

St. Francis of Assisi Parish
RCIA - Deacon P. Iacono

Wakefield, Rhode Island 02879

An Introduction to the Ten Commandments As the Basis for Christian Love and Morality

I. Introduction: Basic Definitions

- A. Catholic morality, and thus, our actions, **centers on the command** given by Jesus in the Gospels “to love one another as I have loved you.”
- B. The term morality derives from the Latin word *moralis*, which means *custom*.
- C. An action is moral if it follows the moral law; it is *immoral* if it doesn't follow the moral law; and amoral if person has no regard to consider the moral law.
- D. The study of God is called Theology (Greek, *theos*: “god”; *ology*: “study of”)
- E. Within theology we have different divisions, for example – **dogmatic theology** which is concerned with what we believe as Catholics (can be found in the *Nicene Creed*), and **moral theology** – which is concerned with how we live out what we believe in the Creed.
- F. In the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament), the Hebrew people followed the covenant established between themselves and Yahweh.
- G. The Hebrews were assisted in this covenant by: the Ten Commandments of God the Father (Exodus 20: 2-17), and, laws established by Moses (Deuteronomy, chapter 5 versus 1 - 22). The roots of Catholic moral theology are the Ten Commandments, plus, the two Commands of Jesus.

II. Application to the Ten Commandments

- A. **1st Commandment:** God clearly establishes who He is – He is ONE; His name is “I Am,” (YHWH). He is a jealous God (He wants to be recognized as having the power, versus “the world,” money, politics, “self,” etc), so He implies do not be influenced by other cultures and their polytheistic ideas.
- B. **2nd Commandment:** God says not to improperly use His name; thus, do not blaspheme, commit perjury, or take unholy oaths.
- C. **3rd Commandment:** God demands worship, the Sabbath day is a holy day, He demands that you worship Him, rest, and recreate (re-create) yourself. For Christians this is a holy day, too, because each Sunday is another “Easter.”
- D. **4th Commandment:** respect your parents, even if they do not respect you, because they are your closest biological relations – thus, they mirror the family of God.
- E. **5th Commandment:** In 1920: 78% of people died in their own homes; in 1960: 41% of people died in their own homes; in 2000: 17% of people died in their own homes. The point is that a sociological change has occurred in which the average person has been freed from seeing death. Death has been taken out the family – it has been put into an entertainment setting, or in an antiseptic hospital setting. Society can come to fear death – as a final act that needs to be “put off or hidden away” so it doesn't impact the society's view of reality. The result is a culture such as ours that continually emphasizes youth and ways in which you can avoid the inevitable end of your own existence: eat, drink, work, exercise, or dope it out of the way... Thou shall not kill applies to you and your neighbor's physical, emotional, and spiritual self.

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It is from the **5th Commandment** that many moral dilemmas are perceived:

- 1) The question that ultimately comes up: “Who decides who is to live or die?” There are five people in intensive care; there are only four respirators, who is left out – why?
- 2) From a Catholic Christian point of view the ruling principle is – **first** – “**Do no harm.**” *Virtus in medio stat*, which is Latin for “virtue stands in the middle.” This means “avoid extremes” – avoid a medical utopia – “We have got to keep this person alive at all costs.” At the same time, you need to avoid medical pessimism: “She is going to die anyway, just let her go.”
- 3) **Key issue:** Physicians are totally competent when it comes to medical decisions, but, many are amateurs when it comes to spiritual/moral issues. As a Catholic, it is mandatory to consult a priest with experience in such matters to assist you in making important moral decisions concerning your family members.
- 4) Pope Pius 12th in a 1957 statement on life issues said: “Excessive concern for the temporal at some time becomes neglect for the eternal.”
- 5) **The Three “P’s”:** **three viewpoints** should help you in making decisions concerning this kind of end of life issue: the **person** in question, the **physician**, and the **priest**. You need to ask the question: “What would they (the person) want in this situation?”
- 6) Remember, people have been resuscitated after clinical death. We are **required to use ordinary means**, in other words, we are required to use appropriate medical care that may have a benefit to the person.
- 7) We are not required to use extraordinary means – that is, very expensive treatments, “warehousing,” no clear benefit or hope for the person.
- 8) Brain death means “no recovery;” after 24 hours of medical evidence of brain death the law states that a person is removed from life support. If there is **no hope for recovery, no brain activity; therefore**, no extraordinary means – you are justified in removing the individual from life support. **If there is normal brain activity and hope** for recovery, **then** you must keep the individual on life support and monitor the situation for change – to determine improvement and recovery.
- 9) In the world today you have a clash of the civil law with the moral law; this is called a *moral dilemma*. Thus, Catholic Christians are asked to remember that they must put the moral law (which is based on the Ten Commandments and Church teaching) above civil law and not abide by the civil law in their own personal behavior. In other words, Catholics may not have an abortion, unless, it occurs as an

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9) indirect consequence of another medical procedure that is performed to save the mother's life.

10) The Catholic Christian viewpoint on abortion is that the "fetus" is a living "person;" thus, it must be respected. "Ensoulement" (the presence of the soul within the living fetus) occurred at the moment of conception. It has the same "right to life" that you or I do, thus, the tiny life is a developing person, as we all are – even into old age. Life is a gift and it is sacred.

F. 6th Commandment: Adultery is basically the sin of injustice against the marriage covenant – the promise to love and be faithful to each other for all eternity. Sexual relations between Catholics outside of marriage is considered to be immoral because it is the breaking of the commitment of faithfulness of two married people who love each other. "Faithfulness and commitment" are affected because the attitude develops that the person can walk away from the affair any time they want to... thus, there is no permanence, and the sexual act loses its spiritual integrity and becomes just a physical or psychological release. The Catholic Church and Orthodox Judaism places the sexual act firmly within the marriage covenant.

Fornication (sex outside of marriage), masturbation, lust, rape, etc. are all serious sins against the 6th Commandment because they are an abuse of the sexual faculties which are a gift from God. The Church teaches that contraceptive sex divides the bond between love and life – unity and procreation. People deserve the best – and the gift of sexuality is the gift of total self in an honest, open, faith filled, and life long commitment. This is a countercultural teaching!

G. 7th Commandment: Stealing is an injustice against the right of people to be secure in their possessions. It is based in pride – the desire that you are worthy to have the goods of another person, even though, you did not work for those goods. Can stealing ever be justified? Yes, in order to feed yourself or your family – it is the issue of self preservation.

H. 8th Commandment: God wants us to honor the truth; but, in "false witness" the Father of Lies – Satan – again uses our pride to have us malign the good name and integrity of another person. This cannot be done for any reason if civilized communication is to occur between people. Calumny is false speech to ruin a reputation. Detraction is when what you say is true, but, you still have no right to say it – this leads to libel (print) and slander (public speech).

I. 9th Commandment and 10th Commandment: Coveting your neighbor's wife and goods stirs up within your heart jealousies, desires, and cravings that go against the moral law. These Commandments require you to respect others "covenant" and property rights.

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III. Application to the Teachings of Jesus Christ

- J. Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, **did not do away with the Hebrew law**. Jesus fulfilled, built upon, and perfected the Hebrew law:
- 1) Love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, mind, soul, and body.
 - 2) Love your neighbor as you would love yourself (treat others in the same way you would like to be treated). (Mk. 12: 30-31, Lk 10: 27, Mt. 22: 36-40).
 - 3) The above two Commandments of Jesus were part of the Law of Moses and the moral code of Israel (Dt. 6: 5, Lv. 19: 18). Jesus adds a new perception to the **responsibilities of love**: be ready and willing to devote your life to others with the spirit of love. **Christian love and concern** for others is critical to our growth in the Spirit of God. We are a **family of believers**, thus, *we need see the spark of God's creation in our neighbors*.
- K. Jesus' morality calls us to: **trust** in Him and His Gospel message, **reject** and **repent** from sin, and to **seek salvation** through prayer, fasting, and following His teachings.
- L. The Holy Family of God is modeled through the institution of the Church. The Church consists of human beings. Those human beings are capable of sin. Church members – the hierarchy and the laity – do sin. The Church as an institution of faith and morals cannot sin. We have the words of Jesus Himself in Matthew 16: 13-20 and Matthew 28: 16 – 20. These passages tell us that He will remain with us until the end of time. Jesus cannot deny Himself. His Church cannot promote wrongdoing in issues of faith or morals.
- M. To be a moral person, Catholic Christians must follow their faith and perform good works. We must seek to do God's will while recognizing our ongoing responsibility to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Man is obliged to follow the moral law, which urges him "to do what is good and avoid what is evil." This law makes itself heard in his conscience. (CC # 1713-14).
- N. **Guidelines** for growth in Christian morality are: 10 Commandments, the Beatitudes: Matthew 5: 3-12; the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, Church teachings on virtues, lives of the saints, etc.
- O. The morality of human acts depends on: the *object* chosen; the *end* in view (intention); and the *circumstances* of the action (CC # 1750).
- P. St. Thomas Aquinas said, "An evil action cannot be justified by reference to a good intention." Thus, **the end does not justify the means**. (CC # 1759)
- Q. Because of original sin, man is inclined to error and evil in exercising his freedom.

