

RCIA
Christian Morality – Part II
Session 20

“Man participates in the wisdom and goodness of the Creator who gives him mastery over his acts and the ability to govern himself with a view to the true and the good.”

(#1954 Catechism of the Catholic Church)



MORALITY PART II Questions We Face Today

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21)

The centrality of **value** is a good worth pursuing, worth committing oneself to, worth passing on to the next generation. We are each responsible for our own values. Each of us is personally and socially responsible for her or his system of values --and their hierarchy. **Ethics** protects values. Ethics is not about **what is** (sociology) it's about **what ought to be!** The responsibility for ethics is directly proportional to power. Ethics has two focal points: character driven ethics, which are the habit of the heart, and action-guiding principles, which is ethics as principled behavior. Ethics can be very secular which are the guiding principles of law. However, Law is the lowest common denominator of ethics. *Gaudium et spes*, #36 states "When God is forgotten, the creature itself grows unintelligible." As Christians we have theological ethics or the theological action-guiding principles that echo our faith. These principles are:

The principle of Divine Sovereignty --"And God spoke all these words, saying 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.'" (Ex. 20:1-3)

The Principle of Imago Dei – The Dignity of the Human Person --"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...so God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them.'" (Gen. 1:26-27) The dignity of the human person is our absolute connection to the divine.

Principle of Stewardship – we hold life and our world in trust – "Fool, This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (Lk. 12:20-21) We are also stewards over the gift of our body.

The newest theory of ethics is Bioethics. There are three areas of interest to the human family and the Church. *Bioethics are defined as a confluence of research, technology and ethical reflection.* They are applied to Stem Cell Research, Genetic Therapy (and Counseling), and Cloning.

The Catholic Church uses "*The echoes of our Faith*" to understand these emerging areas of technology. All Christians have a right and a duty to make ethical demands on technology. Humans are creative beings who must learn and grow. The Church recognizes that science and technology are necessary for the common good but they cannot be left to their own account. Henk Joehemsen who wrote *Human Stem Cells: Source of Hope and of Controversy* asks, "Do we really think the human family is wise enough to tamper with our DNA". Science must be tempered with the experience and values of faith. We cannot leave our future to *utilitarian calculus*, which is power alone determining who is in the

circle of greater good and who are the ones getting used. If left to secular ethics, it is the poor, the marginalized and the weak who continue to be the victims.

The Church has voiced specific opinions regarding the three issues of Bioethics. The Catholic Church does not oppose Stem Cell Research, however where the stem cells come from create the area of controversy. Adult stem cells harvested from a person's own body have been used to great good in treating such devastating diseases such as multiple myeloma or leukemia. Research of stem cells from embryos completely devalues the dignity of the human person who is defined as human from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. In genetic therapy, somatic cell therapy is acceptable for learning and promoting the improved health and welfare of humanity. In the germ line therapy the church recognizes that reproductive dynamics of a person may have repercussions through several generations and man may not benefit self at the expense of future generations. God is the author of all life. Each person is created in the image of God, unique and precious. Cloning is never and will never be an acceptable area of research when considering theological ethics. There is lots of information available on each of these topics, with the Church's perspective regarding each topic by searching "Catholic Conference of Bishops," and other Catholic sites on the internet.

Why the Church Opposes Assisted Suicide

In addition to the ancient scourges of poverty, hunger and war, new crimes against life have emerged. In some ways these crimes are more urgent because they are falsely or erroneously justified in the name of freedom and seek authorization by the state.

In the midst of a culture that often denies the value of human life, it is important to present the teaching of the Church in regard to the issue of physician-assisted suicide. Not only has there been a sharp increase in the publicity surrounding national and local incidents of active physician-assisted suicide, but there is a nationwide effort to legalize the practice state to state.

The emerging debate surrounding physician –assisted suicide forces all the members of society to pause. It clarifies the shared assumption about life and death that our laws are meant to protect. The Church has a rightful place in this public discussion because the issues surrounding death are not only medical and legal, but they are religious and moral as well.

As a people of faith, we have an important role in the public discussion about this issue. In this public conversation our position must not only be stated clearly and confidently, but our opposition to assisted suicide must be backed up with compassionate action.

Our opposition to physician-assisted suicide is not to hinder freedom but to protect the right to die with human and Christian dignity. Between the two extremes of active euthanasia or assisted suicide and the use of every possible

means to prolong life at all cost, the Church offers a third alternative of action that can help to guide the public discussion.

The Church recognizes a person's right to refuse disproportionate medical treatment. What we must safeguard in our society is that a person's informed treatment decisions are respected.

The Church also recognizes the need for the proper management of pain. In this regard, we must ensure in the clinical setting that a person need not seek death in order to escape pain.

The Church recognizes the importance of the interpersonal aspect of human suffering and death. As members of the Church, we offer to the sick and dying our service of charity as a resplendent sign that "God has visited his people" (Lk. 7:16). It will be our compassion toward the sick and dying that will ultimately make our teaching on assisted suicide effective and credible enough to shape and guide the public agenda. In the midst of the final looming controversy over his own fate, Jesus uttered the words of faith that continue to inspire and to provide the Church's teaching in this mystery of Christian Death: "This is why the Father love me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again." (Jn 10:17) (*taken from Catholic Update, 1997 -Why the Church Opposes Assisted Suicide by Wilton D. Grego.*)

THE CHALLENGE OF PEACE

Apprehension about nuclear war is almost tangible and visible today. Nuclear war threatens the existence of our planet; this is a more menacing threat than any the world has known. It is neither tolerable nor necessary that human beings live under this threat.

As Pope John Paul II said at Hiroshima: "From now on it is only through a conscious choice and through a deliberate policy that humanity can survive." As Americans, citizens of the nation which was first to produce atomic weapons, which has been the only one to use them and which today is one of the handful of nations capable of decisively influencing the course of the nuclear age, we have grave human, moral and practical responsibilities to see that a "conscious choice" is made to save humanity.

The Catholic tradition on war and peace is a long and complex one, reaching from the Sermon on the Mount to the statements of Pope John Paul II. At the center of the Church's teaching on peace and at the center of all Catholic social teaching are the transcendence of God and the dignity of the human person. The human person is the clearest reflection of God's presence in the world; all of the Church's work in pursuit of both justice and peace is designed to protect and promote the dignity of every person. For each person not only reflects God, but is the expression of God's creative work and the meaning of Christ's redemptive ministry.

Christians approach the problem of war and peace with fear and reverence. God is the Lord of life, and so each human life is sacred; modern warfare threatens the obliteration of human life on a previously unimaginable

scale. We believe that the Church, as a community of faith and social institution, has a proper, necessary and distinctive part to play in the pursuit of peace.

The protection of human rights and the preservation of peace are tasks to be accomplished in a world marked by sin and conflict of various kinds. The Church's teaching on war and peace establishes a strong presumption against war which is binding on all; it then examines when this presumption may be overridden, precisely in the name of preserving the kind of peace which protect human dignity and human rights. The Christian has no choice but to defend peace, properly understood, against aggression. This is an inalienable obligation. It is the how of defending peace, which offers moral options.

How the 'just-war' theory limits war:

The moral theory of the "just-war" or "limited-war" doctrine begins with the presumption which binds all Christians: We should do no harm to our neighbors. Just-war teaching has evolved as an effort to prevent war. Only if war cannot be rationally avoided does the teaching then seek to restrict and reduce its horrors. It does this by establishing a set of rigorous conditions, which must be met if the decision to go to war is to be morally permissible. Such a decision, especially today, requires extraordinarily strong reasons for overriding the presumption *in favor of peace* and *against war*. The conditions for a just war:

Just cause. War is permissible only to confront "a real and certain danger," i.e. to protect innocent life, to preserve conditions necessary for decent human existence and to secure basic human rights.

Competent authority. War must be declared by those with responsibility for public order, not by private groups or individuals.

Comparative justice. In essence: Which side is sufficiently "right" in a dispute, and are the values at stake critical enough to override the presumption against war? Do the rights and values involved justify killing? Given techniques of propaganda and the ease with which nations and individuals either assume or delude themselves into believing that God or right is clearly on their side, the test of comparative justice may be extremely difficult to apply.

Right intention. War can be legitimately intended only for the reasons set forth above as a just cause.

Last resort. For resort of war to be justified, all peaceful alternatives must have been exhausted.

Probability of success. This is a difficult criterion to apply, but its purpose is to prevent irrational resort to force or hopeless resistance when the outcome of either will clearly be disproportionate or futile.

Proportionality. This means that the damage to be inflicted and the costs incurred by war must be proportionate to the good expected by taking up arms. Because of the destructive capability of modern technological warfare, the principle of proportionality takes on special significance. Today it becomes increasingly difficult to make a decision to use any kind of armed force, however limited initially in intention and in the destructive power of the weapons employed, without facing at least the possibility of escalation to broader, or even total war, and the use of weapons of horrendous destructive potential.

Just response to aggression must be discriminate. It must be directed against unjust aggressors, not against innocent people caught up in a war not of their making. The Vatican Council in its (Pastoral Constitution #80) issued a memorable declaration "Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation."

Nuclear weapons particularly and nuclear warfare as it is planned today raise new moral questions. As indicated in a statement from the Holy See to the United Nations in 1976: the arms race is to be condemned as a danger, an act of aggression against the poor and a folly, which does not provide the security it promises. "Recent talk about winning or even surviving a nuclear war must reflect a failure to appreciate a medical reality; Any nuclear war would inevitably cause death, disease and suffering of pandemonic proportions and without the possibility of effective medical intervention. That reality leads to the same conclusion physicians have reached for life-threatening epidemics throughout history – Prevention is essential for control." Pope John Paul II.

Some principles on the use of nuclear weapons:

Counterpopulation warfare. Under no circumstances may nuclear weapons or other instruments of mass slaughter be used for the purpose of destroying population centers or other predominantly civilian targets. Retaliatory action, whether nuclear or conventional, which would indiscriminately take many wholly innocent lives, lives of people who are in no way responsible for reckless actions of their government, must also be condemned.

The initiation of nuclear war. We do not perceive any situation in which the deliberate initiation of nuclear warfare on however restricted a scale can be morally justified. Non-nuclear attacks by another state must

be resisted by other than nuclear means. Therefore, a serious moral obligation exists to develop non-nuclear defensive strategies as rapidly as possible.

Limited nuclear war. Unless certain questions [namely, those challenging the ability of military leaders to keep a nuclear exchange limited] can be answered satisfactorily, we will continue to be highly skeptical about the real meaning of 'limited.' One of the criteria of the just-war tradition is a reasonable hope of success in bringing about justice and peace. We must ask whether such a reasonable hope can exist once nuclear weapons have been exchanged. The burden of proof remains on those who assert that meaningful limitation possible.

On deterrence. Essentially deterrence means dissuasion of a potential adversary from initiating an attack or conflict, often by the threat of unacceptable retaliatory damage. Pope John Paul II makes this statement about the morality of deterrence: "In current conditions 'deterrence' based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself but as a step on the way toward a progressive disarmament, may still be judged morally acceptable. Nonetheless, in order to ensure peace, it is indispensable not to be satisfied with this minimum, which is always susceptible to the real danger of explosion."

We are now entering an era of new, global interdependencies requiring global systems of governance to manage the resulting conflicts and ensure our common security. We live in a global age with problems and conflicts on a global scale. Either we shall learn to resolve these problems together or we shall destroy one another. Mutual security and survival require a new vision of the world as one interdependent planet. We call for the establishment of some form of global authority adequate to the needs of the international common good.

To be a Christian, according to the New Testament, is not simply to believe with one's mind, but also to become a doer of the Word, a wayfarer with and a witness to Jesus. These comments about the meaning of being a disciple or a follower of Jesus today are especially relevant to the quest for genuine peace in our time.

We are the first generation since Genesis with the power to virtually destroy God's creation. We cannot remain silent in the face of such danger. Peacemaking is not an optional commitment. It is a requirement of our faith. We are called to be peacemakers, not by some movement of the moment, but by Our Lord Jesus. (*Excerpts from The U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on War and Peace.*)