the strong, clear, and liberating language of Tradition. To call evil by its name. To form upright consciences. To teach true virtues. To return to Christ, who did not come to give us "values," but to show us the *way*, the *truth*, and the *life*.

Holiness is not a matter of values, but of virtue.