Grade 12

In Search of the Good

A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living

CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

In Search of the Good

A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living

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The sextant depicted on the cover is an instrument used by sailors to aid their navigation. By sighting on the horizon and the Sun or North Star at a given time of day or night, sailors can establish their location in terms of latitude. By using a sextant together with charts, compass, and timepiece, sailors can get their bearings even in the middle of the sea. The sextant symbolizes what this course is about. Life is like being out at sea: we live in times that may seem more fluid than solid, where the direction we need to travel does not always seem obvious, where storms may arise, where we must learn to navigate or be lost to the mercy of the winds and currents in which we are caught. There are solid points of reference in the moral life, just like the Sun and stars and horizon for the sailor. By learning to recognize these solid points of reference, and developing our skills in order to be able to navigate through life using these reference points, we will succeed in finding direction. *In Search of the Good: A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living* will help guide you as you undertake your search for the good in life.

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CONFÉRENCE DES ÉVÊQUES CATHOLIQUES DU CANADA
CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Dear Student,

This book is based on a distinction.

We tend naturally to connect the idea of being good with the idea of doing the right thing. And yet, good people sometimes do the wrong thing and bad people sometimes do the right thing. The goodness that we find in people appears to be flawed; so is the goodness I find in myself. And so, this text distinguishes between the goodness of human beings and the rightness or wrongness of their actions.

This book is based on our pursuit of happiness.

When you really think about it, trying to make myself happy doesn't work. Yet when I do the right thing for others, I experience happiness. It seems that happiness is a by-product of doing a good thing, the right thing. Great thinkers, philosophers and scholars provide this textbook with a study of the interaction between pursuing the good and finding happiness.

This book is based on the gift of faith.

The teachings of Christ and his Church help us to peer honestly into the depths of our hearts and recognize the goodness of our being. The power of the Holy Spirit, dwelling within us, offers forgiveness to heal our broken hearts and courage to act justly in this world. The gift of faith enlightens our understanding about goodness, about the sin that afflicts our humanity and about our quest for happiness.

Perhaps St. Ambrose summarizes the approach of this textbook best:

Hold fast to God, the one true good

Where a man's heart is, there is his treasure also.
God is not accustomed to refusing a good gift to those who ask for one.
Since he is good,…
let us hold fast to him with all our soul, our heart, our strength,
and so enjoy his light and see his glory and possess the grace of supernatural joy.
Let us reach out with our hearts to possess that good,
let us exist in it and live in it,
let us hold fast to it, that good which is beyond all we can know or see
and is marked by perpetual peace and tranquility,
a peace which is beyond all we can know or understand.
This is the good that permeates creation.
In it we all live, on it we all depend.
It has nothing above it; it is divine.
No one is good but God alone…
*It is through God's goodness that all that is truly good is given us…**

With the authors of this textbook I pray and hope that this program of studies will help you steer a course through life that will lead you to your treasure.

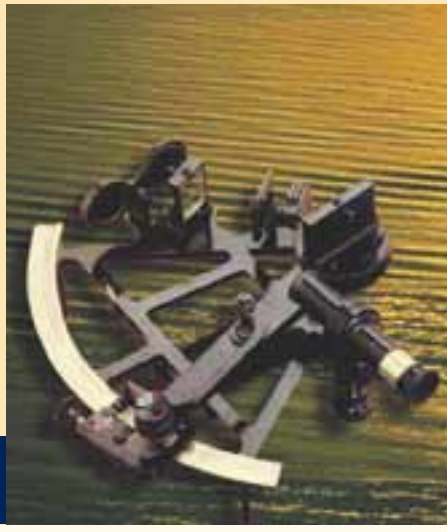
Sincerely yours,

+ Richard Grecco

Most Rev. Richard Grecco
Auxiliary Bishop of Toronto

**The Liturgy of the Hours.* Vol. II.
(NY: Catholic Book Co., 1973) p.203

Part A: Ethical foundations



Mapping the ethical experience

UNIT I

Introduction

Ethics is for lovers. It is for people who know how to love deeply, passionately and energetically. Ethics is for people who have a passion for the good and the beautiful. And so we begin to tell our story of ethics by going to its very centre – love.

St. Augustine, in his book *Confessions*, asks, "What do I love when I love God?" It is an interesting question, which he later repeats in the form of a prayer, "What do I love when I love You, my God?" With this question, St. Augustine admits that he does not know the answer. What is it that I love when I love God? As we explore ethics, we join St. Augustine in his quest.

Why is love of God a good starting point for ethics? Ethics is not *first of all* about duties and obligations, or about rules of behaviour, or about laws. The driving force of ethics is *the good*. We are not talking about the small goods of life, such as a car, a house, a family, or wealth. Ethics is about the big good: the good which St. Paul described as "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2.9). It is the impossible good that Mary encountered when the angel came to her with God's announcement that she was to bear a child while she had no husband (Luke 1.34). Ethics searches for the infinite, the impossible, first of all. Then it returns to our day-to-day actions, to the obligations and responsibilities that we have for one another.

In this program we will start by exploring this search for the infinite good. Then we will look at how we translate this search into our actions. The first we call ethics. The second – translating the search for the good into the way we conduct our lives – we call

Infinite: boundless, endless. In mathematics, the infinite refers to something that cannot be counted. It is greater than any assignable quantity. In philosophy and theology, the good is infinite. It cannot be confined or measured by a definable quantity. Ethics aims at this infinite good.

morality. We can see morality at work in our rules or guidelines of behaviour and good actions. Accordingly, for example, the Ten Commandments – the ten words given to Moses – touch on morality. They identify the good by looking at its flip side: You shall not steal; you shall not murder. Or they show how the good is attained: You shall love the Lord your God. In the opening chapter, we will make the distinction between ethics and morality using examples from everyday life.

In Search of the Good: A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living consists of two parts: an introductory section of two units and a second section of four units. The introductory units ask the question: What fundamental issues are at work in a Catholic approach to ethics? We approach the question from two angles. The first angle explores a philosophical understanding of the human person as ethical (Unit I). You will be invited to reflect on the rich ethical tradition that has emerged over the centuries from Aristotle (384–322 BC) to contemporary thinkers on such questions as "What is ethics?" "What makes human actions unique?" "What guides human actions in search of the good?" "What is conscience?" In Unit I we will use what tradition has called the "Book of Nature," that is, what human reason can learn from the natural world. Human intelligence and philosophical reflection have helped us to understand this desire within us for the good. The second angle (Unit II) explores what our Judeo-Christian tradition brings to ethics and the consideration of the good. Here we will turn to sacred Scripture, which is foundational for our understanding of ourselves as ethical beings.

In the second part of *In Search of the Good,* Revelation and reason will be placed in dialogue with each other. We will consider the good that people search for in the various domains of their lives. Here we will enter into the treasury of reflection that has enlightened human culture over the centuries. We will sample reflections on the good of freedom, of justice, of love, of community, and of forgiveness. We will consider how these goods impact on our lives individually. We will ask "How might I think about these goods when I have to choose between more than one good?" "What about when I am confronted with evil, the opposite of the good?"

Each chapter also offers moments for reflection. These are opportunities to develop a sense of gratitude for the gift of the ethical and moral thrust in ourselves. It is this gift that allows our world to be a home for humanity; a place where it is good to be; a world for lovers.

Why be ethical?

CHAPTER 1

The happy [person] lives well and does well; for we have practically defined happiness as a sort of good life and good action.
Aristotle

The ethical experience: Four ways of locating the ethical in you

"Be home by midnight. And please, drive carefully!" How often have your parents said something like this to you? Perhaps you associate ethics and morals with this kind of prescriptive language. Ethics and morality become a series of do's and don'ts imposed on you by an outside authority. You may often feel that these obligations are an imposition on your personal freedom and responsibility. You may resent these rules and codes as an intrusion on your freedom. Accordingly, you may well think of ethics or morality as something that others put upon you and not as something that is yours. In the following four examples the ethical is clearly a part of what it means to be human.

The scream – The experience of personal response

Ken Melchin begins his book on Christian ethics *Living With Other People* with the following story:

> Take a moment to imagine that you are on vacation, stretched out on a vast expanse of magnificent white beach, with no one around for miles. You are finally getting that relief from the tension and anxiety of daily life that you most certainly deserve. You can feel your muscles relaxing. You can feel the stress flowing out of your body. You can feel your mind detaching from everyday concerns, releasing the grip of concentrated attention. Your mind begins to wander, to float blissfully, to be carried here, then there, from one pleasant image to another, on the breezes that blow in that familiar region of consciousness between waking and sleeping.
>
> Suddenly a scream breaks through your state of bliss.
>
> "Help!!!"

Focus your learning

Cognitive

What makes your experiences ethical or moral?

Practical

How can the ethical theories of Aristotle, Kant and Levinas help you to understand the ethical/moral dimensions of the decisions that you are called upon to make every day of your life?

Affective

What do you consider to be "the good life"?

Key terms in this chapter

autonomy
beautiful
deontological ethics
desire
duty
ethics
good
morality
obligation
passion
response
responsibility
Revelation
teleological ethics

Key thinkers

Aristotle
Immanuel Kant
Emmanuel Levinas

Your entire being suddenly shifts into gear! You are transformed! In a single movement your body and mind rise together into a state of action, of focused attention, of total concentration. It is as different from your previous state as a hurricane from a calm summer's day. Before, you were at rest. Now you are in motion! You are energized! You are dynamized by a concern, a desire, a commitment to action. Who screamed? Are they drowning? Where are they? How to help them? Find out! Get to them! Save them! Keep them alive! [1]

How would you name this experience? The scream broke through your reverie, forcing you to awareness of your responsibility for another person. Objectively, the scream was a burst of sound. For you it was a sound that touched you more deeply than at the level of your intellect. It won't do to analyze the scream. The scream is an appeal, a call for help. It urges you not to think, but to act. It is a deeply felt, almost automatic, claim made upon you to do something. Without thinking about it, you feel an inner tension to respond. It is not a decision you make. It is an almost automatic response. This is what it means to experience an ethical

Ethics or morality? Which is it?

Do ethics and morality mean the same thing? Not quite. *Ethics* comes from the Greek *ta ethika* (having to do with good character). *Morality* comes from the Latin *moralitas* (having to do with the customs, habits and manners shaping human life). Ethics is interested more in the *good* that humans tend towards, such as happiness and freedom. Morality is interested more in the *ways* that humans can attain this good, such as the rules, laws or commandments which we experience as a duty or obligation to follow. The text will constantly go back and forth between ethics and morality. Some chapters will focus more on ethics; others will focus more on morality.

Ethics guides morality; it gives vision to our action. A concrete comparison might make this distinction clearer: Ethics is like understanding musical theory, knowing how to read music, and understanding technique. Morality is like actually playing music, hitting the right notes, correctly interpreting the musical phrase, performing.

Another example: Ethics is like understanding the laws of physics that govern driving a car; for instance, knowing that it takes friction between the tires and the road to have good traction, and that in a snowstorm this friction is reduced. Morality is like good driving: slowing down in a snowstorm and allowing greater distance to stop the car, knowing and applying the rules of the road, driving defensively. You can play music without understanding musical theory, and you can operate a car without understanding the laws of physics. However, you would have difficulty in making good decisions in your musical performance or driving should challenges or dramatic changes arise that require your response. That's why we need a basis for our decisions and actions. Ethics gives us this understanding of the fundamental principles underlying our activity.

Does ethics take priority over morality? Ethics has a certain priority because the search for the good is so important in our lives. But to better understand our search for the good, we must look first at how, over the centuries, people have expressed the good in laws, norms for action, rules, regulations or commandments. Laws and commandments serve to protect some good – for example, "Thou shalt not kill." This commandment promotes and protects the good of life. Yet, there is an exception to this commandment, called self-defense. Ethics searches for the higher good on which the act of self-defense is based. Ethics also explains how there can be a higher good in particular circumstances and under certain conditions. In other words, norms and duties are not the final word. The good is. Rules or norms that do not contribute to the good need to be reformulated.

[1] See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, tr. by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 170.

response. Think about your response. It is a uniquely human experience.

The beggar – The experience of the other

A second common ethical experience comes to us from the French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1905–1995). For Levinas, it all starts with the human face, especially the face of someone in need. Something happens to us when we are face to face with another person, whom he refers to as an "Other." All face-to-face encounters are ethical because they remind us of our responsibility for the Other. Later in this chapter you will learn more about Levinas's ethical theory, but first consider this simple example.

Imagine that you are walking downtown in a typical Canadian city. You meet someone who asks you for some spare change. You may have noticed the person as you came up the street. You may already have begun the debate within yourself as to what you will do. When confronted with this person, you probably go through a number of emotions. "Oh, the poor guy!" "Get a job." "I have better things to spend my money on." "She will probably spend it on alcohol or drugs." "The city should take care of these people." "Oh no!" "Maybe I should cross to the other side." "Why me?" "Please, not today." Even if you refuse to give some spare change, you are not finished with the request. As you walk down the street, the other person, the needy one, is still with you. He or she is inside you while you are busy defending your decision not to give – or, your decision to give. The other person has evoked a response from you.

In Levinas's language, the Other's face has taken you hostage and made you responsible. This is an ethical experience. The Other's face is not something you can just look at neutrally. It has another sort of impact: the face is ethical.

"I have to…" – The experience of obligation

For the third ethical experience, let us go back to the parent who tells you, "Be home by midnight! And please, drive carefully!" When your parents ask you to be cautious, it affects you in a way that is connected with the experience of duty, or obligation. Your ethical sense is turned on when someone orders you to do something.

Take the example of your parents giving you a curfew and telling you to drive carefully. As the time gets closer to midnight, you start thinking about taking your leave. As time passes, you grow increasingly aware of the time and of your need to get going. If you choose to ignore these warning signals and stay anyway, your unrest doesn't go away. You will continue debating with yourself what you will tell your parents. On reaching home after midnight, you may try to sneak to your bedroom without making any noise for fear your parents will hear you and confront you.

This experience of feeling obliged to obey a rule or a law has everything to do with your ethical side. Something in you obliges you to follow the law, or to do what is considered the right thing to do. Someone, whom you consider to have authority over you, can convince you to follow his or her reason or wishes. You cannot remain neutral toward such a person: the order or wish invades your consciousness and demands a response. Your response has everything to do with ethics. Here again you show yourself to be an ethical being. The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) worked out an ethical theory for this experience of duty, or obligation. We will have more to say about Kant's ideas later in the chapter.

This is intolerable! This isn't fair! – The experience of contrast

A fourth ethical experience occurs when you feel outraged by something blatantly unjust or unfair happening to yourself or to others. At the end of the Second World War, the Allied troops brought to light the first images of the heaps of corpses and the emaciated remnants of the Jewish people in the death camps. In 1995, United Nations Peacekeepers reported their helplessness as 7,000 men and boys were butchered in Srebrenice by the Serbian army. Other peacekeepers have wept as they gave witness about the genocide in Rwanda. In each case, the world reacted with anger and revulsion. Before massive evil the human heart recoils and is filled with incomprehension. "Never again," Pope Paul VI pleaded at the United Nations in 1971, "War, never again!"

When you feel overwhelmed by the unjust suffering of others, by the plight of workers who are let go while the bosses award themselves big bonuses, by battered women and abused children, the indignation you feel is an experience of contrast with what ought to be. "This is not right!" "This must be stopped." "This is intolerable!" "This isn't fair!" You have a healthy built-in capacity for seeing what the world ought to look like and how situations ought to be. When confronted with senseless violence and disregard of others, you quite naturally recoil from this destruction. This is again an ethical experience. One could call this an experience of contrast. You are shocked because the terrible and terrifying event contrasts so strongly with what you expect from your fellow humans. The intolerable ought not to be!

Guiding questions

1. How would you describe your personal experience from the perspective of each of the scenarios?
2. What reasons or motives might you have that would cause you to respond in one way or another?
3. What makes you respond in these situations? Why?
4. Under what circumstances might you respond differently?
5. What makes these responses ethical?

Defining ethics

Consider these four types of ethical experiences: personal response (the scream), responsibility for the Other (the beggar), duty (the curfew), and contrast (the intolerable). It is one thing to experience these things, but it is quite another to understand what these experiences mean. Early philosophers noted such experiences and reflected on them. From these philosophers we have inherited different theories that seek to explain ethical experiences and to translate them into a practical wisdom of living. In other words, the ethical experiences do not lead directly to an ethical theory. What one person considers a duty, or intolerable, cannot be translated into an ethical position that applies to everyone at all times. Moral philosophers, or ethicists, sort out what, according to their understanding, is an ethical approach to such experiences. They delve into the complexity of human actions and propose what is the human thing to do.

From these philosophers we have received several definitions of ethics. At a general level, ethics is about the "goodness" of human life.

Ethics seeks answers to questions like: "How and when does human life reflect what is good?" and "How do we aim at the good life?" In asking these questions, we quickly recognize that saying "the good life is the aim of ethics" raises as many questions as it answers. Who determines what is "good"? What is "the good life"? What is good and right in human living?

In answering these questions, ethicists begin to diverge into different camps. Some would have us reflect on the aim of human life (Aristotle). Others look at obligation derived from respect for the law (Kant). Still others focus on the meanings of the words we use to speak of good and evil, right and wrong. Others in the fields of comparative ethics and moral anthropology study the way particular peoples, societies and cultures answer the question "What is the good?" Others again explore our responsibility to the Other (Levinas), or to obedience to the will of God. Each of these viewpoints gives us a different perspective on the search for the good. In order to grasp just how different ethical theories can be, consider the following three ethical thinkers – Aristotle, Kant and Levinas.

Aristotle (384–322 BC): Teleological ethics

Aristotle was born in Stagira, a northern colony of Greece bordering Macedonia. His father, the court physician, was a friend of King Amyntas II of Macedonia. Aristotle became friends with the King's son, Philip, a friendship that was to influence the course of civilization in later years. In all likelihood, Aristotle's father introduced him to anatomy and the medical practices and ideas of the time. From his childhood, he would have dissected and studied various organisms. Undoubtedly this influenced his ideas about how we come to know and understand the world and our place within it. His privileged childhood could not prevent the death of his parents when he was seventeen years old. He went to Athens at that time to continue his education in Plato's Academy. The philosopher Plato was recognized at the time as Greece's leading thinker.

Plato recognized Aristotle's great intellectual abilities, and took him under his wing. However, the two of them approached philosophy very differently. While Plato focused on abstraction and the world of ideas, Aristotle explored the natural world and human experience. While Plato thrived on contemplation, Aristotle thrived on hands-on experience, observation and classification. Even though they saw the world differently, Aristotle had the greatest respect for his teacher and stayed with him for twenty years. Plato died in 347 BC. Because of an upsurge in anti-Macedonian feeling, Aristotle left Athens for the Eastern Aegean. There he became political advisor to Hermeias, who was eager to foster learning in his extensive power base in Asia Minor. Aristotle married Pythias, who was Hermeias's niece and adopted daughter. Unhappily, Hermeias offended the Persian king of the time and, as a result, was executed. Aristotle and Pythias fled for their lives.

By this time (343 BC), Aristotle's childhood friend, Philip, was King Philip of Macedonia. The king invited Aristotle to tutor his thirteen year-old son, Alexander. By all accounts, Alexander was rambunctious. However, Aristotle managed to teach him well and instilled in Alexander a respect for knowledge. We know this

pupil as Alexander the Great, whose armies conquered and controlled much of Asia. Under Alexander's sponsorship, Aristotle established his own school, the Lyceum, in Athens. These were his most fruitful years. He wrote extensively on logic, metaphysics, theology, history, politics, ethics, psychology, anatomy, biology, zoology, astronomy, as well as the ancient equivalents of physics and chemistry.

In 323 BC, Alexander the Great died, and there was again a backlash against all things associated with Macedonian rule. Aristotle, by his association with King Philip, and then with Alexander, found himself in a difficult position. Charges were brought against him for not respecting the gods of the state. (The same charge had been brought against the philosopher Socrates in 399 BC. Socrates was put to death, being forced to drink poison.) Aristotle fled for his life once again, but died within a year.

Ancient historian Diogenes Läertius referred to 360 works by Aristotle. Tragically, much of his work was lost in the destruction of the great library of the Egyptian city of Alexandria. Only forty of his works survive today. The Lyceum in Athens continued – its power somewhat diminished – for another 500 years to challenge and influence much of subsequent Western thought.

teleological: having to do with the design or purpose of something. For example, a house is built to live in, a clock made to keep time. But what of the "end" to which we as human beings aspire? Try thinking of this "end" not as an end point, but as completion, as fullness.

Aristotle's teleological ethics

So how did Aristotle's ideas become a part of Catholic ethical reflection? In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225–1274) – through Arab scholars – rediscovered Aristotle. Aquinas's teaching assured Aristotle an enduring place in the development of Catholic ethical theory.

The pursuit of happiness

At the core of Aristotle's ethics is political intent. Aristotle's first concern is not the individual. His first concern is the *polis*, the Greek city-state. The isolated person, outside the *polis*, must be "either a beast or a god." Aristotle's ethics state that human life is shaped to its full extent in the context of a community. It is there that the citizen will find happiness.

Aristotle does not equate happiness with pleasure. Pleasure, for Aristotle, was suitable for cattle. Pleasure is only momentary. Happiness, however, is an enduring state of someone who does well the tasks that are typical of a human being. Happiness is the condition of the good person who succeeds in living well and acting well. In the words of Aristotle

> As [all] knowledge and moral purpose aspires to some good, what is in our view the good at which the political science aims, and what is the highest of all practical goods? As to its name there is, I may say, a general agreement. The masses and the cultured classes agree in calling it happiness, and conceive that "to live well" or "to do well" is the same thing as "to be happy." But as to the nature of happiness they do not agree, nor do the masses give the same account of it as the philosophers. [2]

In other words, for Aristotle, ethics aims to discover what is good for us as human beings, what permits us to reach our potential, what is our internal compass, or what we are intended to be. For Aristotle, someone is happy "if and only if, over some considerable period of time, [that person] frequently performs with some success the most perfect of typically human tasks." [3] For example, according to Aristotle, happiness might mean learning to be a responsible and active citizen of your community, or developing a lifestyle that fosters good health. That is why we call his ethics teleological ethics. It is because teleological ethics derives from discovering the finality (*telos)* of what we are intended to be.

Teleology

Here is how Aristotle expresses teleology:

> Every art and every scientific inquiry, and similarly every action and purpose, may be said to aim at some good. Hence the good has been well defined as that at which all things aim.
>
> As there are various actions, arts, and sciences, it follows the ends are also various. Thus health is the end of medicine, a vessel of shipbuilding, victory [is the goal] of strategy, and wealth [is the aim] of domestic economy.

> If it is true that in the sphere of action there is an end which we wish for its own sake, and for the sake of which we wish everything else…it is clear that this will be the good or the supreme good. Does it not follow that the knowledge of this supreme good is of great importance for the conduct of life, and that, *if we know it*, we shall be like archers who have a mark at which to aim, we shall have a better chance of attaining what we want? [4]

Above all else, according to Aristotle, we are intended to be rational. Our greatest capacity as humans is our intelligence. Following our internal compass means developing this capacity, not only in matters of science, but also in practical life – in developing our individual character. Humans are rational animals, and we must base our actions, as much as possible, on reasoning. **To act ethically, therefore, is to engage our capacity to reason as we develop good character.** That is the highest form of happiness. The good person is one whose actions as a rule are solidly based on excellent reasoning and who spends a great amount of time thinking.

Human excellence

When people seek to become who they are intended to be, they develop habits that represent the best of what it means to be human. Aristotle calls these excellences virtues. To act virtuously, that is, excellently, is to do things well, to act successfully as a human being. It means allowing reason to guide one's actions. Aristotle held that a good person would use reason to control desire. We choose deliberately to fulfill that which is the most appropriate for us as humans. We become virtuous by choosing continually to do virtuous things, so that these actions become ingrained in us like a habit.

> Moral virtue comes to us as a result of habit…. The virtues we first get by exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g., [people] become builders by building…. So too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts…. If this were not so, there would have been no need of a teacher, but all... would be born good or bad at their craft…. Thus in one word, states of character arise out of like activities. That is why the activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind; it is because the states of character correspond to the difference between these. It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference. [5]

The mean

Aristotle was very aware of the need to maintain balance in our actions. We ought to avoid excess, but not necessarily to avoid something completely. If to drink wine were a good, then it would be good to drink neither too much, nor too little. This is Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. Be moderate in all things. To be courageous is to avoid some but not all dangers; to be polite is to be courteous in some but not in all situations. To be generous is to stay somewhere

Assume a virtue, if you have it not....
For use almost can change the stamp of nature.

***Hamlet*, Shakespeare**

Teleological thinking: seeking to understand the ultimate goal, purpose or end of something. (*Teleology* derives from the Greek root *telos*, meaning goal, purpose or end, and *logos*, meaning study.) For example, from a teleological perspective, adolescence is a stage of development on the way to mature adulthood.

Aristotelian self-realization, like happiness, is a by-product of living a well-balanced life.

Douglas J. Soccio

between extravagance and stinginess. Try to stay in the middle, but in a middle that suits you as an individual. For you, for example, the mean for drinking may mean drinking in moderation, or not at all.

> First of all, it must be observed that the nature of moral qualities is such that they are destroyed by defect and by excess. We see the same thing happen in the case of strength and of health…excess as well as deficiency of physical exercise destroys our strength, and similarly, too much and too little food and drink destroys our health; the proportionate amount, however, produces, increases, and strengthens it. The same applies to self-control, courage, and the other virtues: the [one] who shuns and fears everything becomes a coward, whereas [an individual] who knows no fear at all and goes to meet every danger becomes reckless. Similarly, [one] who revels in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while [the person] who avoids every pleasure like a boor becomes what might be called insensitive. Thus we see that self-control and courage are destroyed by excess and deficiency and are preserved by the mean. [6]

Guiding questions

1. Identify three key points from the ethical theory of Aristotle.
2. How would Aristotle describe "the good"?
3. In light of Aristotle's understanding of the good person, describe someone significant in your life that meets his criteria.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804): Deontological ethics

"Two things fill the mind
with ever new and increasing admiration
and awe…
the starry heavens above
and the moral law within." [7]

Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant was born and raised in Königsberg, a small city in east Prussia now part of northeast Germany. The fourth of eleven children, Immanuel experienced the rigours of poverty, as well as a strict upbringing within a religious household. His parents were devout members of a Protestant sect know as Pietism. Pietists believed in personal devotion, Bible reading, and the universal priesthood of all the faithful. They lived severe, puritanical lives.

Immanuel spent his whole life near his home. Apparently he never ventured more than 100 kilometres from his birthplace. His life, even from the age of eight, was characterized by a routine of study and work. A popular story about his life tells how townspeople could set their clocks by the walks that he took at precisely 3:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Kant studied at the local university, and upon completing his studies, made a meager living

working as a private tutor. Later, he worked as a private teacher at the university, paid directly by the students. Since he was a very popular teacher, he was able to make ends meet. However, it seems that as a young man he could not afford to get married. When he was forty-six years old, he was finally hired by the university as a professor of logic and metaphysics.

Kant wrote many books – some of them are among the most difficult to comprehend. His *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787), by his admission, was the result of at least twelve years of reflection, and four or five months of hurried writing. (You will find some of the longest sentences ever written in that book!) Despite the difficulty of his writing, his influence on philosophy and Western thought is incalculable.

Theoretical reason

One of his primary concerns was clarifying how it is that humans come to know things. What role does experience play in our coming to know something? Can we know things that are beyond our immediate experience? What does this mean for scientific inquiry? Can we know and predict cause and effect? These types of questions pertain to the area called *theoretical reason*. This is the area of reasoning by which we come to know how the laws of nature, the laws of cause and effect, govern human behaviour. It is an area of life where freedom of choice is not an issue.

Practical reason

To understand how people make choices, however, we must look elsewhere. Kant proposed a category he called *practical reason*. Practical reason moves beyond scientific and empirical knowledge to the moral dimension guiding human behaviour. Within the realm of knowledge, humans act not only on impulse as affected by the laws of nature, but also out of conscious choice based on principles.

Using the first category of *theoretical reason*, we can know only what people *actually do*. Using the second category of *practical reason*, we can come to understand what we *ought to do*. Let's look at an example of theoretical reason: We know the effect of alcohol consumption upon the body. Or to look at it from the perspective of practical reason, we know that we ought not to drink and drive. It is this concept of *moral duty* that Kant contributed to our understanding of ethics.

Kant's ethics

Like Aristotle, Kant also held that the good is the aim of a moral life. But he approached the whole question of how one attains the good in quite a different way. Kant was primarily concerned about the certainty of the principles of ethical reasoning. He recognized that in the domain of ethics we cannot arrive at the same type of certainty as we can in physics and mathematics. Ethics presents us not with rational, cognitive certainty, but with practical certainty. In this practical area of our lives, he held that there are three areas of interest: God, freedom and immortality. We may not be able to prove any of these *empirically*. Nonetheless, we need these practical principles – God, freedom and immortality – to be able to pursue and attain the supreme good.

empiricism: a theory that says that knowledge comes from experience, or from evidence that can be perceived by the senses.

1. *God*: Humans cannot out of their own power achieve the supreme good. There are too many circumstances beyond our control. For this reason, Kant proposes the existence of God to allow us to achieve the supreme good.
2. *Freedom*: If the supreme good is to be, in part, our achievement, then what we *ought* to do, we *can* do. To have the duty to do something, we must be *able* to do it. Therefore, Kant argues, humans are by nature free.
3. *Immortality*: Achieving the supreme good is an immense task. It is impossible to obtain it completely in this life. That is why there is immortality, a life beyond, in which we can achieve the supreme good.

The good will

To Aristotle, a "good person" seeks his or her happiness in the city-state of ancient Greece. Kant's ethics is more individual. His ethics is to be discovered in private life, in the inner convictions and *autonomy* of the individual. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785),

Kant proposes how individuals attain the good. He begins by saying, "It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a *good will.*" [8] For Kant, in all circumstances, what is to be prized above all else is a good will. It is our most precious possession, a good in itself.

What is this "good will?" For Kant it is the will to do our duty for no other reason than that it is our duty. That is why Kant's ethical theory is known as *deontological* – from the Greek word *deon*, meaning "duty." This perspective is very different from Aristotle's rational desire for the good. For Kant, what is central is the will. He acknowledges that it is not easy for humans to attain their purpose in life. Impulses and desires can easily draw us away from our duty. After all, our will is finite. We don't always manage to act according to our duty.

subjective: relating to a person's own perception and understanding of a reality; arising from the individual's own mind, feelings, perceptions.

objective: relating to a sensible experience that is independent of any one individual's thought, and that can be perceived by others.

For Kant, therefore, a human action is morally good when it is done for the sake of duty. An act of kindness done to a friend may be praiseworthy, but it is not a moral act. It becomes moral when you are kind to someone when you don't feel like being kind, when you are busy or when you are more inclined to do other things. For example, you might not want to go to your great aunt's funeral, but it is your duty. You choose to go to honour the family.

Real moral worth is motivated by duty, not by inclination, however valuable this inclination may be. In other words, moral worth is measured not by the results of one's actions, but by the motive behind them. Kant's language is full of "shoulds." It is a language not of desires, but of "ought." For Kant, you are your own legislator. It is your autonomy, your decision, to act in accordance with your good will. You are not constrained by another.

Kant's use of moral maxims

The use of reason is central to the moral life. For Kant, duty is determined by principles (maxims) according to which we act. Say you decide to skip school and go to the movies. In this case, you would be acting on the principle, "I will avoid unpleasant things whenever something more pleasant offers itself, and the consequences of my action will not lead to greater unpleasantness." But this subjective principle is too obviously based on personal desires. To be ethical, an action must have a more objective principle. To be a principle, it must apply to everyone. An ethical maxim is one on which *every rational person* would *necessarily* act if reason were fully in charge of his or her actions. Principles tell us how we *ought* to act. But reason determines how this duty is universally applicable.

In his most famous maxim Kant proposes: "I ought never to act except in such a way *that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law.*"[9] To put it another way, I should act in a way that I would want everyone else in the world to act. In other words, would we really want a world in which people felt free to skip out on school, their job, or their family whenever they felt like it in order to have some fun? Or, does it make sense that everyone has certain obligations to fulfill that come before personal desires?

The person as an end, not a means

A second moral imperative for Kant reads: "*Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, never simply as a means but always at the same time as an end.*" [10] Kant does *not* say that we should never treat others as a means. If that were the case, how could we ever have an economy and people working for another's benefit? A worker is a *means* of production, or a *means* of providing a

service. Kant intended, rather, that people never be treated *only* as a means, that is, without regard to their dignity or their working conditions. It would be unethical to take advantage of workers who have little power relative to their employer, such as young people, immigrants, people with little education, or poor people. Workers must be respected. To use another example, it would be wrong for a coach to take on twelve athletes in order to get higher funding for the team, while secretly intending to play only six of them on a regular basis. In this case, the six extra players are being used simply as a means to get more money; they are not being treated as athletes in their own right.

Kant was also somewhat of a utopian dreamer. He came up with the concept of a "kingdom of ends." In this kingdom, all participants would treat each other according to his second maxim (treat another as an end, not just as a means). He encouraged all people to act as if they were members of this kingdom, always acting out of respect for the other. In this kingdom all would act out of their rational will. No one would act on any principle that could not be made universal, for personal benefit, because of how one happened to feel about something, or because of any compulsion that came from personal philosophical or religious views. Above all, Kant valued the autonomy of the good will. He challenged people not to act like children under the control of another. Become a law unto yourself. He coined the slogan of the eighteenth century: Dare to know!

Duty is the necessity of acting from respect for the [moral] law.

Kant

Guiding questions

1. Identify three key points from the ethical theory of Kant.
2. How would Kant describe "the good"?
3. In light of Kant's understanding of the good person, describe someone significant in your life that meets his criteria.

Emmanuel Levinas (1905–1995): An ethics of the face

Emmanuel Levinas

More than most major contemporary philosophers, Emmanuel Levinas was marked by the tragedies of the twentieth century, particularly the Holocaust, or the *Shoah*. He was born in 1905 in Kaunas, Lithuania, to pious Jewish parents. At the age of seventeen he moved to France to begin his studies in philosophy at the University of Strassbourg. In 1928 he continued his studies in Freibourg, Germany. When he came to write his doctoral thesis, Levinas had begun to experience a profound contrast between Western philosophy and his own much more deeply rooted Jewish faith.

The sameness of things

Levinas perceived the Western philosophical tradition attempting to overcome all difference and diversity by grouping everything under an all-encompassing unity, which it called "Being." Everything ultimately carried a stamp of sameness. Westerners, he said, think out of a unified

totality. It thinks away difference. Difference is reduced to being accidental ("accidental" in Aristotle's philosophy meant "not essential" because it changes in every individual).

The singularity of things

The Hebrew tradition, on the other hand, he said, gloried in the singular. This singularity of things gives each thing its identity. He could find nothing that would hold all of these singularities together in some kind of unity. He contrasted the Western notion of "totality" with the Hebrew notion of "infinity."

When World War II broke out in 1939, he was mobilized into the French army. During the disastrous first month of the war in France, he was captured by the Germans. Although five years as a prisoner of war were a hardship, he escaped the dreadful fate of the rest of his family who had remained in Lithuania. His whole family died in the Holocaust. His wife and young daughter escaped deportation to the death camps, being hidden in a monastery in France until the end of the war, unable to communicate with him.

The experience of the war and the Nazi horror had heightened Levinas's awareness of his Jewish roots. At the age of forty, he searched out an extraordinary Jewish teacher, Mordachi Chouchani. Chouchani was a mysterious, brilliant man, who looked like a tramp and who always seemed to be on the move. He instructed Levinas in the ways of the Jewish Talmud. Levinas was a good student, and from 1957 onward he himself began to give regular lectures on the Talmud for young Jewish intellectuals in France.

Only at the age of fifty-five did Levinas complete his doctoral thesis, *Totality and Infinity.*[11] On the basis of this work he was offered a chair in philosophy at the University of Poitiers. In 1973, at the age of sixty-eight, he was named professor of philosophy at the most prestigious school in Paris, the Sorbonne. Only then did he obtain recognition by the philosophical world. He became a very popular writer. Only a few years after obtaining the chair in philosophy at the Sorbonne, he retired.

Levinas never forgot his Jewish roots. When once he was invited to give a lecture at the University of Louvain, they inadvertently put the lecture on the Sabbath. Although the lecture hall was filled, Levinas did not show because observing the Sabbath was of higher value. He offered no apology. He continued to write and lecture until illness prevented him. He died shortly after the feast of Chanukah in 1995.

Pope John Paul II holds great respect for Levinas. In a number of his writings, most evidently in *The New Millennium*, Pope John Paul II uses ideas similar to Levinas. In this letter, the Holy Father speaks of the face of Jesus as "A Face to Contemplate." On several occasions, Pope John Paul II invited Levinas to his summer home to hear from him his understanding of the major issues of our time.

The Good is infinite

Levinas's philosophy as a whole is ethical. Like Aristotle's and Kant's ethics, Levinas is in search of the good. For Levinas the good – actually, the "Good" – is the central question of all philosophy. Whereas most Western philosophies are in search of Being, Levinas went in search of the Good, which he said goes beyond Being. Being seeks to name what things have in common when you take away all the differences. For Levinas this concept of Being is dangerous because it takes away from reality what is its most fascinating quality: that each person or thing is incredibly unique. Levinas wants to maintain the uniqueness of each thought and act. The Good is interested, not in what is in common among things, but in what is absolutely unique about each person or thing.

"Your face, O LORD, I seek" (Psalm 27.8)

Pope John Paul II in The New Millennium *reflects on Psalm 27.8: "Your face, O LORD, I seek." In the face of Christ, he says, "God has truly blessed us … and has made 'his face to shine upon us'" (Psalm 67.1). "Being God and human at the same time, he reveals to us also the true face of humans, 'fully revealing humans to themselves.'"* [12]

Levinas calls these unique things and persons "traces" of the Good, or God. No tangible object is ever identical to God, or the Good. Everything we encounter is finite. The trace of God in things and persons is not a faint presence of God. We do not encounter God anywhere, but only a trace of God. A trace says that God was there but is no longer there. God has gone ahead. The Infinite One is always one step ahead of us.

Take a look at the cover photo of this book. God is like the sun. We see traces of the sun in the picture; the light on the water, the bright light at the edge of the picture. But we see only a glimpse of the grandeur that is there. The sun is beyond the point of vision.

The face as witness of the Good

If the Good is Infinite and is always one step ahead of us, where do we encounter the traces that God has been there? Here Levinas goes to the experience of the human face that turns to me and looks at me. The face is the most naked part of the human body. In one of his articles Levinas lashes out against make-up. He sees it as an attempt to hide. But despite all efforts (he may not have thought of coloured contact lenses) the eyes can never be made up. The eyes penetrate every mask. In another's eyes we make immediate, direct contact.

Think of a time you had an absolute experience of another: a face-to-face experience that touched you deeply. Levinas says that such an experience calls forth a "thrill of astonishment." Such an experience is the most original moment of meaning. In the eyes of the other you meet a stranger, one whom you cannot reduce to being you. She or he is "Other." And in this person's look, the Other calls you not to reduce his or her face to being the same as any other face. This person's face is a "No": a refusal to let you reduce the face or to deny the face in its uniqueness. Levinas goes so far as to translate this "No!" as "You shall not murder." You are not to take the otherness away. The face is an authority, "highness, holiness, divinity." In the Other, you see one who is not your equal, but your superior.

The face as ethical

But how is this ethical? The face that Levinas is referring to is not the face of an authority figure. The superiority of the face comes from elsewhere: the Other is a stranger, one who is totally defenceless, uprooted. Levinas refers to the Book of Deuteronomy (10.18), where the Israelites are told to love the stranger as themselves because the LORD watches over the stranger. The stranger is one whose very existence is threatened, one with no economic stability or security, one who is socially marginalized and without rights.

It is at this point, according to Levinas, that the face becomes ethical. Recognizing the

The idea of infinity ... is an overflowing of ... new powers to the soul... – powers of welcome, of gift, of full hands, of hospitality.

Levina

Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

(Matthew 25.34-36)

The sentence in which God comes to be involved in words is not "I believe in God." … It is the "here I am" said to the neighbor to whom I am given over, and in which I announce peace, that is, my responsibility for the other.

Levinas

The relation with the other will always be offering and gift, never an approach with "empty hands."

Levinas

Other's depth of misery or humility is what makes the command or appeal of the face ethical. The face of the stranger (recall the face of the beggar in the story on page 9) demands that you recognize it and provide it hospitality. The defenceless poverty in this face cannot force you to do anything. That is why she can only ask that you assist her in her misery. The face makes the absolute demand come across as a petition, as "please." As Levinas says, "The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity – its hunger – without being able to be deaf to that appeal. Thus in expression the being that imposes itself does not limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness."[13] The face hardly dares to solicit your hospitality. The face is the beggar with bent head and mumbling voice.[14] This is how the face makes you responsible, by making you aware that you are not as innocent as you thought you were. The face reveals you as someone concerned mostly about yourself. This is the face that makes you responsible.

The face suggests that there is another order of existence: the order of an incredible good calling us to be responsible for the beggar with bent head and mumbling voice. Here the self-centred self is called into question. Here the Other rules. It is a humble rule, revealing itself as if it were afraid to speak. And that is how the divine speaks to us – as a humble God who refuses to use power, so humble that those who seek the face of God are left in despair. God is the goodness who never seduces. God, for Levinas, is the humble and vulnerable God who, in approaching us, immediately retreats like the burning bush that did not burn (Exodus 3.2). The face is a trace of God who has already passed by.

Made responsible by the face

For Levinas the face makes us responsible. This responsibility is our human vocation, our calling. Here the search for the Good ends. His ethics does not bend us in God's direction, but it twists us in the direction of our neighbour. God's infinite goodness touches us without our knowledge. God's touch will always be indirect. God touches us through the face of the Other who begs spare change of us. God refuses to appear, leaving only a trace in the face of the Other, retreating to make room for the Other. Goodness, the Infinite One, translates into responsibility for the Other. How far should this responsibility, this generosity go? Goodness sets no limit.

Guiding questions

1. Identify three key points from the ethical theory of Levinas.
2. How would Levinas describe "the good"?
3. In light of Levinas's understanding of the good person, describe someone significant in your life that meets his criteria.

The human is ethical

These three philosophers, Aristotle, Kant and Levinas, will accompany us for the journey into ethics. They will be our main companions, acting as a compass pointing our way toward understanding what it means to be ethical. On the way we will pick up other thinkers as well, but these three will always be in the background. They convince us that the ethical is indispensable for human life. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says: "The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just."[15]

"Emmanuel" means 'God with us'

In the introduction St. Augustine is quoted as asking, "What do I love when I love You, my God?" When we search for the good in our lives, we will encounter many questions and uncertainties. However, there is one thing of which we can be certain: God is always present to us, as revealed beautifully in Psalm 139. The God whom we seek is always in search of us. See also Isaiah 7.10-17 and Matthew 1.22-23.

Psalm 139

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
    you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
    and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
    O LORD, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
    and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
    it is so high that I cannot attain it.
Where can I go from your spirit?
    Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
    if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
    and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
    and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
    and the light around me become night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
    the night is as bright as the day,
    for darkness is as light to you.
For it was you who formed my inward parts;
    you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
    Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
    when I was being made in secret,
    intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
    In your book were written all the days that were
    formed for me,
    when none of them as yet existed.
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
    How vast is the sum of them!
I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
    I come to the end—I am still with you.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
    test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me,
    and lead me in the way everlasting.

Chapter review

Summary

From Aristotle, Kant and Levinas we can draw the following conclusions with regard to the human as ethical:

- The ethical is about our tendency to search for the good.
- The ethical is a part of what it means to be human; in other words, human beings tend towards the good.
- The ethical is the education of our freedom; it seeks the fulfillment or wholeness of human life by way of our actions.
- The ethical presumes that we can be held responsible for what we do.
- Ethical theories draw their explanations from an organizing principle:
  - Happiness is the aim of the good life (Aristotle)
  - Moral duty and obligation are expressions of the good will (Kant)
  - The ethical impact of the face of the Other is a trace of the Good, or God (Levinas)
- The role of reason – although it differs in each of the theories – is not a theoretical reason; it is a practical reason that accompanies and holds in check our inclinations or makes practical judgments in the face of our duties or responsibilities.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain the distinction between ethics and morality.
2. Identify three key points from the ethical theories of Aristotle, Kant and Levinas.

Thinking and inquiry

3. Compare and contrast the notion of "the good" as used by Aristotle, Kant and Levinas.
4. Explain how every human choice has an ethical/moral dimension.

Communication

5. Create a chart to show the similarities and differences of the ethical theories of Aristotle, Kant and Levinas.
6. Write a short story that captures the essence of any one of the ethical theorists.

Application

7. Choose a story from your daily newspaper and analyze the ethical dimensions of this story from the viewpoints of Aristotle, Kant and Levinas.
8. Imagine a talk show in which Aristotle, Kant and Levinas get to ask questions of a celebrity, politician, business person, etc., with whom you are familiar. Write a script of the conversation that might take place around a significant issue in which this celebrity is involved.

Glossary

autonomy: Free self-direction; responsibility.

ethics: A discipline that deals with the nature of the good, the nature of the human person, and criteria that we use for making right judgments.

morality: A system of right conduct based on fundamental beliefs and obligation to follow certain codes, norms, customs and habits of behaviour.

obligation: What one is bound by duty or contract to do.

responsibility: Being morally accountable for one's actions. Responsibility presumes knowledge, freedom, and the ability to choose and to act.

Revelation: The ways that God makes Himself known to humankind. God is fully revealed in Jesus Christ. The sacred Scriptures, proclaimed within the Church, are the revealed Word of God. God also reveals Self through people and indeed through all of creation.

You are what you do

CHAPTER 2

To speak of the human person as a subject is to say that the person is in charge of his or her own life. That is, the person is a moral agent with a certain degree of autonomy and self-direction empowered to act according to his or her conscience, in freedom, and with knowledge.

Richard M. Gula

Freedom: The amazing capacity to act

In Chapter 1 we began to explore the meaning of ethics. We looked first at the role played by our desire for the good (Aristotle's teleological view). Then we examined an ethics of obligation and duty (Kant's deontological view). From there we turned to the face of another person, how it makes us ethical by calling forth in us the Good (Levinas's relational theory of ethics). In this chapter, we will look at what makes us capable of responding in an ethical manner.

Humans have the capacity to act. This seems obvious. Of course we can act. But what is this *capacity* to act? Answering this question is the challenge that we pick up in this chapter. We possess a power to do things that sets us apart from animals. The human response is not automatic or predictable. We can be spontaneous and creative. We can intervene in and give a new direction to a course of events. Despite a genetic code that seems to predispose us to act in particular ways, we have the capacity to make choices. This freedom to choose exceeds anything that may be found in the response of animals. This human capacity to be an *agent* is the topic of this chapter and the next. Human agency is at the heart of ethics.

agent: a person who acts freely and knowingly, who chooses to do or not do something; a person who is accountable for his or her actions or omissions.

Action theory

Remember the first time you tried to drive a car. At first, the car did not respond as you expected, especially if you were learning to drive a manual transmission. The car likely jolted and stalled the first day out. But finally you discovered the "sweet spot" in the clutch, and you felt that you were ready for the races. Driving does not come automatically. It takes effort and awareness that "I can do it." The philosophy that has given us an insight into this human capacity to do something is *analytic philosophy*. It examines the language we use to communicate our action, and explores what constitutes a meaningful action.

Human actions

Actions are the very fibre of what makes us human. Actions give us our identity; that is, our identity is constructed by what we think, say and do as well as by what we undergo. Human actions are the most important building blocks of who we are and who we become. That is why it is a mistake to try to understand actions

Focus your learning

Cognitive
What is the nature of human action?

Practical
How does what you do shape who you become?

Affective
How capable are you of making a difference?

Key terms in this chapter

agent
conceptual framework of action
determinism
free will
freedom
intention
logical positivism
motive
naturalism
predestination
providence

Key thinkers

Ludwig Wittgenstein
Paul Ricoeur
Sigmund Freud

independently from the person who does them. Actions are not events standing on their own. Actions are not something "out there" that you try on when you decide to do something.

Freedom is the human potential, the capacity, the power to act. Action is the realization of that power. When you use your freedom, you make changes. You change the course of events. You change the world around you. Your actions are interventions in the world. Hence the focus in action theory and in ethics is not first of all on *what is done* but on *who it is done by*. For every action, there is an agent, someone who has a capacity to effect a change in the world, to initiate things. That is why human action is at the heart of ethics. Ethics examines your capacity as an individual to make things happen in your world, in your relationships, and even within yourself.

objective: recognition and acceptance of the fact that sensory experience represents reality, facts, data that are outside the self. These exist independently from individual thought and are perceptible by all observers. For example, your house exists not because you believe it exists; other people walking down the street can see your house because it has an objective reality. In other words, your house is a reality independent of your mind. When you run, something objective takes place, since you can measure your distance or speed. Your *intending* to run, on the other hand, is not something that you can measure or observe; it is *subjective* rather than objective – that is, it exists solely within your mind.

Conceptual framework of action

You cannot directly observe your capacity to make things happen. As a result, you cannot directly describe it either. How then do you know what it is? First of all, you experience this capacity as a conviction that "I can do this," like when you knew you were able to drive a car. You can also deduce it from what others do. In order to understand human action, action theory has devised what the philosopher Paul Ricoeur has called a *conceptual framework of action*.

Analytic philosophy

Analytic philosophy originated in the 1920s with a group of philosophers known as *logical positivists*. They held that if anything has meaning, it must have some kind of sensory experience to back it up. For them, physics was the only real science, and it set the standard for scientific inquiry in terms of its methods. Having set this standard, analytic philosophy was forced to return again and again to its premise to reduce everything to sensory experience – to the "hard facts" that you could see, smell, touch, measure, hear and so on.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1889–1951
Austrian philosopher who originated the theory of action.

The main obstacle to this premise was the human will, especially "free will." You can't see "free will." You can't hear it or touch it. Ludwig Wittgenstein raised an interesting question, "When 'I raise my arm,' my arm goes up. And the problem arises: what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?" You figure it out!

Philosophical Investigations (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), 62.

Paul Ricoeur

Paul Ricoeur was born in Valence, France, in 1913 into a family of civil servants. His mother died shortly after his birth and his father was killed in 1915 in the trenches of the First World War. Orphaned so young, he was raised by his grandparents, who were socialists and were devout members of the Christian Reform Church. He studied philosophy at the University of Rennes but completed his studies in Paris where he graduated in 1935. After graduation he taught philosophy at a Lyceum – the French equivalent for the Canadian high school – until he was called into military service at the outbreak of the Second World War. As a lieutenant in the French army, he was soon captured and spent the rest of the war as a prisoner. While in a prison camp, Ricoeur taught philosophy to other prisoners.

The war convinced Ricoeur to become a pacifist. When he returned to France after the war, he joined a group of Christians striving to model a Christian socialist community. He frequently wrote articles about peace, violence and power, communism, human rights, and politics. As dean of philosophy at the University of Nanterre in Paris, he found himself in the midst of the political and social turmoil of the late 60s and early 70s. At one point, he found himself debating the structure of the university with the Marxist-Leninist student organization. When they could not out-do him with their arguments, they later dumped a garbage pail over him. He was dismayed that the university was threatening to become a place where violence prevailed over debate and language. Shortly after, he resigned his position. He took up teaching positions at the Universities of Louvain, Montreal, and Chicago. Only occasionally did he teach again in Paris.

Always a very public man, interacting with the great issues of his time, Ricoeur is best known as the prolific writer of more than 1,300 books and articles. Ricoeur's main interest has been human action. In *Freedom and Nature* he reflects on how humans will and make decisions. He returns to this theme in his subsequent books, exploring how actions affect the self. Ricoeur's other interest is language and its impact on human existence and action.

Paul Ricoeur lives in Paris. In 2003 he received the Pope Paul VI International Prize from Pope John Paul II. At the occasion Pope John Paul II said of Ricoeur that he was "a philosopher, who is at the same time a man of faith, committed to the defence of human and Christian values." Our reflection on human action will be guided by Paul Ricoeur's thinking.

You can explore this human capacity to make things happen by asking the following questions about an action:

- Who?
- What?
- Why?
- How?
- With whom or against whom?
- Under what circumstances?
- With what outcome?

Together, these questions interact to form the *conceptual framework of human action*. This framework allows us to understand action indirectly, by asking these questions. The meaning of an action shifts depending on the answers to the questions. In other words, an action is good only when it fulfills certain conditions. An action is not good of itself.

The morality of human acts depends on:

- the object chosen;
- the end in view or the intention;
- the circumstances of the action.[1]

You will use the conceptual framework of human action to look at each of these questions in turn. They will help you to understand and evaluate human action.

Who? The agent

The "who" of action, the agent, is the person who makes things happen. Each person has the capacity – the energy or the power – to act. The human self is an intending self: a self that is able to *intend* to do things. Think of it this way: When you act, you are saying that, of all the things you could do, you will do this rather than that. For example, you decide how much effort you put into studying for an exam; you choose with whom you spend your free time, or with whom you form relationships. This is what Catholic tradition calls free choice. Free choice is both an exercise, and a measure, of freedom. You are responsible for *what* you do, and for what you *intend* to do.

Your actions have shaped you. You are who you are largely because of what you have done. Of course, none of us can undo what is done – the past is past. But you do have the capacity to influence your future by what you do in the present. You are an agent when you intend something in the present that will change your future. When you say, "I *intend* to go to university next year," you commit yourself. It is more than, "I *want* to go to university next year." Intending includes making a judgment without conditions. Intending means beginning to discern which subjects you will take and to which universities you will apply. Intending might include speaking to a guidance counsellor. You look at the cost of going to university. You get a job. You work harder at school to ensure that your marks are sufficient. By intending to go to university, you begin to reshape your whole world.

By intending to do certain things, you also reshape who you are. In other words, you begin to shape yourself by the promises, commitments and plans that you make today. For ethics it is most important to discover what are your commitments, your beliefs about your capacities, your image of the world, your faith, your hopes, your goals, your capacity to keep your word. These things tell you who you are.

Guiding questions

1. What is a commitment or a promise?
2. Describe what sorts of things begin to take place when you say something like, "I intend to play ball this evening"?
3. How are you an agent when you make a promise or a commitment?

verb: a word used in a sentence to express an action, state of being, or occurrence. For example: Hassan *ate* the pizza. Mary *lives* in Belleville. The storm *exploded* with a cloudburst.

What? The action

Ethics is about more than the "who," or the agent, of an action. Ethics is also about actions themselves: what the agent *does*. Language expresses actions through verbs. The dictionary is full of verbs that express with rich subtlety how humans act and interact. They demonstrate the almost infinite possibility for the agent to make things happen in the world through thought, word and deed.

Your actions shape you. Shoplifting will shape you in a different way than will doing

homework or arriving on time for work. Gossiping will shape you differently than composing a letter of appreciation for someone.

Ethics is about reflecting on intentional actions, that is, actions intended by an agent. Intentional actions are also called meaningful actions. Ethical theory is not concerned with unintentional actions, reflexes or involuntary bodily movements such as sneezing or sleepwalking. They are still the actions of a person, but they are not moral actions since they "happen" rather than being freely and knowingly chosen. Only actions infused with the power of intention have ethical value.

Say you are driving a car at 30 km/h over the speed limit. You lose control and the car is wrecked. Did you intend the crash to happen? No. Were your actions wrong? Yes, because you intentionally drove over the speed limit, creating the circumstances that increased the likelihood of a collision.

Guiding questions

1. I am what I do. Explain.
2. Can actions, taken on their own, be judged as good, bad or indifferent? Explain.

Why? The motive

We all have our reasons for acting the way we do. We can explain our actions by telling why we did it. We have reasons for what we *intend* to do. For example, you might intend to go college because you are interested in nursing, because you want to have a career, because your high school teacher ignited your passion for geology.

What is a motive? A motive is a reason for an action. As the chapter title states, "You are what you do." Since you have a reason for what you do, who you are becoming is based on your motives. To say, "I intend to go to university" makes no sense unless you have a reason to do so. Something attracts you, leads you or moves you to further your studies. In everything you choose to do, you are motivated by something.

The reasons for doing things are almost endless. They always appear as a good – even if they are a good only to you. "I gave back the money because it did not belong to me." "I went grocery shopping with Grandma because she asked me." "I downloaded my essay from the Internet because I needed an A."

To give a reason for an action is to say why it is worth doing. Whenever you give a motive, you justify your action, you appeal to a value that makes the action right. You don't always express the motives and the values underlying your actions. You don't make a conscious value judgment each time you act. In most cases, it is only afterwards that you become aware of your motive and the value your motive promoted. But whether you are aware of it or not, there is a feeling of a good in the very intention of doing something.

An evil action cannot be justified by reference to a good intention.

St. Thomas Aquinas

Ethics enters the picture when you begin to reflect on the values that are embedded in your decisions and in your intentions. You can step back from a decision you have made and examine the motives. At such moments you pass judgment on what you have done: you say "this is good," or "this is wrong." In ethics you examine the values that make life human.

Guiding questions

1. Think of three choices that you made today.
2. List the motives for these choices.
3. What are the values underlying your motivation?

One may not do evil so that good may result from it.

***CCC #1761**

How? With what means?

How you carry out an action also affects you as the agent. For example, you can deal with a conflict by dialogue or by abusive language, by violence or by silence. Whichever means you choose will say something about you. If you speak up for someone whom you don't particularly like, you are a better person for it. If you are generous to others, you will become a generous person. If you are stingy in your actions towards others, you will become stingy as a person. If you "borrow" without permission your neighbour's snow blower to clear the laneway of your elderly and frail grandmother, the good intention to help her is clearly diminished by the potential damage the "borrowing" may cause in your relationship with your neighbour. The borrowing without permission affects your goodness as the agent and the goodness of the action. "The end *does not* justify the means." The means qualify the action.

aggravate:
make worse

mitigate:
make less severe

Under what circumstances?

The circumstances under which you do something also have an impact on your action. If you bully someone with a physical disability, the circumstances aggravate your action. On the other hand, if you volunteer at the food bank despite a busy schedule, the circumstances enhance your action. Every action has its aggravating or mitigating circumstances. What you do under threat of violence, in extreme hunger, or under pressure affects the level of your intention and motive. The circumstances affect how much the action is yours. In this way, circumstances may reduce, or increase, your responsibility. Circumstances must always be accounted for in evaluating actions.

Circumstances… contribute to increasing or diminishing the moral goodness or evil of human acts…. They can also diminish or increase the agent's responsibility…[but] of themselves … can make neither good nor right an action that is in itself evil.

***CCC #1754**

With or against whom?

When you justify your actions by appealing to a motive, you seek the approval, or seek to prevent the disapproval, of someone. In most cases you learn to evaluate your actions by evaluating the actions of others. You assign praise or blame for an action in relation with others. *Every action is also an interaction.* You act with others, for others, against others. How you act in each case will affect you differently. For example, including others in your plans, or being attentive to those who need your help, affects you positively. Conversely, making fun of someone, or cheating on exams, affects you negatively.

With what outcome?

Are you responsible for the outcome of your actions? If you drive while drunk and crash into a tree, killing your passenger, are you responsible even though you never intended to kill this person? Are you responsible for the fear in a neighbourhood where you have trashed a home? Equally, can you take the credit if through your efforts a youth program is organized in the parish? The outcome of your actions – intended or not – clearly affects the self for good or for bad.[2]

Guiding questions

1. Come up with other examples under the following categories: "How?" "Under what circumstances?" "With whom or against whom?" "With what outcome?"
2. Create an example in which all seven categories of the conceptual framework of human action are at play in a positive manner.

* *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Human freedom

What it means to be free

When you exercise your freedom, the action that results makes a mark or a change in the world. And in making these marks and changes, you yourself are changed in your very core. But to say that you are free means, in a way, that you are not complete, because you always have unrealized possibilities. You are free because you have possibilities. You can reach into the future by giving your word today and keeping it. Your commitments and promises orient you towards the future.[3] We will examine other ways of looking at freedom in Chapter 10.

But is there freedom?

Not all philosophers agree on how to explain the human ability to initiate an action. Remember the question raised by Wittgenstein: "When 'I raise my arm,' my arm goes up. And the problem arises: what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?" You might say, "Nothing! At least nothing to which I can point." If the heart of action lies in the *intention* of the agent to do something, then the heart of action (intentions) is not something that you can observe. You may say, "I raise my arm." But saying it is not the same as doing what you intend. It is only when you have done it (your arm is now raised) that whatever you intended shows itself. Traditionally, this capacity to act intentionally has been identified as a spiritual quality – sometimes called a transcendental quality. Think of the promise you might make to take someone as your spouse for life. What is this promise you make to another, this commitment to enter into a life-long relationship with someone? You cannot see, touch or smell it, and yet it is not "nothing." It is very real.

Some philosophers would say to Wittgenstein, "Yes, there is something. My intention to lift my arm can be seen in the neural and chemical changes in my brain." These philosophers hold that there is no such thing as freedom. We may pretend to have a free will, but there is no scientific evidence for it. Humans, they argue, are part of a physical, material universe and nothing in them reaches beyond the material into a spiritual world. Everything can be explained, or will be explained, by physical and biological processes. Everything has a physical cause. A human agent just happens to be a more complex physical cause. This is the position called *naturalism*.

Freedom characterizes properly human acts. It makes the human being responsible for acts of which he [or she] is the voluntary agent.

CCC #1745

Freedom is the power to act or not to act, and so to perform deliberate acts of one's own. Freedom attains perfection in its acts when directed towards God, the sovereign Good.

CCC #1744

Naturalism

The term "naturalism" was first coined by G.E. Moore in 1903 in his book *Principia Ethica*. As a movement, its roots go back to David Hume, an eighteenth-century philosopher. Hume was the first to seriously challenge the principle of causality. Today naturalism is probably the most widely held philosophy. (If you would like to read further in this area, Daniel Dennett and Hillary Putnam are its best-known exponents.)

Naturalism understands the material universe as a unified system. In it, everything is shaped completely by physical, biological, psychological, social and environmental processes. As part of the evolutionary process, humans, this theory holds, are no more than a part of the material universe. Everything, including humanity, is part of one grand chain of being connected by cause and effect. In this way of understanding the world, science reigns supreme. Everything must be explained by scientific experimentation. According to naturalism, if we want to show that something is true, it must be proven using concrete evidence. All other methods of reasoning are illusory.

In our time, genetic research, and particularly the Human Genome Project, is having an enormous impact on the way we view human beings. It is widely held that, when it comes to understanding who we are, "it's all in the genes." For naturalists, the Genome Project provides "the blueprint of humanity." For them, this research shows that the human self is not an "intending self," but a genetically pre-programmed organism. Neural mechanics and genetic determinism challenge the understanding of a person as a "self." There is no human spirit or culture; humans and human activity are the result of the natural selection process. In such a world, Ted Peters maintains, "Human culture is on a leash, a short leash, held by a genetic agenda. That agenda is the self-replication of genes using the human species as its vehicle. Human culture is structured so as to encourage reproduction and, hence, the perpetuation of genes. Human religion and human morality, whether theologians know it or not, is reducible to the agenda of selfish genes."[4]

The theory of naturalism makes a direct assault on human freedom. If DNA defines who you are, then your genes rule supreme. Your genes determine who you are and what you can be. Your promises and commitments then do not come from motives or intentions, but from a genetic predisposition. Freedom is a delusion. Your attachment to a friend is only a neural state. So are feelings of love and loyalty, or feelings of altruism. If naturalism held, then you could explain your faults by pointing to genetics. Your tendency to procrastinate would not be your fault; you could blame it on your genetic code!

Naturalism denies the possibility of ethics and morality. How can you be responsible for your actions if what you do is a natural physical process over which you have no control and if control is just another facet of your neural organization? What if it is no more than your genetic make-up that is at work?

Ted Peters theorizes that we will soon have to rethink the philosophy underlying important legal concepts "such as free will, guilt, innocence, and mitigating factors." He feels that research linking human behaviour to genetic predisposition will be increasingly important to deciding whether people are guilty of crimes. As he argues,

> The focus will be on the concept of free will, because the assumption of the Western philosophy coming down to us from Augustine that underlies our understanding of law is that guilt can only be assigned to a human agent acting freely.

In the future, Peters says, this could lead to the argument that humans are *compelled* to behave a certain way by their genetic disposition.

> And this will place us at a fork in the legal road: either we declare the person with a genetic disposition to crime innocent and set him or her free, or we declare him or her so constitutionally impaired as to justify incarceration and isolation from the rest of society. The first fork would jeopardize the welfare of society; the second fork would violate individual rights.[5]

The Human Genome Project has clearly established that there is a relationship between a person's neural network and his or her actions. But as the philosopher John Searle says, "We have only the foggiest idea of how it all works." As he says,

> By current estimate the human brain has over 100 billion neurons, and each neuron has synaptic connections with other neurons ranging in number from a few hundred to many tens of thousands. All of this enormously complex structure is massed together in a space smaller than a soccer ball.[6]

But can these neurons explain human action or consciousness? Is there a causal connection? Naturalists assume this to be the case. The advantage, they claim, is that naturalism would allow us to establish a scientific basis for ethics. Ethics would become a natural science. We could then eliminate the ethical confusion that exists today. But the repercussions for ethics and morality would be devastating. Humans would not be agents.

The evidence for genetic determination is far from convincing at present. That there is some interaction between the genetic code and human behaviour can hardly be denied. You cannot act without your body. In the same way, your spirit is an embodied spirit. That is to say, your spiritual capacities, like your free will, are in some way connected with your body.

Future research will likely explain more precisely how genes and freedom go together. But there will always be resistance to saying that freedom is nothing more than our genes at work. Naturalism cannot account for human freedom or the moral drive.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Since the 1940s researchers have been attempting to create intelligent machines. The first person to have raised the possibility was Alan Turing, a British mathematician. In 1947 he gave a talk outlining this venture. But how do you go about creating an intelligent machine? And what does "intelligent" mean, anyway? In an article entitled "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (1950), Turing proposed a test to determine when a machine could be considered intelligent. It is known as the Turing Test. In the Turing test, if someone uses a keyboard to hold a conversation with a machine and with a human, and cannot tell the difference between the human and the machine, the machine would have to be considered intelligent.

In 1956 John McCarthy, a prominent computer scientist, called this project "Artificial Intelligence," AI for short. At the time, he proposed that "intelligence can in principle be so precisely described that a machine can be made to simulate it." He now realizes that this was too strong a claim. The machine was never made. Instead he recognized

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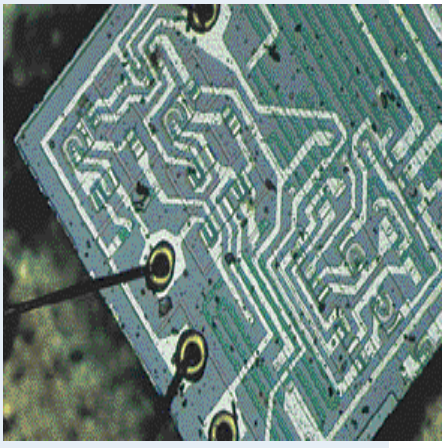
that perhaps the brain's neural networks might be replicated in computer programs. Replication, however, is not necessarily the same as human intelligence. As Amanda Sharkey, a lecturer at Sheffield University has put it, "You could model an aspect of intelligence but we don't have anything that is a whole intelligent system. And my hunch is that it is in principle impossible to go further."[7]

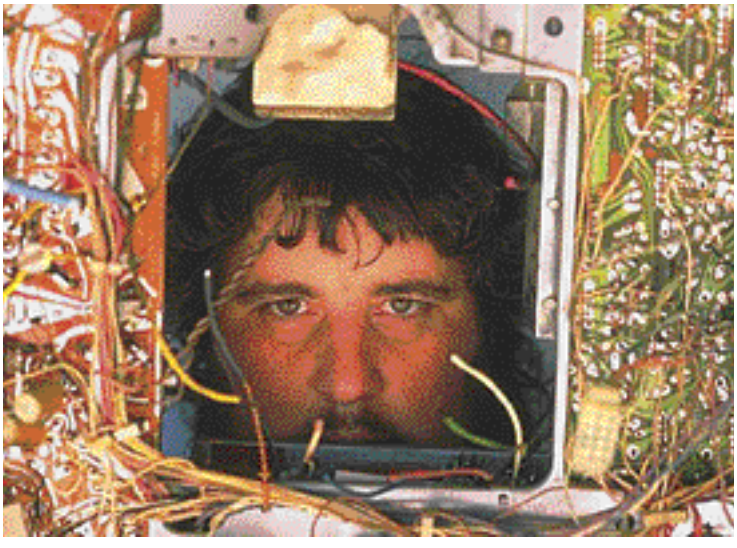
Some researchers continue to imagine that computers will one day replicate human cognitive mental states. This idea is called "strong AI." It is a future reflected in such movies as *Blade Runner*, *A.I.*, the *Terminator* series and the *Matrix* series. "Strong AI" researchers have not given up on the idea that at some point computers may be able to think at a level equal to humans. They point to the success of Deep Blue, the computer that defeated the Russian chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov in 1997.



Others ascribe to the idea of "weak AI." They believe it possible that computers can simulate some thinking-like features, but no more. Weak AI is already at work in many technologies: programs that attempt to understand natural human languages, speech-recognition software, robotics, computer games, and military applications used in real war situations such as Operation Desert Storm and the 2003 Iraq War. The story of Artificial Intelligence is just beginning to unfold.

Naturalism and Artificial Intelligence

The philosophy underlying AI is that of naturalism. What naturalism and AI have in common is their great interest in the human brain and its neural networks. Work has already begun to decode the genes behind a variety of diseases, such as cystic fibrosis on chromosome 7, Alzheimer's disease on chromosome 21 and colon cancer on chromosome 2. These biological and physical discoveries seen in the fields of functional genomics and Artificial Intelligence deeply affect how we view ourselves as humans.



You read earlier how your personal identity is shaped by what you do. But what if you are not an agent? What if your identity is nothing more than neural connections? What if you could not call anything truly "yours"? You would be no more than "the existence of brain and body, and the occurrence of a series of interrelated physical and mental events" as philosopher Derek Parfit would argue.[8] Naturalism tends to look at the body and brain as objects that are separable from *self*. Bodies and brains can be the subject of research – in the manner that the medical science does – without any regard for the person whose body or brain it is. In fact, frequently the brain is equated with the person. But obviously a body or a brain is *somebody*'s brain. It is my body and my brain. The idea of teletransporting in science fiction raises questions about this strong identification of my brain and my body with myself.

The mind–brain distinction

Before the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, little was known about how the brain works. Any distinction between the mind and the brain was vague. Early philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle had a sophisticated understanding of human intelligence. However, they did not make a connection between this intelligence and the human brain. The mathematician and philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) was perhaps the first to clearly argue the distinction.

In brief, in his search for certainty Descartes began a systematic exploration of all the things that he knew – even mathematical truths – and put them to the test. He found that he could doubt the existence of everything around him. He could be certain of the existence of nothing, not even the things he could see and touch. He realized he could be deceived by appearances. At the end of this doubting experiment the only reality that escaped his doubt and that he knew with certainty was the fact that he doubted. From this experiment came his conclusion: I think, therefore I am. Without realizing it, Descartes had created a split between thinking and the world of matter. Descartes was left with a thinking mind with no link to the body (brain).

Physical and spiritual reality

*Catholic teaching refers to the human person as being at once physical and spiritual (*CCC *#362). "The* Lord *God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2.7). The Catechism describes the "soul" as our "innermost aspect" and "that which is of greatest value" in us. The soul, it says, signifies our " spiritual principle" (*CCC *#363). "The spiritual tradition of the Church also emphasizes the* heart *…the depths of one's being, where the person decides for or against God" (*CCC *#368).*

During the nineteenth century, great progress was made in understanding the physiology of the brain and how it functions. Many scientists of this era used this research to look for the causes of human behaviour in the brain alone. Thomas Huxley (1825–1895), for example, argued that the brain was a machine like everything else in nature. The mind, he argued, was no more than a passive reflection of the brain's activity.

In our time, science has made great strides in understanding the working of the brain, and many are convinced that the mind is the brain at work – nothing else. Everything from perception, to learning, to thinking, to consciousness, to decision-making – all of this is claimed to be a matter of brain function. With all its sophistication, however, modern science has not shown a definitive connection between the mind and brain function.

It is evident that there is a connection between the brain and the mind. The mental development of children is clearly linked with the development of the brain. We can see how brain injuries can incapacitate people's mental abilities. We have also learned some of the connections between the body's chemistry and a person's mental health.

But what if we were to jump from these understandings to the conclusion that the human mind is nothing more than the brain at work? If that were the case, we would also have to absolve Hitler from his actions in World War II, and we would have to absolve current-day terrorists from their actions, because we would have to admit that their actions are only products of brain activity, and have nothing to do with human freedom to choose.

Our Catholic tradition does not deny the wonderful discoveries of science, nor does it deny the connections between the mind and the brain. It does, however, assert that the human mind is much more than physical functions. The mind provides the capacity for freedom, for choice, for action. The mind is at the heart of the human capacity to receive God's self-revelation in faith, to understand the message and to live in hope, and to live a life of loving service. None of these actions can be accounted for by neural physiology.

Imaginative variations of the self: Teletransporting?

Remember how characters in *Star Trek* "beamed aboard" the Enterprise? From the planet surface Captain Kirk sends a radio message to the crew onboard the Starship Enterprise. He says, "Beam us up, Mr. Scott." Onboard the Enterprise, Scotty presses a button and activates the teletransporter. The machine essentially destroys Kirk's body, separating all his cells into individual cells, while recording their exact states. The information is sent by radio waves to a transporter terminal on the Enterprise, where another machine, a replicator, uses organic materials to make a perfect copy of his body. Kirk, who materializes on board the spaceship, seems to remember living his life up to the moment when Scotty pressed the button, and he is in every other way just like before.

If you could be teletransported, would you survive in your replica, or would the real you die? Who would be replicated? Would it be another person or the same "you"? What happened to the first "you"? The new you might look the same; it might have the same memories, the same genes, etc. Materially or physically everything would be identical. But would you be the same person before and after the teletransporting? Will "you" survive? Whose actions will they be after the teletransporting?

We can imagine such a scenario, even if it is not likely that we will be able to answer all the questions. But the very question about identity that we ask: "Whose identity is it after the teletransporting?" suggests that not only your original body or brain was destroyed, but with it your identity. The teletransporter can translate only physical matter, and it seems to leave unresolved the question of the self. Moreover, the self in this scenario seems to be identified with the brain. In many of these science fictions, personhood is localized in the brain. But with the original brain destroyed and then teletransported and reconstituted, is the self also reconstituted? Along these lines we may ask, "Does the brain make the promises and the commitments, or does the self?" These mental games with the identity of the self bring home in new ways the question of identity and human action.

Guiding questions

1. Is what we call "the self" something other than the brain and neural connectors? How so? How not? What is the distinction between the human brain and the human mind?
2. What are the repercussions for ethics if the self is reduced to the brain and its neural connectors?
3. Is there anything that attracts you about naturalism? What do you find unacceptable?

Religious determinism

The proponents of naturalism maintain that freedom is an illusion because actions are not free. Actions are nothing more than the results of brain processes. Other contemporary theories are equally deterministic. Freedom as a human capacity is under severe attack in a number of philosophies and even theologies. Determinism is an attractive philosophy. It is attractive because, as Kant pointed out long ago, it is difficult to come up with a theory to explain freedom. Kant said that freedom is not something that can be explained using science. Rather, it is a practical issue and should be explained practically. Here we will explore how even religion can be a source of determinism.

Predestination

Historically, some churches within Christianity have denied human freedom. They have done so based on a belief in God whose knowledge and will have predetermined not only the course of the world and its history, but also each

action and deed of every individual. Today most Christians believe in what is known as *providence*, that is, God's influence upon events and actions. After all, the belief that God saves can only be maintained if one believes that God can achieve the salvation of the world. If God's plan to save some and to damn others is inevitable, then what role do humans and their freedom play? If salvation or damnation is predetermined, is there any recognition or respect for freedom? According to John Calvin, the French Protestant reformer and theologian (1509–1564), freedom and ethics have no place in the doctrine of predestination. The Catholic position disagrees with Calvin. Catholic teaching maintains that human freedom and God's providence do not conflict.

The Puritan tradition, which is an offshoot of the Calvinist tradition, strongly believes that sin has so totally depraved humans that humans are born and live their entire lives deserving eternal damnation. Cut off from God, they can do nothing to save themselves. They do not believe that God wants all people to be saved. They hold that God loves and elects some and rejects others. A person can do nothing to change this election of God. God freely gives salvation to the elect. It is not because they had more faith or led more perfect lives. It is God's freedom, but at the expense of human freedom. This is a harsh doctrine and certainly difficult to interpret. Puritans do not claim to understand why God chooses to save a small minority of the human race and condemn the rest. To question God on this would be sacrilegious. They say, "That's just the way it is." By contrast, the Catholic tradition has always struggled to maintain that humans are free precisely because of God's providence. Yes, salvation is God's initiative of love, but God's love requires and makes possible our cooperation. The Catholic tradition has been the great defender of human freedom.

Free will

St. Augustine (354–430) was the first great theologian who wrote extensively about the free will and its connection with grace. He did so, because in his time there were those who denied the free will (the Manichaeans) and those who gave the free will too much power (the Pelagians). One of his sayings on free will is frequently quoted: "It is certain that we will when we will; but He [God] brings it about that we act, but that without His help we neither will anything good nor do it."

St. Augustine by Sandro Botticelli

Social determinism

Social determinism is in many ways like naturalism. A social determinist would say that your behaviour is determined not so much by your physical state as by the influences of others upon you: your parents or culture; your psychological state, including any traumatic experiences you may have had; your history; and your social background, including such things as socio-economic status, race, gender, religion and education. According to this view, your actions can be explained by what you have undergone at the hands of others. You are not free because you are the product of what others have done to you. To a social determinist, the past, your past, determines who you are. Your behaviour is explained by social factors, not by your decisions. A social determinist might argue, "I did this because I was abused as a child." But if your actions today are determined entirely by your past, how can you be responsible for those actions? Here is one example of this way of thinking, seen in the work of Sigmund Freud.

Freud's theory of the unconscious

One of Sigmund Freud's most important contributions to the understanding of the human person was to develop the concept of the unconscious mind. Freud demonstrated that human behaviour is often driven by unconscious impulses based on repressed memories and desires. For a variety of reasons – the memories were too painful or shameful – humans repress these memories and desires through a sort of mental censor. This censorship does not remove the memories or desires. It only represses them out of consciousness. And so these unacceptable memories and desires end up in the unconscious mind. There, the conscious mind does not have to deal with them directly.

However, your no-longer conscious memories and desires do not "go away." According to Freud, they exert a constant pressure on your conscious mind and play an indirect role in shaping your perceptions and decisions. They emerge in the almost indecipherable images and symbols of your dreams. But they also surface in odd behaviour patterns. When you act out of your unconscious, your behaviour patterns are what Freud would call "neurotic." In other words, for Freud your dreams and neurotic behaviour patterns are resurfacing memories and desires. At this level, you could call Freud's theory of the unconscious deterministic. Until you reconnect with the repression and what gave rise to the repression, your actions are not free. Therefore, you cannot be held directly responsible for your actions. Freud also recognized that people can use the emotional power of repressed memories and desires for right action by channelling this energy creatively and less neurotically. He called this sublimation.

The life and death instinct

Another aspect of Freud's theory that had an impact on morality is his theory of instinct. Instinct (such as the sexual instinct), he maintained, is something that exerts pressure on the mind causing humans to act to reduce that

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)

Sigmund Freud was born in Moravia (now in the Czech Republic) in 1856. His family moved to Vienna when he was four. He was to remain there until he was eighty-two. In 1873 he enrolled in the medical school at the University of Vienna. Freud would have liked an appointment to teach there, but because of prejudice against Jewish people that proved impossible. So instead he worked and did his research on the human brain at Vienna's General Hospital. He was particularly interested in neurology, the study of neurotic disorders. Freud always held that physical disorders, such as bodily paralysis or visual impairment, had psychological rather than physiological causes. He became interested in the related work of one of his contemporaries, Joseph Breuer (1842–1925), who steered him in the direction of psychotherapy. Freud's name is now forever linked with the field of psychotherapy. He began studies on hypnosis and on the sexual basis for problems of the human psyche. He realized that to cure these patients, he must explore the dark world of the human unconscious. In 1897 Freud began an intensive self-analysis. He found access to the self by the analysis of his dreams. This led to the publication of his major work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

In 1905 Freud initiated a discussion group on the topic of psychotherapy. The other participants were Alfred Adler, Carl Jung and Otto Rank. These four researchers have become known as the four pillars of depth psychology. Together they formed the Vienna Psychological Society. Their discussions were lively and, at times, heated. In the end the four parted ways and went on to develop their own theories. Freud continued to practise psychoanalysis and published broadly. When the Nazis occupied Austria in 1938, Freud fled Vienna. At the age of eighty-two he arrived in London. He died there the following year.

See N.A. Haynie, "Freud, Sigmund (1856-1939)," in *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, Raymond J. Corsini, ed. Bonnie D. Ozaki, assistant ed. (New York: J. Wiley&Sons, 1984), 37-38. Donald C. Abel, *Theories of Human Nature: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. 1992), 281-282.

tension. Pleasure results when we reduce this tension. Instinct played a powerful role in Freud's psychoanalytic theory. How many instincts are there? Freud saw two determining instincts in humans. One he called the life, or love (*Eros*), instinct; the other he called the death (*Thanatos*) instinct. The life instinct is frequently identified with Freud's notion of *Eros*, or the sexual instinct. But it goes beyond the sexual to include life and growth and the struggle against death. The life instinct is found in the various ways that humans express their desire for life and love for the other. Freud even found a place for the commandment to "love your neighbour as yourself" as an expression of the life instinct.

This desire for life conflicts with another desire, the desire for death. Freud arrived at the notion of the death instinct as a result of his experience of the First World War. Freud was struck by the aggressive-destructive tendencies manifested by this horrendous war in which people slaughtered one another by the thousands each day. He also noted aggression in the way humans deal with themselves. Freud was highly critical of morality, which he saw as self-aggression. Morality, he wrote in a letter to Einstein, consists of precepts and sanctions imposed upon people from the outside, most often against their will. Morality is built on coercion. It demands the renunciation of one's instincts. This point of view quickly found its way into literature. Listen to the narrator in Kate Chopin's *A Pair of Silk Stockings*, a story first published in 1890:

> She was not going through any acute mental process or reasoning with herself, nor was she striving to explain to her satisfaction the motive of her action. She was not thinking at all. She seemed for the time to be taking a rest from that laborious and fatiguing function and to

> have abandoned herself to some mechanical impulse that directed her actions and freed her from responsibility.[9]

The subject of this passage is shrinking from morality, allowing herself to be guided by instinct alone. According to Freud, people take on morality from their parents from early infancy. They internalize their parents' precepts and sanctions. Internalized, these rules form what Freud called the superego.

The superego is the internal taskmaster that imposes feelings of guilt and shame if you do not follow the rules imposed upon you by parents and society. These feelings of shame are powerful enough that you will obey these precepts against your own will. To Freud, this amounted to self-aggression. In the next chapter we will examine in greater detail the notions of conscience and the superego.

Guiding questions

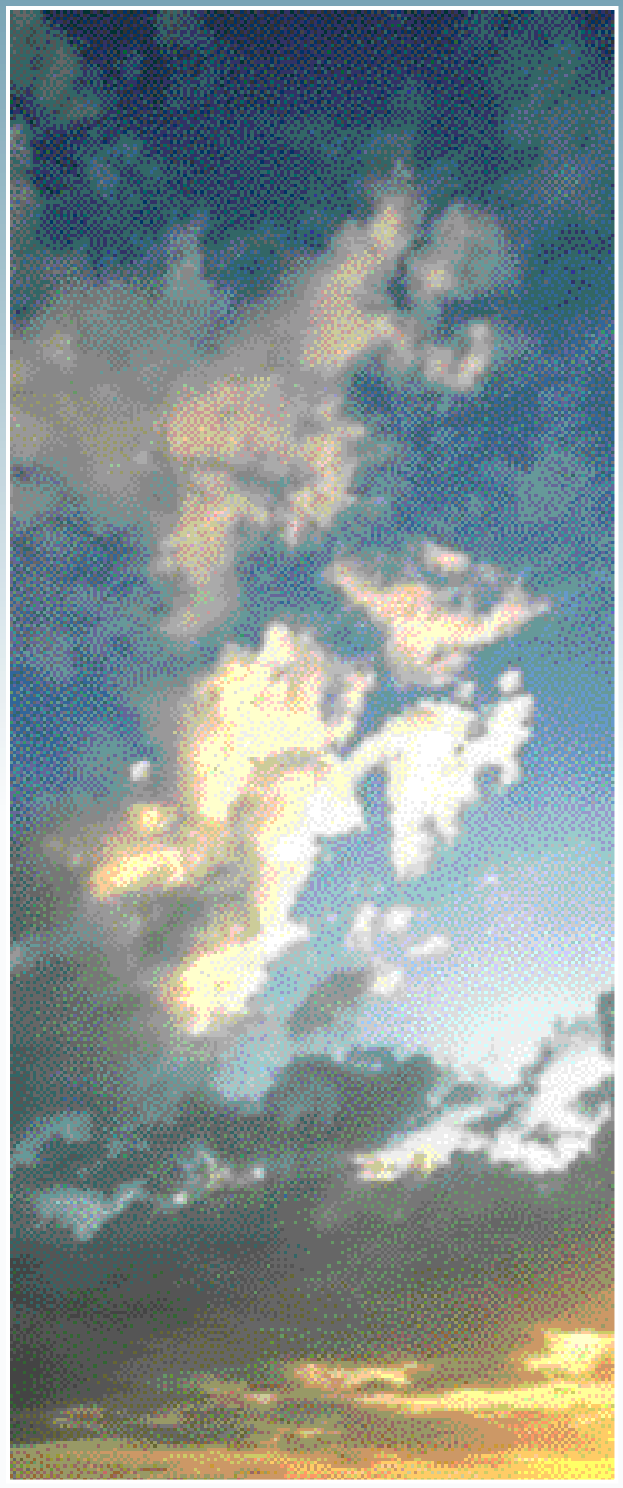
1. What is determinism?
2. What effect does it have on human freedom? Give some examples.
3. Would society still need prisons if freedom were an illusion? Why or why not?

Who, then, is the self?

In conclusion, think back to the question, "Who am I?" or even, "What am I?" When you ask this question of yourself, it is difficult to answer. When someone else asks you this question: "Who are you?" you become more eloquent. You summon forth all sorts of things. You give a brief story of your life. You talk about your parents, your home, the street you live on, the church you belong to, the schools you attended, perhaps the cultural background you grew up in, the sports you play, the things you do in your free time, or the friends you have. Each of these items in your story forms a part of your identity. Together, they make up who you are. They tell how, from your present perspective, you look at life, in effect saying, "Here is where I am!" By telling these events in your life story, you let the other person into your life, your identity. You know that your identity, your self, is more than any one of these fragments, but they are your only reference point. Your tendency may be to stop there, to focus only on your past in telling the story of your identity. But there is more to your story!

You are more than what you have done. That is the amazing thing about human action. You are capable of projecting yourself into the future. You can make promises; you can make commitments; you can make choices. You can give your word – your self – and shape your future. This self is not yet made. You can tell its story only as a promise, in your present commitment. That, too, is your identity. It is an identity that is full of promise, full of possibilities, full of hope.

You cannot undo the events of the past. But this does not mean that the story of your past will never change. You can make a decision, for instance, to talk to a trusted counsellor if your past story is very painful. A counsellor can help you discover a totally different – and much more comforting – interpretation of the events that happened to you. Although you cannot undo the events of the past – only reinterpret them – you can do something about your future. You can examine what is held out to you as the promise of life. You can explore your Christian tradition, how it views life, how it names the good, how it presents the fullness of life.



High Flight

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds, —and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of—wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air...

Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or even eagle flew—
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

John Gillespie Magee, Jr.

Chapter review

Summary

- Ethics presupposes that human agents have a capacity to act.
- Human actions are the most important building blocks of who we are and who we become.
- The conceptual framework of action provides a series of questions that help us to understand the complexity of a human action.
- Although it is presumed that human actions have a physical connection (the body and the neural connectors of the brain), the human self is more than its physical structure. While we use our brains for thinking, our minds cannot be reduced to the physical activity of the brain.
- The dominant philosophical position today is naturalism. It presumes that human actions can be located within, and reduced to, their physical components.
- Within Christian tradition, freedom is an essential characteristic of human nature. St. Augustine was the first to name the human will. You can make promises, commitments and choices. These actions form who you are becoming.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain what it means to be a moral agent.
2. Identify the key questions to ask when using the conceptual framework of action to analyze a human action.

Thinking and inquiry

3. Explain how freedom is an essential characteristic of ethics.
4. How would ethics be compromised if naturalism were the only way to understand human behaviour?

Communication

5. Create a visual representation of your understanding of yourself as "agent."
6. Write a short story that exemplifies how you are not just a product of your past actions, but can also shape your future by the commitments that you make.

Application

7. Choose a story from your daily newspaper or an event that happened at school and analyze the actions that took place using the conceptual framework of action.
8. Keep a journal of what you do for 24 hours. Analyze how your actions are forming who you are becoming.

Glossary

agent: One who acts, who has the capacity to initiate a course of events. A person to whom we ascribe actions. One who is responsible for his or her actions.

action: Action is the realization of the power of human freedom. When we engage the capacities of our freedom, we change the world around us.

determinism: A point of view that holds that human behaviour is a product, not of free will, but of a complex array of physical, social, cultural, psychological and historical causes.

intention: That which motivates me to act – values. The reason for doing something that appears, at least to me, as a good.

freedom: The human capacity to choose and to act. I am free because I have possibilities and capacities to act on these possibilities.

predestination: The view that my behaviour is predetermined, whether by God or by other causes.

responsibility: The conviction that a person is the agent of his or her actions. This presupposes freedom, knowledge and capability. As seen through the application of the conceptual framework of action, circumstances can mitigate the degree of a person's responsibility in any given action.

Conscience: The self in search of the good

CHAPTER 3

I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
Whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle,
Else it will not stay near you.
Steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.
Psalm 32.8-9, 10

Introduction

In this chapter we continue to lay the groundwork for ethics. In looking at the three main ethical theories in Chapter 1, we learned how something in us inclines us to ethics. The word that kept cropping up was "good." Something in our very core seeks after the good. This desire for the good accompanies everything we do. We are forever in search of the good.

In Chapter 2 we explored human action and what it means to be a moral agent.

In this chapter we continue to explore aspects of ourselves that we need to understand before we tackle specific ethical issues. Every ethics is based upon a theory of the human. A philosophical view of what it means to be human is important for ethics. This viewpoint lets us interpret how we as individuals interact with others, our community, our culture and our religion in the process of becoming moral agents. In this chapter we examine six aspects of the human person that are important for ethics:

A. The importance of others
B. The importance of having a direction in life
C. The importance of communication and language
D. The importance of character and one's body
E. The importance of conscience
F. The importance of the development of one's conscience

In the following chapters, we will expand this perspective to include the broader social dimensions. We begin, now, to explore these six aspects of our lives that make us moral agents.

Focus your learning

Cognitive
What is the role of conscience in your search for the good?

Practical
What do you need to consider when making a moral decision?

Affective
The quotation from Psalm 32 tells us not to be like a horse or a mule, lacking understanding, and needing a bit and a bridle. How does God teach you as you search for the good in your life?

Key terms in this chapter

character
commitment
conscience
identity
judgment
language
moral stance
narcissism
person
superego
Trinity

Key thinkers

Sigmund Freud
Richard Gula
Timothy O'Connell
Charles Taylor

A. The importance of others

"Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4.9)

Can you be a free, unique individual while bearing responsibility for the other? The story of Cain and Abel in Genesis sheds light on this question. One day, Cain, in a jealous rage, set upon and killed his brother, Abel. When the Lord asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain said, "I don't know." Then he added, "Am I my

brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4.1-9) Cain's question has resounded throughout history. Are you responsible for your sister and brother? Why should you care for the other?

In the ethical theories of Aristotle, Kant and Levinas (Chapter 1), the "other" plays a central role. Levinas, who of the three is closest to the biblical tradition, makes the strongest argument that the human person is relational. In Chapter 2 you read how, to properly understand human action, it is important to consider "with whom or against whom" an action is undertaken. Most of your actions are in some way relational. Your actions are motivated by others; they involve others; they are done with others or against others; they affect others. Your relationship with others is a powerful incentive for what you do and how you do it. The other is central to your search for the good.

In Western society, the idea that "I am my brother and sister's keeper" isn't very popular. We tend to think of others as standing in the way of personal freedom, plans and initiatives: "If only *they* would see things *my* way, I could do what I really want to do." We often see others as an obstacle to our freedom. Why is this so? Western culture views the human person as an individual. It emphasizes autonomy, independence and freedom. Westerners prize the entrepreneur, the solo mountain climber, the explorer, and the teen who becomes a rock star: all self-made individuals. These independent individuals break with traditions; they set their own rules; they are not governed by the opinions of others. For some, relationships are like an add-on that they choose to be a part of or not. They view freedom as independence from others. Others can easily become, as the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre maintained, "my hell." Such a person might say, "I may choose to build bridges but that is wholly my decision. I don't need others. I can be a full human being and free without them."

Jean-Paul Sartre, 1905–1980. An existentialist philosopher.

It is true that human beings are individuals, unique and singular with a capacity to act and be free. But that does not mean we need to see others as enemies of our autonomy. Rather, the other makes it possible for us to become our true selves, individuals in freedom. Consider this example:

> Allannah grew up in a one-parent family where she was often called on to be "mom" for her younger brother. Her mother died in a car accident when she was 11 and her brother, Liam, only 7.
>
> In Grade 9, she was told that she had a natural talent for music, both vocal and instrumental. Her teacher called her home and suggested that Allannah take lessons at the Royal Conservatory of Music. But lessons were expensive and her father could hardly make ends meet as it was. Instead, her father encouraged her to continue her music classes at school and to join the church choir where she could at least learn something about singing. Disappointed, but understanding her father's position, Allannah agreed to the compromise.
>
> When she turned 16, Allannah got a part-time job after school, from which she was able to pay for music lessons. At last, she was going to be able to study music.
>
> But just then, one cold winter morning, Liam was walking to school when a car hit a patch of black ice, jumped the curb and hit him, shattering his left hip. As the weeks passed, it became clear that Liam would need a lot of help from his family, and extensive long-term physiotherapy in order to walk again. After their visit to the clinic to arrange physio, Allannah found her father sitting forlornly in the family room. Allannah thought about what this might mean for the three of them. She put her arms around her father. "Don't worry, Dad. We can get through this. We're a tough family and we have each other." That night she made a resolution to help take care of her brother. She would make sure that he didn't fall behind in his studies. She would give the money she earned at her job to help pay for his expensive therapy, and together they would get through this.

Now at 24, Allannah recalls her teen years, all the parties she missed and the music lessons she gave up for her brother. She remembers the hard work lifting him from his wheelchair to his bed, going over missed school work, doing all the housework that Liam could have helped her with – and yet as she remembers, she smiles. Today, Liam is graduating and she will stand by her father's side where her mother would have been. She will feel the joy of his success, and later in the evening, she will enjoy performing with her band for her dad and brother and invited guests at the graduation party.

Why is it that after all the disappointments in her own life, Allannah is still able to celebrate her brother's success? What is life-giving about sacrifice for the good of the other? Compelled by love, Allannah chose to commit her freedom to the care of her father and brother. In doing so, she found her freedom and fulfillment. And her life as a musician had not ended, but only changed. She still had a talent to develop and a dream to pursue.

In love with myself: The danger of narcissism

The ancient Greeks tell the story of a young man, named Narcissus, who was physically very beautiful. His beauty attracted the passionate desire and longing of a young woman named Echo. Narcissus, however, lacked any feeling, and he disdained and rejected her. One day as he was hunting, he became thirsty and so came to a well. Just as he was about to drink, he noticed his reflection in the water. He fell in love with his own reflection. He became so consumed with this image and his inability to reach the object of his love that he died of thirst at the edge of the well.

Echo and Narcissus (detail) by John William Waterhouse

This myth of Narcissus has helped clarify our understanding of how people develop a healthy self-identity. A healthy, mature personality must find a balance between self-love and love for others. A healthy individual will work on relationships with others, trusting that there will be sufficient reward for the "me." The narcissist refuses to look beyond the self to achieve this balance. Modern psychiatry classifies narcissism as a disorder marked by self-absorption to the exclusion of others. It manifests itself in feelings of rage and aggression against those who do not support the self and its needs.[1]

First they came for the Communists, but I was not a Communist so I did not speak out. Then they came for the Socialists and the Trade Unionists, but I was neither, so I did not speak out. Then they came for the Jews, but I was not a Jew so I did not speak out. And when they came for me, there was no one left to speak out for me.

Martin Niemoeller

B. The importance of having direction in life

"I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth."
(Revelation 3.15-16)

The second anthropological trait of the human self is about being committed to particular values. Knowing who you are means knowing where you stand. Everyone stands somewhere. You need to know your commitments – where you stand with the great issues of life. These commitments make clear what you consider good and valuable – what you are *for*. Knowing where you stand is essential, not only to your self-identity, but also to your moral self. When you become an active member of Students Against Drunk Driving, you make known to others that you stand for responsible action, safety and preservation of life. You speak out against those who selfishly risk the lives of others by drinking and driving. You take a stand: You are for something.

Charles Taylor

Charles Taylor was born in Montreal in 1931 to a francophone mother and an anglophone father. He has lived there – except during his graduate studies as a Rhodes Scholar in Oxford – most of his life. Fluently bilingual, he is immersed in the Anglo-French culture of the city. Comfortable with both dominant cultures in Canada, he constantly seeks to bring the two solitudes of anglophone and francophone together.

Charles Taylor has been a professor of philosophy at McGill University in Montreal since 1961. He has drawn on his political instincts to write extensively about the place and role of Quebec in Canadian society. He even ran as a member of the NDP in a federal election in 1965 against Pierre Elliot Trudeau – and lost. He tried three times more, each time unsuccessfully. In Quebec Taylor is recognized as one of the great Québécois intellectuals of the twentieth century. In 1992 the Quebec government awarded him the Prix Léon-Gérin, the highest honour given for contributions to Quebec intellectual life.

Taylor describes himself as a Catholic Quebecker. In his work he shows a great concern over the images that Western peoples have developed of themselves. When he looks back into the rich Judeo-Christian tradition, he sees a much richer vision of the self than that which is being promoted by today's secularism. In his book *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989), he recognizes the need for a new spirituality. He says that the current purely humanistic and secular understanding of the self is not able to sustain important values such as care for the other over a long time. He makes a case for a return to Judeo-Christian values and spirituality. Despite its decline in countries like Canada, Christianity has far from exhausted its force as a treasured vision of the human self. [2]

humanism:
a worldview centred on human interest and values, and the individual's capacity for self-realization through reason and action. Humanists generally reject reference to the divine.

secularism:
a worldview that rejects religion and religious considerations. Secularists accept only critical reason.

My identity lies in my commitments

In the first part of *Sources of the Self*, Taylor shows how human lives have a sense of direction. He maintains that this moral orientation of our lives forms part of our identity. This moral orientation reveals our stance in life. The following abridged selection is taken from a chapter in Taylor's book entitled, "The Self in Moral Space":

People may see their identity as defined partly by some moral or spiritual commitment, say as a Catholic…. Or they may define it in part by the nation or tradition they belong to … say … a Québécois. [The attachment] to this spiritual view or background…provides the frame within which they can determine where they stand on questions of what is good, or worthwhile, or admirable, or of value…. [If] they … were … to lose this commitment or identification, they would be at sea, as it were; they wouldn't know anymore, for an important range of questions, what the significance of things was for them.

[When] this situation … arises for some people, [they suffer] an "identity crisis," an acute form of disorientation, which people often express in terms of not knowing who they are, but which can also be seen as a radical uncertainty of where they stand. They lack a frame … within which things can take on a stable significance, within which some life possibilities can be seen as good or meaningful, others as bad or trivial…. This is a painful and frightening experience.

My identity emerges from the direction I take in life

Taylor argues that there is an essential link between my moral direction or stance in life and my identity. It is within the light of this moral stance that life's questions arise: What is good or bad? What is worth doing or not doing? What is meaningful and important? What is trivial? Taylor considers why there is a link between identity and moral stance:

> Our identities, as defined by [the values that] give us our fundamental [direction in life], are in fact complex and many-tiered. We are all framed by what we see as universally valid commitments (being a Catholic… in my example above) and also by what we understand as particular identifications (being…. a Québécois). We often declare our identity as defined by only one of these, because this is what is [most important to us at that moment]. But in fact our identity is deeper and more many-sided than any of our possible articulations of it.

Where do I stand?

> But the second facet of the question above (about our identities as Catholic or Québécois) is not historical…. The answer comes in the form of a name: "I'm Joe Smith," often accompanied by a statement of relationship: "I'm Mary's brother-in-law," or by a statement of social role: "It's the repair man," or "the man you're pointing to is the President…." To be able to answer for oneself is to know where one stands…. that is why we naturally tend to talk of our fundamental [stance] in terms of who we are. To lose this [stance], or not to have found it, is not to know who one is. And this [stance], once attained, defines where you answer from, hence your identity. [3]

Guiding questions

1. How do your commitments or moral stance give rise to your identity?
2. How can you go about determining your own identity? Fill in the following statement, "I am a …" What do you stand for?
3. Looking at the question, "Where do you stand?" think of your life as a moral space. Map your space. What are your mountain peaks and deepest valleys? In what direction do your rivers flow? What is your main produce? What do you stand for?
4. Name some key values that the culture around you stands for. What is your stance toward the orientation of our culture? Do you commit yourself to these values?

C. The importance of communication and language

"The Word became flesh and lived among us."
(John 1.14)

According to the first anthropological trait, you are a self for and through others. Secondly, you are a self because you take a stance in life. But your stance in life is not shaped by you alone. You are also part of a community that shares a common language. What you value, aspire to, plan for, dream of, hope for, work for was first made known to you as good and desirable by others in your life. Your parents, teachers and many others teach you what is right and wrong, naming it as either good or evil. Charles Taylor writes that we live in a world shaped by language. To answer the question, "Who am I?" you must recognize the community into which you were born, by whom you were raised, and whose language you speak.

> There is no way we could be inducted into personhood except by being initiated into a language. We first learn our languages of moral and spiritual discernment by being brought into an ongoing conversation by those who bring us up. The meanings that the key words first had for me are the meanings they have for *us*, that is, for me and my conversation partners together. …in talking about something you and I make it an object for us together…
>
> So I can learn what anger, love, anxiety, the aspiration to wholeness, etc., are only through my and others' experience of these being objects for us, in some common space.… Later, I may innovate. I may develop an original way of understanding myself and human life, at least one which is in sharp disagreement with my family and background. But the innovation can take place only from the base in our common language. Even as the most independent adult, there are moments when I cannot clarify what I feel until I talk about it with certain special partner(s), who know me, or have wisdom, or with whom I have an affinity…
>
> This is the sense in which one cannot be a self on one's own. I am a self only in relation to … those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition… A self exists only within what I call "webs of [conversation]"… The full definition of someone's identity thus usually involves not only his stand on moral or spiritual matters but also some reference to a defining community (Catholic/Québécois etc.).[4]

Language contains and shares with others common experiences and commitments. That is why a language can be meaningless to those who do not share that same experience. For example, when you tell an "inside joke" that draws on an experience shared only by your friends, anyone outside your circle doesn't "get it." In the same way, words like "Incarnation," "Trinity," "grace," "Eucharist" have a particular and definitive meaning for Catholics. Their

meaning is not easily understood by those who do not share our faith tradition because they do not have the Catholic experience that gives these terms their meaning. Knowing the dictionary definition is not the same as understanding a term's meaning within the Catholic tradition.

Guiding questions

1. How does language show that your stance in life grows out of conversations?
2. What do you mean when you say to someone, "I am a Catholic"?
3. Who have been your significant conversation partners? Who are they now?
4. What have you learned from them?
5. Who is your "defining community"?
6. Why is participating in the Christian community important to understanding the Scripture quotation: "The Word became flesh…"?

The Christian origin of the notion of "person"

There are two distinct meanings for the word "person" and both meanings have a religious background. They grew out of theological questions about the mystery of the Trinity. In Christian belief, God is a union of three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How can three selves be one? This revelation of God required a word that would allow us to express how three persons – called Father, Son and Spirit – are one God. Ancient Greek and Latin had no words to name these distinctions in God. Both languages had a word for "person" (*hypostasis* and *prosopon* in Greek and *persona* in Latin). But these words referred only to what one could see from the outside about a human being. They did not touch the inner core of the human. And so theologians reshaped the word "person." Gradually, out of the puzzling Christian revelation of "one God in three persons" came an enriched understanding of the human person.

One meaning of "person" came to be an individual who bears rights and responsibilities. To be a person is to be one of a kind, to be autonomous. No two persons are alike. To be a person is to be conscious and to act. (This is the notion of person that you read about in Chapter 2.) In an analogous sense, Father, Son and Spirit in God also are persons as singular and distinct from the other. The one is not the other.

But another meaning for person also emerged to express how, in the three distinct persons of the Trinity, there is unity. What binds the three persons of the Trinity together as one in God? The answer, theologians said, is love. God is love. Love pours itself out toward another. In God this breathing forth of love is a communion of love that is Father, Son and Spirit. This love generated the Son and breathed forth the Spirit so that there are three persons. At the same time, this love binds the three into a unity. For this reason the word "person" also came to mean this outpouring of love toward the other.

Because you are made in God's image, you are also made by and for love. This outpouring of love defines God: in God, three are one in a bond of love. To be made in the image of God is to have this outpouring of God's love inscribed in your very being. The other is implanted in you as part of your self. Human beings by their nature are social beings. Others are not an add-on. The other is not "my hell," as Sartre said. Human life is a web of relationships. You cannot do without the other. Essentially, "person" means "the self as relational." No wonder that loneliness is so painful. [5]

(Note: The concept of Trinity will be explored again in future chapters. See especially Chapter 5 and the prologue to the gospel of John which reveals the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.)

D. The importance of character and one's body

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God…?" (1 Corinthians 6.19)

To the previous three a fourth trait must be added. Not only do you become a self with others, not only do you need to stand somewhere and not only are you shaped by your response to others, you do so with your body. You might say that it is through your body that all of these human traits become possible. For this reason your actions too are embodied: they shape your character. This formation of character is the fourth trait of the moral self.

Building character

The word "character" refers to the way your actions, over time, tend to become fixed in your body. For example, think of how you might train for an athletic competition. By running, rowing or cycling three or four hours a day, you gradually increase your capacity to run, to row or to cycle as you develop muscle strength and endurance. Without the strain of trying to reach your potential – without the pain of reaching for the limit – your body would lose its competitive edge. However much you want to be the fastest, you must work with the constraints of your body. Your capacity to run depends on your body.

The same can be said of your choices in life. What training does to increase the body's capacity, so moral and ethical actions do to increase character. "Moral fibre" is something like muscle fibre – the more you exercise it, the stronger your character. By constantly repeating your actions, you create habits. As Ricoeur says,

> A habit is possible because the living person has the admirable power of changing himself through his acts. But by learning, the person affects himself… Thus there arises, through this continued affecting of myself, a kind of human nature… What is learned is acquired (a habit), and what is acquired is contracted… Habit fixes our tastes and aptitudes and shrinks our field of availability; the range of the possible narrows down; my life has taken shape.[6]

When you repeat a certain action, over time, the action becomes fixed; it takes root in you. Others will recognize this as one of your character traits. They will identify you as kind, helpful, cheery, or stubborn, argumentative, vain. Once these character traits take root, they are not easily changed. As a child, your character can develop in many different directions. But as you grow older this space narrows. You become more set in your ways – for good or for bad.

Read the following excerpt from the novel *Full Disclosure* by William Safire. It illustrates how your character, habits and orientation in life dispose you towards making a decision:

> The President stretched, smiled, and thought again about that wondrous, amorphous, always-capitalized mystery called The Decision-Making Process.

To be nobody-but-myself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make me everybody else – means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight and never stop fighting.

e.e. cummings

When had he decided to give up his presidency? Just now, as he was feeding the dog? …

The truth about big decisions, Ericson mused, was that they never marched through logical processes, staff systems, option papers, and yellow pads to a conclusion. No dramatic bottom lines, no Thurberian captains with their voices like thin ice breaking, announcing "We're going through!" The big ones were a matter of mental sets, predispositions, tendencies—taking a lifetime to determine—followed by the battering of circumstance, the search for a feeling of what was right—never concluded at some finite moment of conclusion, but in the recollection of having "known" what the decision would be some indeterminate time before. For weeks now, Ericson knew he had known he was ready to do what he had to do, if only…somebody could be induced to come up with a solution that the President could then put through his Decision-Making Process. That made his decision a willingness not to obstruct, rather than a decision to go ahead….

"I haven't decided yet," he cautioned the dog, who was moving the bowl around with his tongue but no longer making crunching sounds. "A decision is not a decision until it has to be made." Relieved, slightly euphoric, feeling admirably patriotic, Ericson moved to the main cabin to join the others for dinner.[7]

In this excerpt, we see the fictional President of the United States, Ericson, reflecting on a major decision that he has been called upon to make. Notice how his decision comes not from a conscious decision-making process. His decision arises from the depth of his character and life experience. In a sense, he knows what he has to do long before he has to decide.

The choices you make day after day are often the product of what you believe and value, and the habits you have formed over the years. The moral principles you learn also help to make up your character – that is to say, your character determines what you see, how you interpret what you see, and how you respond to what you see. With all of this at stake, how important is it that you pay attention to the formation of your moral character?

Guiding questions

1. If a number of people witness the same event, how likely is it that each person would report seeing something different about the same event? Why is that?
2. Richard Gula, a contemporary Catholic moral theologian writes, "Character is what results from the values we make our own. When a value has woven its way into the fabric of our being, we delight in doing what pertains to that value…."
   Do you agree? Give an example that supports your view.
3. Ricoeur writes, "Habit fixes our tastes and aptitudes and shrinks our field of availability; the range of the possible narrows down; my life has taken shape." How is the "narrowing down of possibilities" in life a good thing? Why?
4. The passage from the novel describes the thinking behind a decision that the President has to make. On the one hand, he says: "The big [decisions] were a matter of mental sets, predispositions, tendencies—taking a lifetime to determine—followed by the battering of circumstance, the search for a feeling of what was right—never concluded at some finite moment of conclusion, but in the recollection of having 'known' what the decision would be some indeterminate time before." And on the other hand, he says: "A decision is not a decision until it has to be made." Describe the interplay between the person's character that predisposes him or her to make a certain decision, and that person's judgment to make a choice.

E. The importance of conscience

"For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?" (Matthew 16.26)

Up to this point you have looked at several ways of understanding yourself as an ethical and moral being. You have seen how important the other person is to your identity, and at the role your commitments play in defining your character. To these we must add another anthropological trait: your conscience. Of what importance is your conscience?

Your conscience is more complex than it may at first appear. In Robert Bolt's *A Man For All Seasons*, Thomas More, Lord Chancellor in King Henry VIII's court, is visited in jail by his daughter, Margaret, who tries to persuade him to swear to the Act of Succession. Thomas More has been charged with treason for standing in defiance of the King of England on moral principle. If More were to endorse the King's wishes to marry Anne Boleyn, he would save his head but he would violate his conscience regarding the sacred vow of marriage. The dialogue may help to understand the notion of conscience.

MORE: You want me to swear to the Act of Succession?

MARGARET: "God more regards the thoughts of the heart than the words of the mouth." Or so you've always told me.

MORE: Yes.

MARGARET: Then say the words of the oath and in your heart think otherwise.

MORE: What is an oath then but words we say to God?

MARGARET: That's very neat.

MORE: Do you mean, it isn't true?

MARGARET: No, it's true.

MORE: Then it's a poor argument to call it "neat," Meg. When a man takes an oath, Meg, he's holding his own self in his own hands. Like water. (*He cups his hands*) And if he opens his fingers *then* – he needn't hope to find himself again. Some men aren't capable of this, but I'd be loath to think your father one of them.[8]

The Act of Succession, 1534

On March 23, 1534, Parliament passed the Act of Succession, vesting the succession of the English Crown in the children of King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. This act effectively set Princess Elizabeth first in line for the throne and declared Princess Mary a bastard. It was also proclaimed that subjects, if commanded, were to swear to an oath recognizing this Act as well as the King's supremacy. People who refused to take the oath, including Sir Thomas More, were charged with treason.

In April 1534, More refused to swear to the Act of Succession and the Oath of Supremacy, and was committed to the Tower of London on April 17. More was found guilty of treason and was beheaded on July 6, 1535. His final words on the scaffold were: "The King's good servant, but God's first." More was beatified in 1886 and canonized by the Catholic Church as a saint by Pope Pius XI in 1935.[9]

Sir Thomas More (1478–1535)

Conscience is the place where we hold our own selves in our hands. According to More, if we lose it, we need not hope to find ourselves again. The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) calls conscience a voice that calls us "to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil." This inner voice tell us "at the right moment: do this, shun that." The same document calls conscience a law inscribed in human hearts by God. It says our conscience is our most secret core and sanctuary where we are alone with God whose voice echoes in our depths. (#16)

Conscience in the teaching of the Church

This is the full text on conscience from the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* of Vatican II (a document that expresses the official teaching of the Church).

Dignity of Moral Conscience

16. Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells him inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. His dignity lies in observing this law, and by it he will be judged. (Cf. Romans 2.15-16) His conscience is man's most secret core, and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths. By conscience, in a wonderful way, that law is made known which is fulfilled in the love of God and of one's neighbour. (Cf. Matthew 22.37-40; Galatians 5.14) Through loyalty to conscience Christians are joined to other men in the search for truth and for the right solution to so many moral problems which arise both in the life of individuals and from social relationships. Hence, the more a correct conscience prevails, the more do persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and try to be guided by the objective standards of moral conduct. Yet it often happens that conscience goes astray through ignorance, which it is unable to avoid, without thereby losing it dignity. This cannot be said of the man who takes little trouble to find out what is true and good, or when conscience is by degrees almost blinded through the habit of committing sin.

The following explanations of conscience come from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, another source of the official teaching of the Church. Notice how paragraph #1776 quotes the definition of the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*.

1776 "Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment.… For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God.… His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths."

1777 Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil. It bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn, and it welcomes the commandments. When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.

1778 Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right. It is by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognizes the prescriptions of the divine law.

Conscience in contrast to Freud's concept of superego

As people develop a mature conscience, they generally move from the experience of rules and laws as being imposed by someone in authority – parents, police, teachers, priests, government – to directing their actions more from within. When you were very young, others told you what to do. As you mature, it is your responsibility to do what you consider to be right. You decide for yourself what ought to be done. This distinction between being self-directed and being other-directed makes the difference between a mature and an immature conscience. As a morally mature person, you must be able to make decisions that are your own, not someone else's. You will still listen to others and allow yourself to be guided by norms and commandments, but not without your own moral judgment and acceptance.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory helps to explain the distinction between conscience and superego. It is a useful distinction because when we confess our offences to God, it is healthy to understand what comes from our conscience and what from our superego. Conscience is not a feeling that something is right or wrong. It is not a feeling of guilt, although this *feeling* can be a signal to alert us that something is amiss. For example, conscience has little to do with the feeling of failure we experience when we light up a cigarette after having quit smoking. Conscience is not the fear of punishment we experience if we break our curfew. The moral theologian Richard Gula explains the distinction as follows:

> Psychologists of the Freudian school tell us that we have three structures to our personality: the *id* – the unconscious reservoir of instinctual drives largely dominated by the pleasure principle; the *ego* – the conscious structure which operates on the reality principle to mediate the forces of the id, the demands of society, and the reality of the physical world; and the *superego* – the ego of another superimposed on our own to serve as an internal censor to regulate our conduct by using guilt as its powerful weapon. The superego is like an attic in an old house. Instead of furniture, it stores all the "shoulds" and "have-tos" which we absorb in the process of growing up under the influence of authority figures, first our parents but later any other authority figures – teachers, police, boss, sisters, priests, pope, etc. Its powerful weapon of guilt springs forth automatically for simple faults as well as for more serious matter. The superego tells us we are good when we do what we are told to do, and it tells us we are bad and makes us feel guilty when we do not do what the authority over us tells us to do.
>
> To understand the superego we need to begin with childhood. As we develop through childhood, the need to be loved and approved is the basic need and drive. We fear punishment as children not for its physical pain only, but more because it represents a withdrawal of love. So we regulate our behaviour so as not to lose love and approval. We absorb the standards and regulations of our parents, or anyone who has authority over us, as a matter of self-protection. The authority figure takes up a place within us to become the source of commands and prohibitions.…
>
> A simplified way of thinking about the difference between superego and moral conscience is to distinguish between the "shoulds" or "have-tos" and the "wants" as the source of commands directing our behaviour. "Shoulds" and "have-tos" belong to someone else. "Wants" belong to us.… The commands of the superego which tell us what we "should" do come from the process of absorbing the regulations and restrictions of those who are the source of love and approval. We follow the commands of the superego out of the fear of losing love, or out of our need to be accepted and approved. The moral conscience, on the other hand, acts in love responding to the call to commit ourselves to value. The commands of the moral conscience come from the personal perception and appropriation of values which we discover in the stories or examples of persons we want to be like. The moral conscience is the key to responsible freedom or wanting to do what we do because we value what we are seeking.[10]

➤

In the stages of moral development the superego plays an important role. Your moral development and conscience began with the rules and regulations of those who play important roles in your life, such as your parents or caregivers, teachers, priests and others. Without them you would be rudderless. You need their instruction. And in a way, your superego probably never outlives its usefulness. Even as your conscience matures, the superego is not abolished. It is integrated. You integrate the wisdom of your past into your actions. This wisdom becomes stored as "the way things are done" and which you are expected to obey. In time these laws, rules and regulations should move ever further from being imposed from the outside to becoming personal choices. If in our earlier years we confess many of our "shoulds" to God, this will change as we mature morally.

"Conscience is a *radical experience of ourselves as moral agents*." Hence, every choice that we make, every commitment, every promise is also our choice between being authentic and inauthentic. As Gula says, "The morally mature adult is called to commit his or her freedom, not to submit it. As long as we do not direct our own activity, we are not yet free, morally mature persons."[11] It is the task of conscience to direct this process.

Three senses of conscience

Here is one way that a moral theologian has analyzed the notion of conscience as it is found in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* #16, quoted earlier on page 52. Timothy O'Connell identifies three related senses of the word "conscience":

1. Conscience as a capacity to recognize right and wrong

Here conscience is a *capacity* of the human person. All people in all cultures have a general awareness that some things are right and others are wrong. The fact that individuals and societies may disagree about what is right only helps to show that all people have this capacity to know the good. This capacity refers to your basic orientation toward the good. Conscience as a capacity defines the essential identity of the human. The terms sociopath and psychopath refer to persons who have no conscience.

2. Conscience as a process of moral reasoning

It is not enough to have a conscience or ability to choose the right and avoid evil. You need to search out in each situation what is the right thing to do. To act according to your conscience, you must seek to learn the facts, to learn what moral values are, to reason correctly in moral matters. You must seek to be educated about moral issues. Your conscience, in other words, must also be formed and informed. This is a lifelong process of learning "correct seeing and right thinking."[12] It means relying on the community for instruction rather than relying solely on yourself. You can draw on many sources to arrive at moral wisdom: personal experience, moral theologians, the sciences, and especially sacred Scripture and Church tradition (teachings found in papal documents, social encyclicals, pastoral letters, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

3. Conscience as a judgment

Your conscience is incomplete until you act on it. After examining all the factors, you still need to make a judgment and a decision and commitment to do what is right. This is conscience in the narrow sense of the term (particular concrete situations of daily living). This is the heart of conscience: you commit yourself to do

what you believe to be right and avoid what you believe to be wrong. In the words of Gula:

> I must always do what I believe to be right and avoid what I believe to be wrong. If a person truly believes in his or her heart (i.e., with one's whole person) that one line of action rather than another is God's objective call, then that line of action is no longer simply one option among many. It becomes the morally required line of action for that person to take, which is what we mean by being "bound to follow one's conscience." Conscience [as judgment] cannot be violated. It is what the Vatican Council called our "most secret core and sanctuary" where we are alone with God. [13]

Conscience as Capacity	Conscience as Process	Conscience as Judgment
Our capacity to know and do the good, and to avoid evil.	Knowing how to perceive accurately and to think correctly.	The concrete judgment and decision of what I must do in the situation based on my personal perception and grasp of values.
Our fundamental sense of value and of personal responsibility.	This is where moral disagreements and error, blindness and insight occur.	Conscience makes a moral decision "my own" and the moral action expressive of "me" by realizing and expressing my fundamental stance.
Our fundamental awareness that there is a right and a wrong.	The conscience must be formed and examined.	The decision is not simply about this or that object of choice, but also about being this or that sort of person.
	Formed in community, it draws upon many sources of moral wisdom in order to know what it means to be human in a truly moral way.	This is the conscience that I must obey to be true to myself.
	Seeks to know the truth, and to make it one's own.	This is our "secret core and sanctuary" where we are alone with God (*Gaudium et Spes* #16). All persons "[are] bound to follow [their] conscience faithfully in all [their] activity so that [they] may come to God.... [No one] must…be forced to act contrary to [their] conscience" (*Dignitatis humanae* #3).
	Searches for what is right through accurate perception, and a process of reflection and analysis.	

Chart adapted from Richard M. Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 132.

Reaching for the top

Steph realized that preparing for university required not only pulling down top marks in her courses, but also rounding up the finances to pay the tuition, residence fees, meal plans, and to purchase books.

Last year, a student in her school, Jason, had applied for a government scholarship that rewarded students' contributions to their community and school. Steph remembered reading a community newspaper article about Jason's scholarship, and how the article had praised Jason for his remarkable contributions to his community. She also knew that Jason's claim to having done so much was way overblown. Sure he was a great student, and yes he did do some volunteer work in the community, but it was nothing like what the newspaper reported. Jason had blown his own horn, and had

Through pride we are ever deceiving ourselves. But deep down below the surface of the average conscience a still, small voice says to us, "Something is out of tune."

Carl Jung

The person that loses their conscience has nothing left worth keeping.

Izaak Walton

I myself would wish neither; but if it were necessary either to do wrong or to suffer it, I should choose to suffer rather than to do wrong.

Socrates

tweaked the truth, and had been rewarded with a $2,500 scholarship that would be renewed for four years, as long as he maintained an 80% average or higher. The problem is, only one such scholarship was awarded per school. He had edged out several other equally, or more, deserving students.

Now Steph had the scholarship application in her hands, and she was preparing to tell the scholarship judges her story. Five other top students in her school were also applying for this scholarship. All had averages in the high 80s and 90s. Brad, the student with lowest grades of these five, had probably done more community service than all the other applicants combined. Steph figured that Brad totally deserved the scholarship money, but reasoned that she was deserving too, and had the higher marks besides. As she filled out her application and described her community and school contribution, Steph decided to stick to a true telling of her story – it was worthy in and of itself. Her integrity was not for sale.

Guiding questions

1. Identify how conscience as Capacity, Process, and Judgment were at play in this scenario. (See chart on page 55.)
2. Choose other similar instances from the life of a Grade 12 student, and analyze the role of conscience using the chart.
3. Find all three meanings of conscience in the excerpt from *Gaudium et Spes*, #16 on page 52.
4. Whenever you use the word conscience, do you mean capacity, process or judgment?

F. The development of one's conscience

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Matthew 7.13-14)

You might ask: "How is this 'moral self' formed? What must I do to be able to make the right judgments and decisions that so set the direction of my life?" This is a complex question with no simple answer. Subsequent chapters of *In Search of the Good* will return to this question in greater detail. There is no simple recipe for developing your conscience. Here, however, are some pointers to keep in mind for forming your conscience.

- Your conscience develops as you mature. Your sense of right and wrong, which began to be formed within your family, becomes increasingly refined with time.
- Your conscience develops as you take account of and follow the norms, values, virtues and commandments found in our Christian tradition as guidelines for your conscience.
- Your conscience helps you deal with your moral failures and sins. Through your faults you become aware of your weakness and fragility as a human being and of your need for support from others, especially from God.

- Your conscience develops as you participate in the Eucharist and prayer life of the Church.
- Your conscience develops as you grow in the virtue of humility, realizing that we are not the final arbiters of what is right and wrong. Our humility leads us to seek direction of the Church.

Summary

From psychology we learn that moral behaviour is developmental – that it is tied to intellectual, social and spiritual growth. We can learn what is morally correct or incorrect through family and friends, through life experiences, and through the time and culture in which we live. We also get our moral bearings through formal learning within institutions whose role it is to pass on a community's norms and the values that guide moral action. All these life experiences give rise to our character and a particular worldview and understanding of what is right or wrong. All this preparation, over years of living, comes into play when we are faced with a moral decision.

On August 6, 1945, an atomic bomb (similar to the one pictured above) was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The city was destroyed and over 70,000 were killed immediately from the effects of the blast. Three days later a second bomb destroyed Nagasaki.

Unfortunately, we sometimes lack the information we need to form right judgments or make good decisions, with painful results. Conscience can be *mal*formed through immoral actions, faulty reasoning, faulty value structures, and misinformation received from others in our society. We can think that we are doing what is right, when in fact we are doing something evil in order to affect a desired good. Or, we can find ourselves in a situation that makes it almost impossible to reason out the right course of action.

A well-formed conscience is well *in*formed. This means that you have a responsibility to be well informed, not only about the issues that challenge moral living, but also about the views of other moral thinkers. To whom can you go for help to inform your conscience? Are all norms and values held by your community good, or can some be destructive to the community's members? What do you do when you have to choose between two conflicting goods? (For example, lose weight or enjoy another

Symptoms of a misinformed conscience:

Rationalization: Stealing may be wrong sometimes, but large stores can afford it because they are making huge profits.

Trivialization: It's no big deal – everybody else does it.

Misinformation: My doctor told me that all teenage girls should take the birth control pill to prevent getting pregnant.

The end justifies the immoral means: I had to steal the chocolate bar – I didn't have any money and I hadn't eaten for 12 hours. I get sick if I don't eat.

Means to an end: By dropping a nuclear bomb to end the war, we'll end up saving lives.

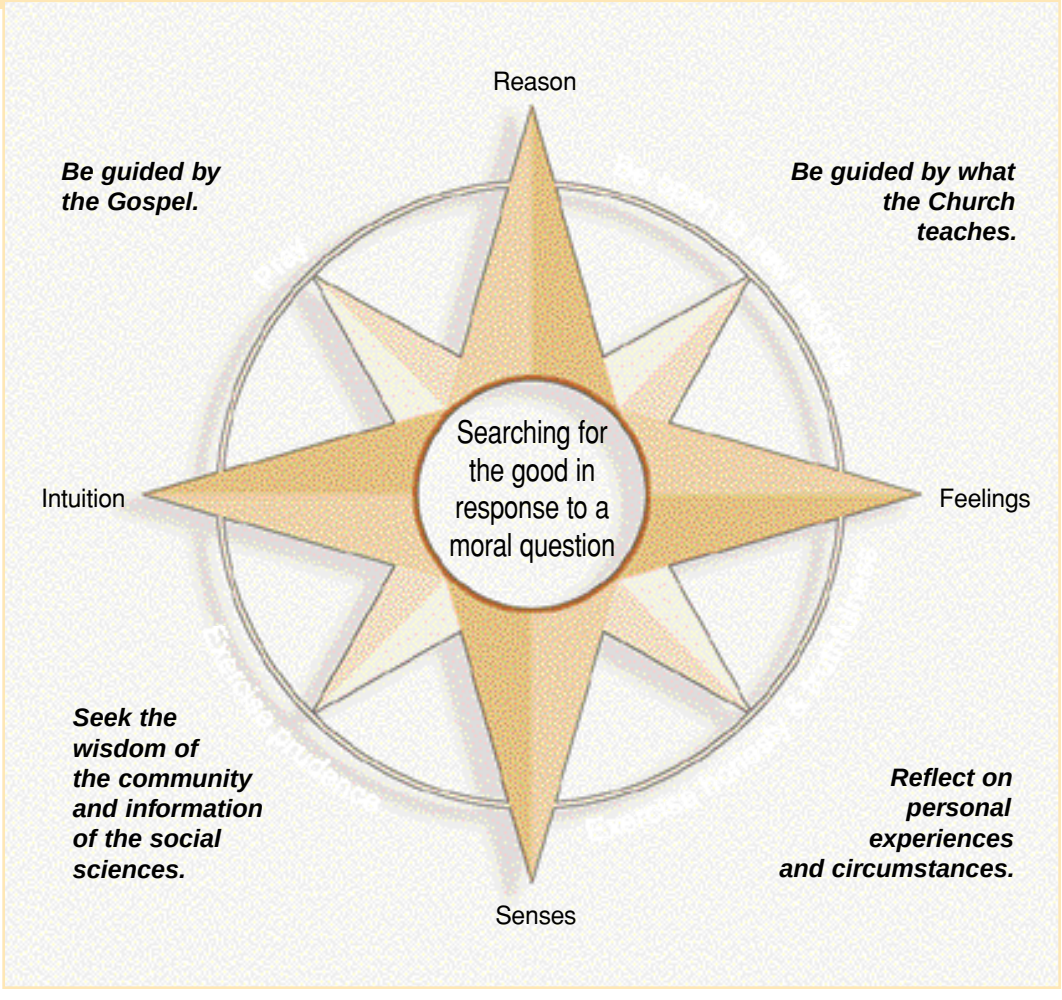
Difficult to reason: Having been kicked out of his home and finding himself with no place to go, a teen acts without thinking. He breaks into an empty home to keep warm when he could have asked for help from the police.

piece of cake.) All these questions confuse moral decision-making. The following diagram can guide you as you seek a truthful response to a moral question.

Informing your conscience is not something you do only when facing a moral issue or dilemma. Becoming a morally mature and responsible person entails an ongoing effort to form and inform your conscience. Your family, church, school, the arts, sports, music and other social institutions all seek to pass on a value system that upholds what they see as life giving – as the good. Part of this process lies also with you. You need to constantly seek to understand what it means to be fully human.

There are many ways to discover our humanity. Shared human experience has much to say to us about humanity, but only you can know your own reality first-hand. To better understand human reality, you need to seek out information from others. For moral questions, the greatest authority the Catholic community can draw on is the *magisterium* of the Church. *"For a Catholic to make a decision of conscience with indifference to, or in spite of, the* magisterium *would be forfeiting one's claim to be acting as a loyal Catholic and according to a properly informed conscience."*[14] Later in Chapter 6 you will come to know more about the structure of the *magisterium* and how the Church communicates Catholic teaching with authority.

Moral Decision-Making



Steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord

What a joy to find yourself on the right path in life. And what a joy to have committed wrong and to know that you are forgiven. Your conscience is a barometer of life, both in gladness and in sorrow. Listen carefully to the psalmist in Psalm 32; see how he describes the torment of a conscience that has gone astray and the joy of those whose conscience has been set free:

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
Happy are those to whom the LORD *imputes no*
iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of
summer.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to
the LORD*,"*
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer
to you; …
You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle,
else it will not stay near you.

Many are the torments of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD*.*
Be glad in the LORD *and rejoice, O righteous,*
and shout for joy, all you upright of heart.

Chapter review

Summary

- Other people are central to my search for the good. They make it possible for me to become myself, an individual in freedom.
- My commitments and moral stance make clear what is good and valuable for me, what I am for. My identity emerges from the direction I take in life.
- We live in a world shaped by language. What I value, hope for, and work for was first made known to me as good and desirable by others.
- Our moral character develops as our actions become habitual. Through habitual actions I become more set in my ways – for good or for bad. The choices that we make day after day are often the product of what we believe and value, and the habits we have formed over the years.
- Conscience is a law inscribed in human hearts. It is our most secret core and sanctuary where we are alone with God whose voice echoes in our depths.
- Conscience is our *capacity* to know and do the good; it is a *process* of moral reasoning; and it is the concrete *judgment* of what I should do.
- Our consciences develop as we mature; as we take account of norms, values, virtues and commandments; as we deal with our moral failings and sins.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Identify and explain the three senses of conscience.
2. Explain how a person's moral character is formed.

Thinking and inquiry

3. How do a person's character and conscience come into play in making a decision?
4. When you face a choice between two conflicting goods (e.g., Thomas More: upholding his principles vs. saving his life; or Allannah: developing her musical talent vs. helping her family), name the various factors that can come into play in your decision-making process.

Communication

5. Using the scripture quotes that introduce the six subsections of this chapter, create a presentation on the title of this chapter: "The self in search of the good." In consultation with your teacher, use whatever medium or format you think would be appropriate.
6. In an essay, story or poem, explore the good that is manifested in the values that shape us.

Application

7. Analyze a decision that you have had to make using the conscience chart on page 58.
8. In the introduction to this chapter (page 41), six aspects of the human person that are important for ethics are identified (i.e., The importance of others, etc.). Illustrate the truth of each of these with a brief story of an event from your life.

Glossary

commitment: Promise or pledge; resolve to carry something out in the future.

habit: A manner of behaving acquired by frequent repetition; prevailing disposition or character.

identity: The distinguishing character of a person. My identity is determined in large part by the moral stance that I take in life.

judgment: The concrete decision of what I must do in the situation based on my personal perception and grasp of values.

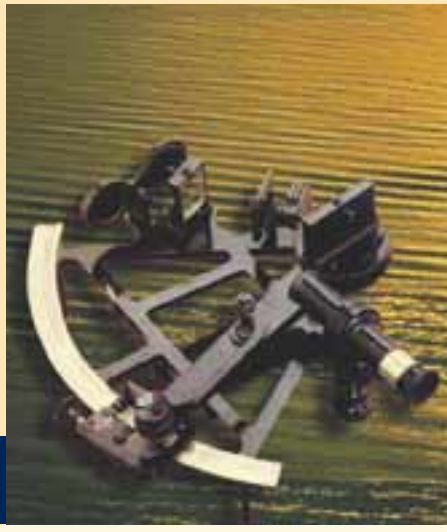
moral stance: My moral orientation or direction in life; what I "stand for."

narcissism: A disorder marked by self-absorption to the exclusion of others.

psychiatry: A branch of medicine that deals with mental, emotional and behavioural disorders.

psychology: The study of the mind, mental states, behaviour. Psychology tries to explain why people think, feel and behave as they do.

Trinity: "…the central mystery of the Christian faith and of Christian life. God alone can make it known to us by revealing himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit." *CCC* #261



Guided by the light of Revelation

UNIT II

You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD *am holy.*
Leviticus 20.26

Introduction

In the first unit we approached ethics from a general perspective, referring to theories and explaining the aim of ethics as you might find in ethics texts with or without a religious context. In this unit we turn to the ethical perspective we have inherited from our faith. What impact does faith in God have upon ethics?

For some people the link connecting ethics and religion is the Ten Commandments. Their understanding is that God dictated ten rules that we are compelled to obey or be severely punished. But this punitive understanding of religion and ethics is simplistic and inadequate for several reasons. First, it makes fear of punishment the motive for keeping the Ten Commandments. That is hardly worthy of God. A religion based on fear is dehumanizing and wrong. Second, this kind of a link between religion and ethics presents God in a way that is contrary to the way the Hebrew people and the followers of Jesus came to know and love God. God is not a distant lawgiver or a law enforcement officer or a merciless judge. So, what is an adequate and accurate understanding of the link between the Ten Commandments and ethics? This unit will present how ethics, especially the Ten Commandments, is understood in the Bible. What happens when God enters into the ethical debate?

Each of the three chapters in this unit will explore texts from the Bible that reveal God. As you read these Scripture texts, you will see that their primary purpose was not to dictate rules, but to reveal God. These texts answer in part the question of St. Augustine, "What do I love when I love You, my God?" They give no lengthy descriptions or theories about God. Rather, the books of the Bible tell stories about God and

people. They tell us that God is not easily named. And even when a name is given, you will see how, in a sense, it is "not given." We are warned never to use the name in vain. God is not a reality that we can easily understand. That is why God's Name is perhaps best understood through human actions rather than words. Here is the connection with ethics. The ethics of the Bible – both in the covenant with Moses as well as in the new covenant with Jesus – reveals a God passionately in love with human beings. We are talking about an ethics based on a relationship. The things we are prohibited from doing, such as stealing, murdering and giving false witness, reveal what God is concerned about in this relationship: an exclusive attachment to this God and a deep concern for our neighbour. Any action against our neighbour is at the same time an action against God. In our religious tradition, the ways in which we treat one another – with justice, kindness, mercy and love – reflect and give witness to the power of God's Name. It is God's Name and its power to change lives that frames our search for the good, and that we explore in greater detail in this unit.

In Israel such is the reverence for the holiness of God's Name, YHWH, that their sacred texts leave it unpronounceable. It is replaced with *Adonai*, meaning "my Lord" – a prayer form which Jewish rabbis in their commentaries often translate as "the Lord God – Holy is He."

The naming of God and ethics

CHAPTER 4

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your might.
Deuteronomy 6.5

Love with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might

In the first three chapters you explored the philosophical foundations of ethics. In this chapter you will get your ethical footing on the bedrock of the Catholic understanding of moral living. This understanding is simple yet profound: God loves you with a passion. This is revealed in the Bible, in God's covenant with Moses and in the new covenant with Jesus – God loves human beings passionately. Christian ethics is an ethics based on this relationship. In this chapter you will read stories that are probably familiar to you: stories of Moses and stories of the prophets. Hear again what God is revealing to you through these stories. Now that you know what people like Aristotle, Kant and Levinas say about ethics and the human search for the good, listen again to the story of Moses, asking what this adds to what you have been learning from the philosophical tradition.

Henri J. M. Nouwen (1932–1996), a priest from Holland, was an influential teacher and spiritual writer. During the last ten years of his life he lived with physically and mentally challenged people at L'Arche Daybreak community in Toronto.

A word about revelation

Has God spoken to you lately? God is breaking in and speaking to you every day of your life. In Mark 4.9, Jesus says, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" God wants to be known, and reveals Himself in ways too innumerable to count. Do you have ears to hear? Do you have eyes to see? Do you have the heart and mind to understand?

> The spiritual life is a life in which you gradually learn to listen to a voice … that says, "You are the beloved and on you my favour rests." ... It is not a very loud voice because it is an intimate voice. It comes from a very deep place. It is soft and gentle. I want you to gradually hear that voice. We both have to hear that voice and to claim for ourselves that that voice speaks the truth, our truth. It tells us who we are. That is where the spiritual life starts – by claiming the voice that calls us the beloved.
>
> Henri J. M. Nouwen[1]

God's voice does not come to us surrounded by thunder and lightning, or in shafts of light. God speaks to us

Focus your learning

Cognitive

How does God's self-revelation to Moses and the prophets call the people of Israel into a new way of living?

Practical

How are we to respond to the revelation of God's commitment to us in the covenant?

Affective

How does being touched by God change the way you understand yourself and influence the way you choose to live?

Key terms in this chapter

call
covenant
encounter
Passover
prophet
Revelation
self-revelation
sin
vocation

Key thinkers

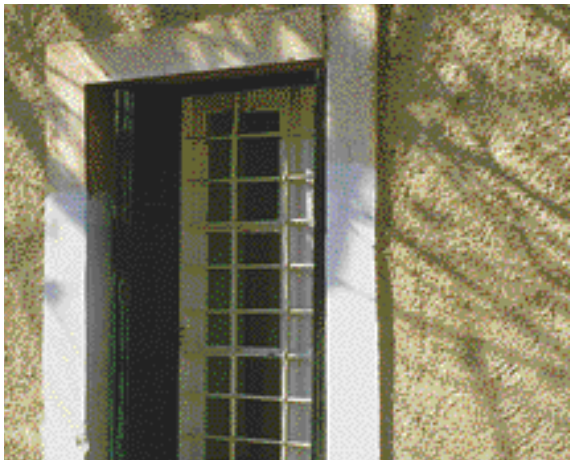
Moses
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
Henri J. M. Nouwen
C. S. Lewis

in the midst of everyday life. C.S. Lewis (1898–1963), the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a popular children's classic, has left us an account of such an experience in his life.

> It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me; … "enormous bliss" … comes somewhere near it. It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but desire for what? …before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased. It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison.[2]

One might expect a 58-year-old professor to be able to tell in greater detail of what happened to him. He can recount the precise place and time of his experience. But when he tries to write about what God has done to him, he comes up short. Later in the book, *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis returns to this "odd thing" that happened to him:

> The odd thing was that before God closed in on me, I was in fact offered what now appears a moment of wholly free choice. …I was going up Headington Hill on top of a bus. Without words and (I think) almost without images, a fact about myself was somehow present to me. I became aware that I was holding something at bay, or shutting something out. Or, if you like, that I was wearing some stiff clothing, like corsets, or even a suit of armour, as if I were a lobster. I felt myself being, there and then, given a free choice. I could open the door or keep it shut; I could unbuckle the armour or keep it on. Neither choice was presented as a duty; no threat or promise was attached to either, though I know that to open the door or to take off the corset meant the incalculable. The choice appeared to be momentous but it was also strangely unemotional. I was moved by no desires or fears. In a sense I was not moved by anything. I chose to open, unbuckle, to loosen the rein. I say "I chose," yet it did not really seem possible to do the opposite. On the other hand, I was aware of no motives. You could argue that I was not a free agent, but I am more inclined to think that this came nearer to being a perfectly free act than most that I have ever done. Necessity may not be the opposite of freedom, and perhaps a man is most free when, instead of producing motives, he could only say "I am what I do."
>
> Then came the repercussion on the imaginative level. I felt as if I were a man of snow at long last beginning to melt. The melting was starting in my back – drip-drip and presently trickle-trickle. I rather disliked the feeling.[3]



C.S. Lewis does not say much about the God who is closing in on him. He can describe only what has happened to him: he comes "unstuck." He can express it no better than with images of stiffness and of closed doors, of being enclosed in body-armour or of being a snowman, all of which this experience of God loosens, opens up, unbuckles and melts. These are powerful images of what has been held open to him: perfect freedom. The "I" who was hemmed in on all sides is released. The revelation of God brings with it the gift of a new "I." The brief moment in which his new self experiences its promise, its fulfillment, its mystery, is

at the same time an experience of the hidden God. Even though he cannot but respond with joy to this promise held out to the self, he is nonetheless perfectly free. He makes a momentous discovery: "I am what I do." Such moments are the times when we are most ourselves.

God encounters us in a privileged way through the sacred Scriptures. To hear what God is saying to us through the sacred Scriptures, we need to resist our culture's tendency to be sceptical and take the time to really listen. We must open ourselves to an encounter with a reality that is not of our own making. The biblical world is different from our own and its perspective on life comes from a different culture. We call the Bible the Word of God because through its words God enters into our hearing and experience. With this in mind we turn to the unique experience of Moses and the importance of his story for our faith and ethical life.

Guiding questions

1. What happened to C.S. Lewis in this experience?
2. Why do you think that C.S. Lewis has such a hard time putting the experience into words?
3. How did this encounter with God begin to change Lewis?
4. Henri Nouwen speaks of the spiritual life as a life in which you gradually learn to listen to a voice. How do you see this beginning to happen in C.S. Lewis's account?

The Word of God

"In the Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, 'but as what it really is, the word of God.' 'In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them.'

"Still, the Christian faith is not a 'religion of the book.' Christianity is the religion of the 'Word' of God, a word which is 'not a written and mute word, but the Word which is incarnate and living.' If the Scriptures are not to remain a dead letter, Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must, through the Holy Spirit, 'open [our] minds to understand the Scriptures.'"

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #104, 108

Moses

Moses is honoured as no other in the Jewish tradition. He is the leader, the founding father of the Israelites, *the* prophet, *the* lawgiver. As the Book of Deuteronomy says of him: "Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face." (34.10)

It is impossible to give historical dates for Moses. All that we know of him comes to us from the Bible. He was born in Egypt to unnamed parents from the priestly tribe of Levi. His mother's quick thinking saved his life. Defying the decree of the Egyptian Pharaoh to kill all boys by drowning them in the Nile, she first hid him and then tried to save him by placing him in a watertight container in the Nile River in a place where she must have known that the Pharaoh's daughter bathed. There Pharaoh's daughter found him: hence his name, which means "because I drew him out of water" – although Moses in Egyptian means "is born."

We are told of two siblings: Aaron, Moses' older brother; and Miriam, his sister. We are told nothing, however, about his early life. The story presumes that Moses' mother nursed him and that he grew up in the abundance and luxury of the Pharaoh's house. And so it was that the future liberator of the Israelites grew up in the very house that he would later confront.

Although Moses grew up in Pharaoh's household, he obviously did not forget his ancestry. He so identified with his enslaved people – the story calls them his brothers – that one day, in anger, trying to protect a fellow Hebrew from certain death, he kills an Egyptian overseer. His position offers him no protection, and he is forced to flee. He ends up in Midian where, because of his gallantry helping some women to water their herd, he is welcomed into the household of Jethro, a Midian priest. He marries one of Jethro's daughters, Zipporah, and with her he has two children, Gershom and Eliezer.

The revelation of the Name of God: The call of Moses

As Chapter 3 of the Book of Exodus tells it, Moses encounters God while he is keeping sheep for his father-in-law, Jethro:

> He led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.
>
> Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey…. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."
>
> But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what

shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, has sent me to you':

> This is my name forever,
> And this my title for all generations."
> (Exodus 3.1-15)

The Name of God

Moses was given a new name for God. In Hebrew the name reads *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehjeh*. Translated it can be read as: "I am who am," "I am who is," "I am who I shall be," or "I shall be who I am." Much has been read into this name. Some have taken this as a refusal to give a name in the very giving of a name. God seems to refuse to entrust Self into the hands of people and yet at the same time does. Others have understood the name as a promise: *I will show you who I am in my being with you, or I will be with you tomorrow as I have been up to now*.[4]

Moses' mission

Moses' mission is to speak. God calls Moses to be a prophet, an intermediary between God and people. In the Bible he is the first to receive this mission to speak. As other prophets would do afterwards, Moses tries to convince God that he is the wrong person:

> "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and will teach you what you shall do. He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him." (Exodus 4.10-16)

Moses is to serve as the mouth of God to Aaron and to the people. He is to tell them that he has been sent to them by the God of their ancestors to bring them to the mountain of the Lord in the power of the holy Name of YHWH.

Bringing the people to the holy mountain would become a test of power between the Pharaoh and God. To go to the mountain would signify a shift of service for the people: from slavery under Pharaoh to the service of YHWH, the God who set them free. Moses and Aaron first go to the people to try to convince them that God has sent them. They are successful; the people believe them, at first. But later, when the Egyptians – in response to the demands of Moses and Aaron – increase the workload of the Hebrews, they begin to doubt that God will be able to liberate them from the powerful Egyptians. At first Moses and Aaron cannot convince the Pharaoh to let the people go, forcing God to use a heavy hand. The story of this contest of wills is detailed in the Book of Exodus (5–12). At long last, the night comes

The holy Name is written as: YHWH. The vowels are not given. In worship the name YHWH was replaced with *Adonai*: "my Lord." The name was pronounced in temple worship only once a year by the High Priest.

For we are all little children, playing with alphabet blocks and trying endlessly to spell out the Ineffable Name.

Tennessee Williams

when Israel can eat the Passover meal and leave the land of their oppression. Even though the Egyptians try once more to force them back to work, the Israelites make a miraculous escape through the sea and finally arrive at the mountain of the Lord.

Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19)

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness of Sinai. They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possessions out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."

So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. The people all answered as one: "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do." Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after."

When Moses had told the words of the people to the LORD, the LORD said to Moses: "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and prepare for the third day, because on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Be careful not to go up the mountain or to touch the edge of it. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch them, but they shall be stoned or shot with arrows; whether animal or human being, they shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain." So Moses went down from the mountain to the people. He consecrated the people, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, "Prepare for the third day; do not go near a woman."

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast

of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. When the LORD descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the LORD summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people not to break through to the LORD to look; otherwise many of them will perish. Even the priests who approach the LORD must consecrate themselves or the LORD will break out against them." Moses said to the LORD, "The people are not permitted to come up to Mount Sinai; for you yourself warned us, saying, 'Set limits around the mountain and keep it holy.'" The LORD said to him, "Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you; but do not let either the priests or the people break through to come up to the LORD; otherwise he will break out against them." So Moses went down to the people and told them.

The Decalogue (Exodus 20)

Then God spoke all these words:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.

Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin." Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

The Ten Commandments

The Decalogue (literally translated as Ten Words, and known within our tradition as the Ten Commandments) comes to us in two versions. You have already read Exodus 20, which contains the longer version. In the Book of Deuteronomy (5.6-21) we find a shorter version. The Ten Commandments have been adapted – interpreted – again in the formula traditionally found in catechetical texts. We say interpreted, because today Christians interpret them in light of their faith in Jesus Christ. So, for instance, "Keeping holy the Lord's day" in the Christian context refers not to the Sabbath but to the first day of the week: Sunday, the day of the Resurrection. See these three versions side-by-side below.

The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20.2-17	**Deuteronomy 5.6-21**	**A Traditional Catechetical Formula**
I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.	I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.	1. I am the LORD your God:
You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.	You shall have no other gods before me…	you shall not have strange gods before me.

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.	You shall not take the name of the LORD and your God in vain:…	2. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.	Observe the sabbath day, to keep it holy…	3. Remember to keep holy the LORD's Day.
Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you.	Honour your father and your mother…	4. Honour your father and your mother.
You shall not kill.	You shall not kill.	5. You shall not kill.
You shall not commit adultery.	Neither shall you commit adultery.	6. You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.	Neither shall you steal.	7. You shall not steal.
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.	Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbour.	8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbour's.	Neither shall you covet your neighbour's wife… You shall not desire… anything that is your neighbour's.	9. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife. 10. You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.

In the Ten Commandments, God ("I am the LORD") is not speaking to the Jews in general. The Words are addressed to each of us individually. The "you" of the commandment is in the second person singular because each of us receives this revelation personally. (See CCC, #2063)

The Ten Commandments state what God expects of the people bound by the covenant (see the box "Covenant: Its origins" and the section beginning on page 74, "Life as a covenant with YHWH"). In the Gospel of Matthew (19.16-22) a young person asks Jesus, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus begins by pointing out the primary good that encompasses all. He tells the young man "There is only one who is good," referring, of course, to God. The Good to be sought above all is God. He then tells him: "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." When, at another time, Jesus is asked "Which commandment in the Law is the greatest?" he answers: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22.37-44) Jesus' summary corresponds to the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written, as Exodus 31.18 insists, "with the finger of God." The first three contain the words how to honour and love God; the last seven concern the human community. Jesus says that the first – to love God – is like the second – to love your neighbour.

The Ten Commandments make sense only in the context of the covenant. They are not just rules and commandments on their own. They state the type of relationship to which Israel is privileged. At times this covenant is described using the language of adoption. So we read in Psalm 2, "You are my son." Israel is the Lord's adopted son. That is why the first commandment directs Israel to remember who it is with whom they have entered into a covenant: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." It is none other than your liberator God, the one that brought you "out of the house of slavery." The second tablet of the Decalogue describes this relationship with God in our relation to the other. Our relation to others is part of our worship of God. The covenant with God is at the same time a covenant with our neighbour. Our turning to the Lord our God is expressed as a responsibility to our neighbour.

The covenant presents Israel as a free people, set free by God's liberating action. Why did God choose them? Because in their misery in Egypt, they called on God. Their only claim was the Lord's promise to Abraham and Sarah. It is this covenant that Israel entered freely: "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient" (Exodus 24.7).

Covenant: Its origins

To understand how covenants work, we need to look at their origins. The ancient Hittites were a powerful people who lived in Asia Minor between 2000 and 1200 BC. Covenants were treaties between a sovereign nation and a vassal nation. They exhibited five traits:

1. The preamble
The treaty begins with the name, the titles and attributes of the Great Hittite King and his genealogy.

2. The historical prologue
The Great King then gives a historical overview that describes the previous relations between the two contractors. It recounts the many benefits the sovereign has bestowed upon the vassal. The prologue forms an essential part of the covenant. There can be many variations depending on the circumstances at the time of entry into the treaty. For example, the sovereign might point out how he has come to the vassal's aid when he was threatened by an enemy attack.

3. The submission
The submission states what the Great King expects from the vassal. This submission often includes a fundamental declaration on the future relations of the partners. It consists in a request of loyalty. This aspect of

the submission is expressed frequently by the formula: "With my friend, be a friend! With my enemy, be an enemy!" Often at this point the submission details certain conditions that must be met, for example, taxes to be paid, prisoners to be released, etc.

4. The witnesses
Every legal document requires witnesses. This is also the case with treaties. In this case, the witnesses are the gods of the two partners, but also the deified elements of nature: the mountains, the rivers, the sea, the heavens and the earth.

5. The blessings and curses
The treaty tells what will happen if the vassal remains faithful or is unfaithful to the demands of the treaty.

The covenant at Sinai in Chapter 19 (3-8) of the Book of Exodus displays these traits clearly. It gives a prologue that recalls the Israelite's liberation from Egypt: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians…" This is followed by the submission: "Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant…" It ends with a blessing contingent on the conditions set in the submission: "You shall be my treasured possession … you shall be for me a priestly people…" Even the traditional formula "With my friend be a friend, with my enemy an enemy" is found in Exodus 23.22: "I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes."[5]

While the covenant on Sinai displays similarities with the other covenants found among contemporary cultures, it is also far greater than these contractual agreements. God's covenant is a bond of love, calling us in our freedom to respond in love. God's commitment to us is founded in love, and God's commitment is forever.

What's in a name?

When someone asks, "Who are you?" you usually give your name. In a way, you are your name, your identity inextricably linked to the name your parents gave you at birth.

As we saw in the burning bush story, Moses is given a new name for God: YHWH: *I shall be (for you) who I am; I am there, beside you, and I shall be there as the God who helps and saves*. The Name reveals God in what God will do for others. As we explore the Book of Exodus, we will begin to understand the power of this Name.

First, the Name has consequences for Moses. His encounter with the Name changes his life radically. God gives the Name as part of the mission of Moses, as the One on whose behalf Moses is being sent to the Israelites and the Pharaoh. God's Name is not merely a neutral piece of information; the Name has the power to liberate Moses and his people. When the Lord calls out of the bush: "Moses, Moses!" Moses responds with "Here I am." The emphasis of the response "Here I am" does not lie upon the "here" but upon the "I." Moses is in effect saying: "*I* am at your service. *I* am yours." In this exchange with God, Moses is totally claimed. The Holy One, the "I AM," is echoed in Moses' response to his call: "Here I am." Moses' vocation, his call, now defines who he has become – a prophet. As a prophet, his new identity gives witness to, or reveals, the meaning of the Name. The Name gives us information about God, because we can see what Moses does in response to the Name.

Second, YHWH is a Name with power. The Name changes history. After all, despite the Pharaoh's refusal, Israel comes to the mountain. A slave people become a nation by the power of the Name. And, like Moses, the nation of Israel is given a vocation. At Sinai, the people respond "Here I am." Like Moses, the people of Israel in their subsequent history are forever bound to reveal the Name. There can be no Israel without YHWH. The Name of God is revealed in what happens to this people.

In some call stories the one who is called receives a new name to signify a new identity. So Abram becomes Abraham. Abraham's wife Sarai becomes Sarah. Jacob (who in wrestling with God is refused his request for God's Name) becomes Israel. In the New Testament, Simon becomes Peter.

Third, the Name results in a new way of living. The revelation of the Name is an ethical event. One of the principal results of the encounter between Moses and God is the gift of the Ten Words. The reason for keeping these commandments is straightforward: "For I am YHWH, your God." The covenant between God and the people is an ethical bond that says, in effect: You must do this "for I am YHWH, your God." The Ten Words are for this reason a legal and ethical commentary on the divine Name. The Name is not something we can understand through knowledge. It is, however, something that approaches our understanding when we act ethically toward the Other. Recalling Levinas's theory of ethics (recall Chapter 1), one could say that the Good engenders in us the desire to be responsible for the Other. It is in obeying these Ten Words that we give witness to God. God is so much more than what we can think and do. All we can do is to be agents of God's nearness by acting out of responsibility for the Other. In this way we respond to the covenant.

Fourth, the Name is a source of judgment. The revelation of the Name provokes a decision from those who hear it. The Name is not only a blessing; it can also be a curse. For Egypt the Name became a curse, as it was at times for Israel when it failed to abide by this covenant. The prophets who acted as spokespersons for God later in Israel's history made the people aware of the repercussions for breaching the covenant and neglecting their identity as God's people. Later in this chapter you will read more about what happens when we break the covenant.

Life as a covenant with YHWH

The Book of Exodus tells the story of how the people of Israel come to understand themselves as God's people, as God's adopted sons and daughters. Their story becomes our story, too. We too understand ourselves as people of the covenant in continuity with the Jewish people. When God chooses them, God's choice – mirrored in Israel's choice – is addressed to all nations. Today the Ten Commandments still describe this covenant with God, making us responsible for others.

As he prays, this Jewish man wears the *talit* (prayer shawl). It is based on Numbers 15.37-41: "The LORD said to Moses: Speak to the Israelites, and tell them to make fringes on the corners of their garments... so that, when you see it, you will remember all the commandments..."

There are other stories in the Bible that have this same universal significance, such as the stories of creation; of the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel's faith: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekkah, Jacob (who becomes Israel) and Leah and Rachel; and the stories of Israel's time in the desert under Moses' leadership. When the Church wants to tell the origin of our story, as it does each year in its most solemn feast of Easter, it recalls these stories, each of which takes place because of God's initiative: the story of creation (Genesis 1 – 2.4), the story of the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22.1-18) and the story of Israel's liberation from Egypt (Exodus 14.15-31, 15.20). They are our stories because they tell us who we are.

These stories testify that for each one of us, as for Israel, life at its very core is about a relationship with God. We are not meant to be alone or isolated in a shell. In our very being we are oriented towards another. As the second creation story states: "It is not good that *Adamah* – the man – should be alone." (Genesis 2.18) This desire for the other is inextricably connected with our relation to God. The story of Abraham and Sarah tells it well. Abraham was to begin a new chapter in the story of humanity: in him all nations were to be blessed. It is a story of faith and trust in God. Abraham leaves his homeland in blind faith based on God's promise of a new land and offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven. He trusts God. Even when in old age he and Sarah still do not have a son, even when the word of God directs him to sacrifice his only son, he trusts that God will provide. This steadfast relationship between God and Abraham receives the name "covenant." To the people of the ancient Near-East, this word "covenant" expresses the most solemn and unbreakable of bonds.

Guiding questions

1. "Life at its very core is a relationship with God." What does this statement mean to you? Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
2. How is the story of Israel as told in these passages also our story?

The covenant with Moses

When Moses encounters God in the burning bush, God recalls the covenant made with Abraham. "I am the God of Abraham," the Voice says. Because of the promise to Abraham, God has a special care for Abraham's descendants. The enslavement of the Hebrews in Egypt touches God. "I have heard their cry … I know their sufferings … I have come down to deliver them." (Exodus 3.7-8) There is a bond of love and compassion between God and these descendants of Abraham. God cannot but be moved by their plight. And so YHWH, in remembering Abraham, makes another covenant – this time on Mount Sinai with the people of Israel. It is not Israel who searches out God; it is God who searches for Israel's heart. From this point, Israel understands itself in terms of this bond between God and itself: the covenant becomes Israel's identity. When Israel forgets or ignores this covenant, Israel is lost. As Christians we have inherited this self-understanding as a people of the covenant. For us, this covenant is renewed even more powerfully in Jesus. Our identity is rooted in God through our relationship – a covenant – with Jesus Christ.

Guiding questions

1. How did God approach Moses?
2. What did God reveal to Moses?
3. What mission did Moses receive?
4. How did Moses respond?
5. How did this revelation of God change Moses' life?
6. How did this revelation of God change the lives of the people that Moses touched?

From Moses, the first prophet, to other prophets

Moses is not the only person called by God to perform a specific mission. Israel's history is filled with prophets – messengers, or spokespersons, for God. When God calls them, they all receive new identities. The summons transforms them. From the moment of his call, Moses becomes a prophet. His call from God defines his vocation, and he is thereafter identified with this vocation. Like Moses, you also have a vocation, and your vocation identifies who you are. Your vocation touches you at the point where you are most yourself. For example, perhaps you can think of a teacher who is a teacher to the bone. For this person, teaching is not just a means of bringing home a paycheque, it is a vocation. This person's identity is expressed through teaching. She or he *is* a teacher.

For the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea, the experience of God's call shaped their lives. As you read their stories, you will come to see what intense turmoil this call caused in their lives. Each of them is shaped by their experience of God in the call. The times in which they lived were times of crisis: for Moses it was the crisis of captivity in Egypt; for Isaiah it was the crisis of the threatening destruction of Jerusalem and the temple; for Second Isaiah it was the crisis of faith in the time of the exile; for Ezekiel it was the cultural crisis arising from the loss of the land, the temple, kings, true prophets and language during the exile. These prophets were spokespersons and mediators between God and the people when everything seemed to be at stake. You will explore now the stories of God's calling of three prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

The structure of a call story

The call stories of Gideon (Judges 6.11-17), Moses (Exodus 3.1-12), Jeremiah (1.4-10), Isaiah (Isaiah 6.1-13), Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40.1-11) and Ezekiel (1.1–3.15) all follow a similar pattern of six episodes:

1. Confrontation with God

It begins with an encounter with God. Each encounter is different. For Moses it takes place in the burning bush. For Isaiah it is a dramatic vision of God in the temple. For Ezekiel it is a vision of the "chariot" of YHWH and the scroll that he is told to eat. In each case, we see the immense disproportion between God and the one being called. It is the All-Holy that sends them on their mission, calling them away from their homes and ordinary preoccupations. The call totally uproots their lives. Amos is taken from his flock, as is Moses, who "was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro."

2. Introductory speech

It is God who speaks first. Before the call, God's makes a self-announcement.

- "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," God says to Moses (Exodus 3.6).
- "The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior," the angel of the Lord says to Gideon (Judges 6.12).

- "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations," the word of the Lord says to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1.5).

At the heart of each call is an assurance from the Lord – a promise of "God with you." As we hear in Ezekiel, "And the hand of the LORD was on him there." (1.3)

3. Imparting of a mission

The prominent phrase in these call stories is, "I send you…" Moses is told, "I will send you to Pharaoh…" (Exodus 3.10). In Isaiah the mission is preceded by a request: "'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me.' And he said, "Go and say to this people'" (Isaiah 6.8-9). When Isaiah says, "Here am I" he puts his whole identity on the line. "Here am I, at your service!" Isaiah takes on the identity and mission of "prophet."

4. Objection by the prophet-to-be

"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" asks Moses even though earlier he had said, "Here I am." When he is told that he is to be a messenger and a spokesperson, he objects again: "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." (Exodus 4.10) Jeremiah offers a similar objection: "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." (Jeremiah 1.6) Isaiah too – despite his earlier exuberant "Here am I, send me!" – soon realizes the burden of unhappiness and condemnation that he had taken upon himself, and mutters, "How long, O Lord?" Ezekiel does not object. He is overwhelmed. His objection is expressed in a resentful silence: "The spirit lifted me up and bore me away: I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the LORD being strong upon me." (3.14) The prophets are strongly aware that their mission to the people will set them apart from the people. That is their burden.

5. Reassurance by God

God reassures the prophets as they receive their mission. To Jeremiah the Lord says, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.' Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth." (Jeremiah 1.7-9) "I will be with you," "Go, I am with you"; "I will open your mouth." The word that the prophets are to speak is God's word. The prophet's word is taken over by the Lord's word.

6. The sign

The sign is not always clear. Moses is given a sign: "And this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." (Exodus 3.12) The sign that Isaiah is given is devastating: "Until the cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; until the LORD sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land" (Isaiah 6.11). Isaiah's sign is the destruction of the land and the people.[6]

The call of Isaiah (Isaiah 6.1-13)

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" And he said, "Go and say to this people:

'Keep listening, but do not comprehend;
keep looking, but do not understand.'
Make the mind of this people dull,
and stop their ears,
and shut their eyes,
so that they may not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and comprehend with their minds,
and turn and be healed."

Then I said, "How long, O Lord?"
And he said:
"Until cities lie waste with inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is utterly desolate;
until the LORD sends everyone far away,
and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.
Even if a tenth part remain in it,
it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak
whose stump remains standing when it is felled."
The holy seed is its stump.

The call of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1.4-10)

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,
"Before I formed you in the womb
I knew you,
and before you were born
I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."
But the LORD said to me,
"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.
Do not be afraid of them,
For I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD."

Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,
"Now I have put my words in your mouth.
See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant."

The call of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1.1 – 3.15)

In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiled by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. On the fifth day of the month, the word of the LORD came to the priest Ezekiel, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was on him there.

As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber. In the middle of it was something like four living creatures. This was their appearance: they were of human form. Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: their wings touched one another; each of them moved straight ahead, without turning as they moved. As for the appearance of their faces: the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and face of an eagle; such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. Each moved straight ahead; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. In the middle of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures;

the fire was bright, and lightning issued from the fire. The living creatures darted to and fro, like a flash of lightning.

As I look at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them. As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl; and the four had the same form, their construction being something like a wheel within a wheel. When they moved, they moved in any of the four directions without veering as they moved. Their rims were tall and awesome, for the rims of all four were full of eyes all around. When the living creatures moved, the wheels moved beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. Wherever the spirit would go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When they moved, the others moved; when they stopped, the others stopped; and when they rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

Over the heads of the living creatures there was something like a dome, shining like crystal, spread out above their heads. Under the dome their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another; and each of the creatures had two wings covering its body. When they moved, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of mighty waters, like the thunder of the almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army; when they stopped, they let down their wings. And there came a voice from above the dome over their heads; and when they stopped they let down their wings.

And above the dome over their heads there was something like a throne, in appearance like sapphire, and seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form. Upward from what appeared like the loins I saw something like gleaming amber, something that looked like fire enclosed all around; and downward from what looked like the loins I saw something that looked like fire, and there was a splendour all around. Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendour all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.

When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of someone speaking.

He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD." Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them. And you, O mortal, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions; do not

Since the messages of biblical prophets were initially produced and stored on scrolls, visual representations of prophets often show the figures with scrolls in their hands. This illustration of a medieval sculpture shows Jeremiah with a scroll containing his message.

be afraid of their words, and do not be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear; for they are a rebellious house.

But you, mortal, hear what I say to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you. I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

He said to me, O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. He said to me, mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.

He said to me: Mortal, go to the house of Israel, and speak my very words to them. For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel – not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you. But the house of Israel will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me; because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. See, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their foreheads. Like the hardest stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not fear them or be dismayed by their looks, for they are a rebellious house. He said to me: Mortal, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart and hear with your ears; then go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them. Say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD"; whether they hear or refuse to hear.

Then the spirit lifted me up, and as the glory of the LORD rose from its place, I heard behind me the sound of loud rumbling; it was the sound of the wings of the living creatures brushing against one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, that sounded like a loud rumbling. The spirit lifted me up and bore me away; I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me. I came to the exiles at Telabib. And I sat there among them, stunned, for seven days.

Prophets of judgment

The prophetic call stories are poignant and gripping, leaving us, like Ezekiel, stunned. Their mission is a devastating mission. To be told, as was Jeremiah, "See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" is to truly set one apart, to prepare one to become the pariah of a people. To be given the mission to tell them that their cities will be laid waste without inhabitants, that their houses will be without people, and that the land will be utterly desolate, as was Isaiah, is to be given a bitter mission. No wonder Isaiah asks, "How long, O LORD?" We can empathize with Jeremiah when he turns to God one day and says, "O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, 'Violence and destruction!' For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long." (Jeremiah 20.7-8)

Why are they called to bring YHWH's judgment to the people of Israel? Why has the word of salvation and liberation, so prominent before, turned into a word of condemnation and destruction? Why have these ordinary

people, enticed by the word of God, become prophets of doom? Was this the only way to interpret the crisis being experienced by Israel? What kept Israel together was its covenant. These prophets were expressing God's action to keep the covenant from totally unravelling. The disasters that came upon Israel throughout its long history needed to be understood in terms of the covenant. The prophets were not saying that the covenant had ended and that the people were left to their own devices. No, the covenant was embraced more than ever. How, then, can we explain these terrible events within the covenant? At the time of Moses, had not God declared how moved the LORD was by the cries of the misery of Israel in Egypt? Where was this God now? At the moment, God seemed absent. It is only later that Israel will realize that all this time God's instruction and guidance had not ended. Through the prophets God was teaching Israel that the road to its freedom involved recognizing its fault, its sinfulness, its separation from God. The experience of exile became part of Israel's formation. These prophets were called to interpret these events. It is held today that, if it had not been for the prophets, Israel might not have survived the crisis caused by the exile.

Guiding questions

1. What does "Revelation" mean in the context of sacred Scripture?
2. Using the experience of one of the prophets that you have studied, describe the dynamics of revelation.
3. Why does the Revelation of God always call us to respond in some way?

Sin and transgression

The prophets used the word "sin" – a word probably borrowed from the Babylonians in the time of the exile. Sin referred to transgressions. Israel had transgressed, the prophets said. These events are a judgment of God. The suffering of Israel was not an innocent suffering. Listen to the prophet Amos:

> Thus says the LORD:
> For three transgressions of Israel,
> and for four, I will not revoke the
> punishment;
> because they sell the righteous for silver,
> and the needy for a pair of sandals—
> they who trample the head of the poor
> into the dust of the earth,
> and push the afflicted out of the way;
> father and son go in to the same girl,
> so that my holy name is profaned;
> they lay themselves down beside
> every altar
> on garments taken in pledge;
> and in the house of their God they drink
> wine bought with fines they imposed.
> (Amos 2.6-8)

The prophets cry out; they threaten, order, accuse and warn the people: "The day of YHWH will be darkness and not light," Amos says (5.18). Their indignation and accusation touch Israel in a new way, reminding them that in the covenant they stand before the infinitely

Prophets are driven by the Spirit. During her life, Mother Teresa reached out to the poorest and most powerless members of society, proclaiming the presence and love of God, even in the most abysmal circumstances.

Holy One. They discover with Isaiah in the temple that this holiness translates into a feeling of infinite distance. In this distance, Isaiah feels that he is a sinner, belonging to a people of unclean lips and unclean hearts. He is standing before God who demands that we be holy as God is holy. He is made aware of his inadequacy. Through the words of the prophets, the people of Israel recognized that they were far from God – not in who they were – but in what they had done. They recognized their sin.

Sin, for Israel (and for us), means realizing, when standing before God – the Holy One – that our actions do not measure up. No one can be holy as the Lord God is holy. The prophets let the people know in no uncertain terms that breaking the commandments affected their relationship with God and with one another, and also affected who they were. Breaking the commandments is sinful because this breaks their covenant with God. By sinning, they deliberately choose to distance themselves from God. But the prophets also helped the people to understand how to live in accordance with the Holy One, even though what they did was not equal to God's holiness. For instance, Jeremiah was told to stand at the gate of the temple one day to warn people that just having a temple did not guarantee that the Lord would dwell among them, "For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever." (Jeremiah 7.5-7) How then, are we to stand before God? Act justly with one another! The prophets break down this relationship with God into things we can do for one another. The goodness of God is revealed and given an outlet in our lives by acting justly in the human community.

Sin also points to another part of the human heart – a heart filled with pride and with the refusal to regard the other. The prophets realized how far this sin had entered into Israel's heart. Sin was so deeply rooted that Israel was hardly alive any more. Its heart had become a heart of stone. The prophets confronted this hardness of heart by identifying the people's transgressions. Listen to the harsh words of Amos speaking to the women of Samaria: "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, "Bring something to drink!" (Amos 4.1)

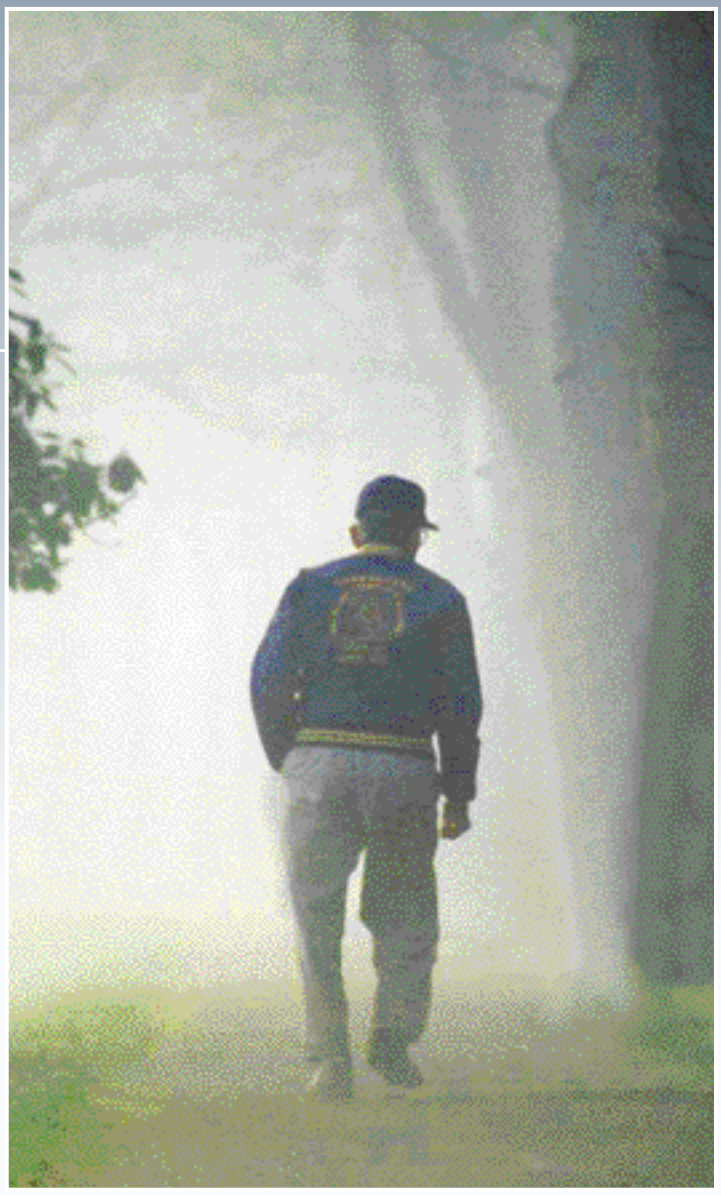
Sin shows itself when the moral commandments are broken. As the prophet Hosea says to the people: "There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows upon bloodshed" (4.1-2). Israel began to see how sins were turning them away from God. While sin, as a disposition of the heart, may be one, the prophets broke down the people's sin into a multitude of infractions. You cannot be a sinner in general. You are a sinner by stealing, by being disrespectful, by polluting the environment. In a negative way sin reveals the holiness of God.[7]

Guiding questions

1. At the core, what is Israel's understanding of sin?
2. How is God's action of sending prophets to point out Israel's sin a loving and constructive thing to do?
3. How do you think that sending prophets to the people is God's way of keeping the covenant relationship intact?

Prayer of one called by God

God calls you every day of your life. God is committed to you. How does being touched by God change the way you understand yourself? How does God's passionate love for you influence how you choose to live? Psalm 119 is a prayer of a person who has thought about these questions.



Psalm 119.1-7

Happy are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the LORD.

Happy are those who keep his decrees,
who seek him with their whole heart,
who also do no wrong, but walk
in his ways.

You have commanded your precepts to be
kept diligently.

O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!

Then I shall not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.

I will praise you with an upright heart,
when I learn your righteous ordinances.

Chapter review

Summary

- The sacred Scriptures are the inspired Word of God.
- God's self-revelation to Moses and the prophets was a summons to them, and through them the people of Israel, to a way of living with God.
- An encounter with God is never neutral – it is a call and a summons. The one called receives a new identity. God's self-revelation always includes a mission or vocation: "Go and say…," or "Go and do…," or "Go and be…," etc.
- Life at its core is a relationship with God. Furthermore, humans are not isolated beings – they are by nature oriented towards another. This desire for the other is linked with our covenant with God.
- In the covenant with Moses, God renews his bond with Israel. The "Ten Words" describe our relationship to God in our relationship to the other.
- When the people of Israel strayed from keeping their part of the covenant agreement, God sent the prophets to call them back. They pointed out how they had transgressed the covenant. They named their transgressions "sin."

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain how sacred Scripture is the Word of God.
2. Describe the structure of a covenant, and use God's covenant with Moses as an example.

Thinking and inquiry

3. Explain the function of the "Ten Words" in the Mosaic covenant.
4. How is the Christian moral stance related to the Ten Words given to Moses?

Communication

5. Create a chart that shows the parallels between the call stories of the prophets.
6. Write a short story or poem about one of the prophet's encounters with God, or about an encounter that you have had with God. Or, communicate the main points about this encounter visually or musically.

Application

7. Identify and analyze two forms of covenant that can be found in our society.
8. If you were called to be a prophet today, how would you call people back to God? Use the Ten Words to help people identify how they must reform their ways so that they live in right relationship with God and with one another.

Glossary

call story: The Bible contains a number of stories of God calling people and imparting to them a mission. They follow the pattern of encounter with God, God speaks, God gives a mission, the person being called objects, they are reassured by God, and God gives a sign that God is with them in their mission. When God calls us, God does not leave us alone.

covenant: A binding agreement between two parties that spells out the conditions and obligations of each party. The biblical notion of covenant arose from this contractual notion, but it is far more. God's covenant is a bond of love that calls to us in our freedom to respond in love. God's commitment to us is forever. God's commitment is founded in love.

Revelation: People have the ability to come to know God through God's works. But there is a higher order of knowledge which comes not from human reason, but from divine Revelation. God makes Himself known fully by sending his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The sacred Scriptures reveal the loving actions of God in human history.

vocation: Vocation is a call from God. Jesus calls all people into the family of God. God also calls each one of us personally to a way of life that is founded on the love of God and the love of neighbour. For some this way of life leads to priesthood; for others, consecrated religious life; for others, service in the context of family life or the broader community.

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"

CHAPTER 5

Everyone becomes like what he loves.
Do you love the earth?
You shall be earth.
Do you love God?
Then I say, you shall be God.
St. Augustine

Interpreting the ethical teaching of Jesus

There are many faces of Jesus. The four gospels are not enough to say all that might be said about him. To the billions of people who are his followers each one of us carries a unique image of him in our heart. Yet no one image is complete. After probing and finding in Jesus the very Word that God spoke, John the Evangelist writes, "There are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (21.25) One of John's images of Jesus is of Jesus as "the way." John presents Jesus as the path to truth and to life. In this chapter we explore this light on our path of life. We do so through the moral teachings of Jesus.

Perhaps inspired by Matthew's depiction of Jesus as teacher, the remains of an ancient gilded vase depicts Jesus in the classical Greek style as the master teacher with his students (the apostles) gathered around him. He holds the scroll of the Law, a visual statement of his authority. (Compare with page 89.)

In the gospels we find many moral teachings of Jesus. For example, in Luke's gospel Jesus says, "Love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.… Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you." (6.35-38) How are we to interpret the ethical and moral sayings of Jesus? Jesus lived in a world very different from ours, yet his words still have a big impact on our time. Hearing Jesus say to us, "Love your enemies," or "Lend, expecting nothing in return," leaves us perhaps as surprised as it did those who heard it two thousand years ago.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) contains the heart of Jesus' ethical message. Some scholars have called it the summary of the gospel. In order to interpret the Sermon on the Mount, you will first examine Matthew's intent in writing the gospel. Second, you will explore what the "kingdom of God," which was at the heart of Jesus' teaching, means for Christian ethics. Third, you will read the full text of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, and reflect on what this teaching might mean for you in the twenty-first century.

Focus your learning

Cognitive

What are the ethical and moral implications of Jesus' teachings on the kingdom of God?

Practical

How are we called to participate in the kingdom of God?

Affective

What does the scripture quotation, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6.21), mean in terms of your moral stance in life?

Key terms in this chapter

apocalyptic literature
beatitudes
eschatological
exegesis
gospel
hermeneutics
inspiration
kingdom of heaven
parousia
Torah

Key sources

Gospel of Matthew
Gospel of John

This illustration of St. Matthew is based on the ninth-century gospel book of Archbishop Ebbo.

Interpreting Scripture

How does the Catholic community go about interpreting what Jesus is teaching in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount? How can we understand what his teaching means for us today in terms of ethics and morality? To answer these questions we need to understand two very important tools of scriptural scholarship: *exegesis* and *hermeneutics*. These complicated-sounding terms describe two activities that we all engage in regularly: analysis and interpretation. In the case of scripture study, however, they are applied with a certain academic rigour and discipline.

Exegesis refers to the study of scripture texts in their original context. It looks at the language, the historical context in which these texts were originally written, the religious traditions and other existing writings that influenced the authors of the texts. To understand fully what the authors intended, we need to understand something about their world, their motivations, and so on. For example, imagine that Grade 12 students one hundred years from now were to do a research paper on the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. To do so, they would have to know something about the political situation in the world as it was in 2001. They would have to know something about the different religious groups and movements. They would have to be aware of the biases of the different sources from which they were getting their information. For instance, newspapers from the United States, Israel, Canada and Saudi Arabia would all cover the same event from very different perspectives. Students in the next century would have to distinguish these sources in order to understand the complexity of the situation. There would also be books written on the subject, documentary and news film and audio coverage, and even songs and poetry. There would be artifacts and memorials built of stone. How would each of these add to their understanding of the event? Why is it important to understand each source of information in its original context? That is the task of exegesis – analyzing the text or event in question as much as possible within its original context. In this chapter, we will use exegesis to understand the world within which Matthew wrote, and to see how his world influenced the shape and form of his gospel.

Hermeneutics is essentially the task of interpretation. When we interpret something, we do so with reference to something else. For example, say those same high-school students in the next century were doing a research paper on the evolution of airport security procedures since the dawn of air travel. They would completely miss the mark if they failed to recognize the importance of the September 11 terrorist attack as a key factor leading to changes in airport security. We can understand the sharp increase in security at airports early in the twenty-first century by seeing it *in light of* the terrorist attack that used passenger aircraft as weapons of terror. September 11 and the ongoing threat of terrorism become a hermeneutical lens through which we understand things like changes to airport security.

Matthew wrote in an era politically, culturally and economically different from our own, using images and concepts often unfamiliar to us. Bringing hermeneutics to bear on Matthew's gospel, we must first identify key "lenses" through which we read Scripture. One such lens will be the lens of "apocalyptic literature" (see the textbox on page 90) – a type of writing used in time of crisis and filled with images of the end of the world. Matthew lived in a time of upheaval, crisis and an uncertain future. Another lens is that of "kingdom of God." The kingdom of God was the central theme of Jesus' teaching. It follows, then, that if we are to understand what he is saying, we need to know something about "kingdom of God."

We will use *exegesis* to understand the context of Matthew's gospel, and *hermeneutics* to apply the findings of exegesis to understanding these texts for our time.

Matthew's gospel

The gospel of Matthew was likely written in the city of Antioch (in today's Turkey) in the last twenty years of the first century – some fifty or sixty years after the death of Jesus and ten or twenty years after the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem by the Romans. Matthew's gospel primarily addresses a Jewish community, concerned with the division that had arisen between those who followed Jesus and those who saw him as subversive to the Jewish tradition. These were turbulent times for the followers of Jesus. With the destruction of the temple, a split developed between the Jewish rabbis and the Jewish followers of Jesus. Until this time, the followers of Jesus had been considered part of the Jewish mosaic. There had been some clashes, and even some deaths (such as Stephen the deacon and James, the brother of Jesus), but there was no breakup.

After the Roman army laid siege to the city of Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in the year 70, however, the conflict became so intense that the rabbis and Pharisees refused the followers of Jesus the right to participate in the synagogue. The two groups went their separate ways. Those who followed the rabbis and the Pharisees formed Rabbinic Judaism, which remains the main form of Judaism today. Those who followed Jesus became known as Christians and formed the early Church.

The community for which Matthew wrote had already been living the gospel for fifty years (Jesus died around the year 30). The life and teachings of Jesus had been preserved by this community through oral tradition, with the stories of Jesus told and retold at community gatherings. Now Matthew wanted to write these traditions down so that the community could continue to follow Jesus after the death of the twelve apostles. Matthew selected, edited and recorded the oral tradition of the community from a particular point of view that distinguishes his gospel from the others. Matthew's gospel therefore offers a particular perspective on Jesus. He interpreted (hermeneutics) the meaning of Jesus' words and deeds for his time to address the concerns of his community. Matthew warned the followers of Jesus to remain united, to refrain from judging one another, to accept the sinner among them, and to accept a stable structure. Matthew's is the only gospel in which Jesus speaks of the church. Matthew's interpretation has Jesus speaking to his church in the 80s. But Matthew's story has not exhausted its power to reveal and inspire. His gospel, told and interpreted in the liturgy once every three years, speaks to us even today. (In the Ukrainian rite, each of the gospels is read every year.)

Sacred Scripture is inspired by God. "What Christ entrusted to the apostles, they in turn handed on by their preaching and writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to all generations, until Christ returns in glory."

CCC #96

Guiding questions

1. The author of the gospel of Matthew wrote for a specific group of people: the Jewish followers of Jesus. What religious challenges were these people facing?
2. How did the Church emerge out of the situation?
3. What did Matthew's gospel seek to accomplish?

Matthew's Jesus – the ultimate teacher

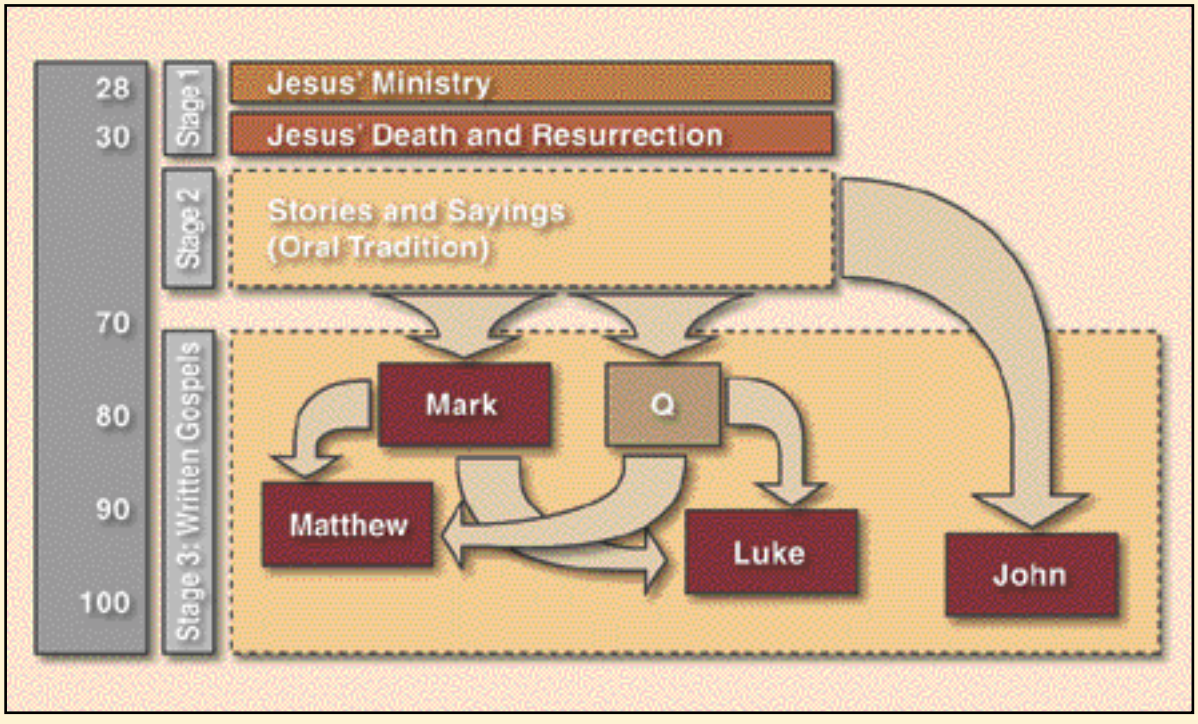
At the very end of Matthew's gospel, we find Jesus telling the disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (28.18-20) Although he physically departs, Jesus remains with the disciples through the Holy Spirit. For Matthew, Jesus

Gospel: the "good news"

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were developed in three stages, as you can see in the diagram. The first stage was the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as experienced by his disciples. Afterwards, the stories and sayings of Jesus were kept alive orally among the followers of Jesus. Only forty years later was the first gospel, the gospel according to Mark, written down. As you can see, his gospel influenced the writers of Matthew and Luke's gospels, who drew on some of Mark's texts in their gospels. We deduce that they had yet another source, which scholars have called "Q," to which Matthew and Luke refer. We know this because both have similar texts that are not found in Mark or John, and because neither had access to the other's gospel. John's gospel comes to us straight from the oral tradition, but it was the last to be written, about seventy years after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Matthew wrote his gospel for the Jewish followers of Jesus. Mark's gospel was written for the Christian community in Rome in an atmosphere of persecution and fear during a time when it was illegal to be a Christian. Luke wrote for non-Jewish Christians who lived in a Greek-speaking urban environment. John's gospel was addressed to a now unknown community of Jewish Christians. John's interpretation of Jesus, different as it is from the other three gospels, presented Jesus as the Word that has come to us from God and lived among us. All these communities formed part of the mosaic of interpretations of Jesus that characterized the early Church.

The story of Jesus as told by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is so unique among the writings of the world that it is recognized as a unique literary form – gospel.



will be a constant presence in his Church as a teacher.

The gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as an incomparable teacher. The beginning of the text establishes Jesus' authority to teach. It gives a genealogy of Jesus linking Jesus clearly to two major figures in the story of Israel: Abraham, the father of Judaism, and King David, out of whose house would come the Messiah. The genealogy ends with Joseph. But then we are told that Joseph is not the father of Jesus. Mary, as Matthew tells us, "was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit." (1.18) Jesus' origin is in God. The end of Matthew's gospel tells the story of the risen Jesus instructing his disciples to teach the world about him. It is God who sent Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Now he returns to God in order to be with us until the end of time. The middle of Matthew's gospel is the story about Jesus the supreme teacher. The time and space between the resurrection of Jesus and "the end of the age" is to be filled with the teaching of Jesus. Matthew's gospel portrays Jesus as the one who brings the teaching of Moses to perfection.

To understand Jesus' ethical teaching, it is important to recall the centrality of Moses, of the covenant, and of the Torah in the Jewish tradition (Chapter 4). The Torah guided Jewish people in their intense and passionate search to live the will of God. They turned to it for guidance on how they should behave from day to day. The followers of Jesus for whom Matthew was writing were also deeply passionate about living the will of God, but in following the teaching of Jesus, their interpretation of the Torah was more spiritual than literal. The Torah taught by Moses is brought into its fullness by Jesus. Jesus is the law and the law is love. The law is not imposed; rather, it is written in our hearts, inviting us to live the way of Jesus. To Matthew, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Torah, and even more: Jesus is the *new* Torah.

Several details of Jesus' life in Matthew's gospel recall the story of Moses. The lives of both were threatened as infants. While Moses had to be protected from the Pharaoh of Egypt, Jesus had to be protected from a Messiah-fearing Herod. Ironically, Joseph and Mary fled with the infant Jesus back to Egypt, out of the very land that the Lord had promised to Moses. While Matthew must have had Mark's gospel in front of him as he was writing his own account of Jesus, he cut into Mark's narrative in five places and inserted five teachings of Jesus. The number is important, because Jewish tradition held that Moses left Israel with five teachings: the five books of Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). Parallel to Moses who taught the Torah to Israel, Jesus teaches a new Torah to the Church. And this new Torah is greater than the first. Five times (Matthew 5.21-48) Jesus makes a comparison between his approach to Torah and Moses' approach. Each time the text begins with "You have heard that it was said [to our ancestors]…" This is followed in each case with "but I say to you…" This teaching of Jesus does not replace the Torah, but fulfills its original intent. In fact, Matthew's Jesus says, "not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." (Matthew 5.18) Jesus teaches not only Israel; he teaches all nations with authority. At the end of one of these teachings, Matthew writes, "The crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." (7.28-29) It is this authority as a teacher that Matthew passes on to us and that we, the Church, are instructed to pass on.[1]

Guiding questions

1. How does Matthew portray Jesus as a teacher?
2. How does Matthew compare Jesus and Moses?
3. What is he seeking to demonstrate?

Matthew's Church and the 'kingdom of God'

Fifty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Matthew was facing a dilemma. The disciples of Jesus remembered his promise to return and complete the work he had begun. The second coming is called the *parousia*. They believed that this coming would be soon – in their lifetime. But when fifty years had elapsed and the "coming soon" had not yet taken place, the followers of Jesus began to prepare for the long haul. The scribes and teachers among them began to gather the stories and traditions around Jesus and form the teaching and discipline of what Matthew's Jesus calls the "church." Central to Jesus' teaching was the "kingdom of heaven."

parousia: This term refers to the second coming of Christ, which is to take place "at the end of the age." This time ends time: it is the ending of the story of salvation. The end is described as a completion: the full revelation of God. He will appear, as Matthew 25 says, as the Son of Man in his glory. Jesus will give the final accounting of the earth and its history. As the Creed says, "He will come to judge the living and the dead." History will be judged, as Jesus said, by what "you did … to one of the least of these who are members of my family": the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the prisoner (Matthew 25.31-46).

Apocalyptic literature

During the time that Matthew wrote his gospel, Jewish society felt a loss of identity and a sense of hopelessness. Politically they were ruled by the Romans. Religiously, the temple was run by people who had no right to be high priests. Culturally, they experienced the influence of Greece and the pressure to adopt all things Greek. And they were still dealing with the collective memory of the exile of their ancestors five hundred years earlier to Babylon. In this situation, a style of writing called "apocalyptic literature" developed. Apocalyptic writings are writings of crisis. They reflect how a people who find their surroundings corrupt and without hope reflect on their faith in the covenant God. They wonder whether God has abandoned them or whether God is testing them. But the overall conviction is that the present tribulations are a prelude to the coming of God to liberate people from their sufferings. God will come soon. The end is in sight. Our hope is in God.

Apocalyptic writings emphasize an end to this evil-dominated history. The end is presented as a coming of God to judge this world. This apocalyptic vision foresees a time of great distress "such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be." (Matthew 24.21) With God's coming, the truth about this world will be revealed, and God's purifying judgment will take place. The apocalyptic writers usually presented this coming of God in judgment as taking place soon, within the lifetime of the listeners, portraying the end as a catastrophe of cosmic proportions. There are wars and rumours of wars; there are earthquakes – it is a time filled with fire and bloodshed. Often the ending includes a battle between the forces of good and evil that leaves no doubt as to the outcome. The powers of evil are defeated.

Jesus uses this apocalyptic language but strips it of many of its images. Jesus is presented in the gospels as preparing the coming of God. When he first appears in the gospel, Jesus proclaims, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (4.17). How near is God's coming? Jesus says not to look at some distant future, that God's liberating action is already among us. The final times have come already, and they have come in the words and the ministry of Jesus. What happened then to all the terrifying images associated with the coming of God?

God's coming, Jesus says, is not in the frightening signs of judgment. God comes as an abundant outpouring of goodness: "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." (Matthew 11.4-6) God comes as a free gift of salvation.

Kingdom of heaven

At the time when Jesus was teaching, the language of the common person was Aramaic. People no longer understood or spoke Hebrew and so their scriptures were translated from Hebrew into Aramaic for use in the synagogues. The translations were often more like paraphrases. Out of respect for the name of God, they would avoid making God the subject of an active verb. They would not say, "God reigns" or "the LORD is King." Instead they would say, "the kingdom of God has come." In other words, "the kingdom of heaven" or "the kingdom of God" is not a place but a symbol or metaphor for God.[2]

Jesus chose this symbol of the "kingdom of God" as the central image of his message. When Jesus talks about the "kingdom of God," he is speaking about God. When Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17.21) or "The kingdom of God has come to you," (Matthew 12.28) he is saying that God is now acting among you.

What is perhaps most unique about Jesus' proclamation of the "kingdom of God" is his portrayal of the nearness of God. Jesus did not place God in a far-off heaven. In Matthew, Jesus begins the proclamation by saying: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (4.17). God is not distant but close at hand, right here in the midst of us. But what does it mean that God is near?

The gospels say that this coming of God appears in the very person of Jesus. It is revealed in his teaching as well as his actions. In Jesus God is already at work. The end is not in some future time but is present here and now in very concrete ways. Jesus is someone in whom the kingdom has taken on flesh and bones. Wherever he goes, the kingdom happens. Whenever he speaks, people can begin to glimpse the kingdom of heaven. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount Matthew says, "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching." (7.28) Jesus had an authority about him that naturally drew people. God's kingdom has broken into history in the person and the teaching of Jesus.

The kingdom of heaven comes among us

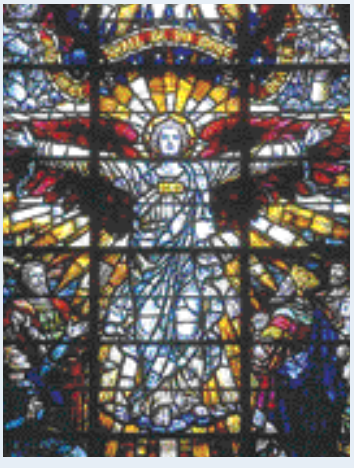
Jesus wanted this kingdom of heaven – God's liberating action – more than anything else to be among us. Jesus brought it so close that people could almost taste it. They felt Jesus' time with them as a time of generosity and abundance. The sick tasted its generosity in their healing. The sinners and outcasts tasted this abundance without any preconditions when Jesus invited himself to their table and became their table companion. Those who heard Jesus' words tasted it and were astonished. They were left wondering: "Who is this?" They began to see in him the messenger of God's coming with abundance. He put it into words and images. He enacted it with actions and signs. For them Jesus was the one who, in his person and teaching, inaugurated the kingdom of God in human history.

The kingdom of heaven and the Church

Is the Church of which Matthew speaks the same as the kingdom of God? No, it isn't. The Church is the people who follow the way of Jesus and accept the free gift of God's salvation. But the Church is not yet the fullness of God's kingdom. Paul calls those who are gathered in the Church the "first fruits" (1 Corinthians 15.20), that is, the beginning of the harvest. As "first fruits" they are a sign of things to come. They are the community in whom the kingdom of God is at work. The Church lives in the present time what the full revelation of God will bring about. In her liturgy the Church lives this future in the present through word and sacrament.

Kingdom of heaven: Matthew does not use the term "kingdom of God." Instead he uses "kingdom of heaven." But the terms are held to be interchangeable. Heaven stands for God. It is another example of the awe due to the holy Name of God.

In Jesus God's kingdom has come and is present in history. God's kingdom continues to break into human history through the gift of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the just. God's kingdom will come in fullness when Jesus returns at the end of time.



The New Law is a law of love, a law of grace, a law of freedom.

CCC #1985

The ethics of the kingdom of heaven

In Chapter 4, we saw how the Ten Commandments, the heart of the Torah, called the people to right relationship in the context of the covenant. In Matthew's gospel, we see Jesus proclaiming the fulfillment of this Torah. It is found in his Sermon on the Mount. Just as Moses received the tablets of the Decalogue from the Lord on Mount Sinai, Jesus delivers the new Torah from a mountain. It is not a mountain of the Law but the mountain of the beatitudes. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives the platform for the life of the disciples. The disciples are to model this new Torah. They are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world – a city blazing with light on top of a hill (5.13-16), a mirror to the world of what Jesus taught. This completion of the Torah reflects what a fully redeemed world looks like.

What follows is the complete text of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). Allow these words to shape your imagination of what this redeemed world according to Jesus might look like.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)

The Beatitudes

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and
after he sat down, his disciples came to him. [2] Then he began
to speak, and taught them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of
heaven.
[4] Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
[5] Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
[6] Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
[7] Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
[8] Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
[9] Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children
of God.
[10] Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness'
sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
[11] Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you
and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
[12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for
in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were
before you.

The primary recipients of the Sermon are the disciples. It is primarily intended for the Christian community. But it is also given to everyone else (the crowds). Like Moses, Jesus goes up the mountain. But whereas Moses received the Decalogue from *God, Jesus on the other hand speaks as* God did *on Sinai.*

Beatitudes are a form of pronouncement. They presuppose that a good or happiness has already been given or is about to be received. The gift here is the kingdom of heaven. The first four beatitudes express an action of God toward the poor, etc., while the second four talk about our behaviour toward our neighbour.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) – continued

Salt and light

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how
can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but
is thrown out and trampled under foot. 14 You are the light of the
world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 15 No one after lighting a
lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and
it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light
shine before others, so that they may see your good works and
give glory to your Father in heaven.

The images of salt and light illustrate the mission of the disciples. Just as salt is necessary for food, so the witness of the disciples is essential. To be a disciple you must be like salt for the world. Once you have received the light, you cannot keep it for yourself. It must shine out and give glory to the Father.

The Law and the prophets

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the
prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I tell
you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one
stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.
19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these command-
ments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in
the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them
will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you,
unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and
Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Here Jesus begins a series of contrasts between the Law of the prophets and that of his teaching. Jesus does not abolish the Torah; he gives it its deepest meaning. Only in this sense is it new. Jesus does not take away the Old Testament.

The "one stroke of a letter" *refers to the Hebrew* 'yod,' *the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet.*

Concerning anger

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You
shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judg-
ment.' 22 But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sis-
ter, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sis-
ter, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you
will be liable to the hell of fire. 23 So when you are offering your gift
at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has some-
thing against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go;
first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and
offer your gift. 25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you
are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you
over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be
thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you
have paid the last penny.

First contrast: v. 21-26. Jesus gives a new interpretation to the fifth commandment: "You shall not murder." He insists that every angry impulse against your brother or sister is as damnable as murder. It refers to anything that lessens the dignity of another person, anything that harms relationships with others. Everyone's humanity is precious and reflects the glory of God.

What is original here is Jesus as the interpreter of God's will. "But I say to you…"

Concerning adultery and divorce

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. 31 It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Second contrast: v. 27-32. Jesus gives a new interpretation to the sixth commandment: "You shall not commit adultery" by connecting it with the tenth commandment: "You shall not covet your neighbour's wife." He insists that casting a look of lust at a woman – desiring to possess her sexually – is the same as adultery. Jesus presents here a teaching on the meaning of sexuality and marriage. Jesus points to the interior disposition of coveting. To covet is the same as the act of adultery. Jesus is very radical here – even though the tearing out of one's eyes must be understood metaphorically.

Concerning oaths

33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' 34 But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

Third contrast: v. 33-37. Jesus gives a new interpretation to the Jewish custom of making an oath to do something by pronouncing the Name of God or another sacred thing. Jesus is against oaths. God's holy Name is not to be used. Your word should be solid enough. Here Jesus insists on giving and keeping your word.

Concerning retaliation

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; 40 and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; 41 and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. 42 Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

Fourth contrast: v. 38-42. Jesus here refers to the law of talion *(Exodus 21.23-25) This law existed to limit the level of vengeance and retaliation. Only an eye for an eye! Jesus goes much further: don't resist the evildoer by returning blow for blow. Respond to evil with good. Jesus encourages you to give everything!*

Love for enemies

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you,

Fifth contrast: v. 43-48. Jesus redefines love of neighbour (Leviticus 19.18) as a gesture of goodness to all others, even your enemy. Refrain from doing any harm. You are to be an imitator of the Father.

what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [47] And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? [48] Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Concerning almsgiving

6 "Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. [2] So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. [3] But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

In this section (6.1-18) Jesus talks about true religion, that is, a correct behaviour towards the Father. True religion shows itself in almsgiving, prayer and fasting. These are not the only works of piety, of course. Jesus' point here is about how we perform works of piety, namely, to please God, rather than to display them before people. Hypocrites are those who pretend to be oriented towards God in their actions but in fact are only calling attention to themselves.

Concerning prayer

5 "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. [6] But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. [7] When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. [8] Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9 "Pray then in this way:
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
[10] Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
[11] Give us this day our daily bread.
[12] And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
[13] And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

[14] For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; [15] but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

There are two versions of the prayer of Jesus in the gospels: Matthew's and Luke's (11.2-4) The entire prayer is in the second person addressed to the Father, but it is in the second part that the object changes to "us" as it brings up human concerns. This is the heart of the Sermon on the Mount. It is the prayer of the disciple who has taken up the cause of the kingdom and who desires that it be in place everywhere.

Concerning fasting

16 "And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Concerning treasures and worry

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; 23 but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

24 "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

34 "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Here Jesus shows how you can seek the kingdom of God as the treasure worthy of your highest personal investment. The treasure has been described in the previous part of the Sermon. The treasure is the instruction of Jesus or the glory of the Father. All other treasures become secondary.

The heart is the centre of the person.

This section continues to reflect on how you ought to deal with your earthly worries in light of the real treasure: the kingdom of God. It encourages the disciples to have trust in God. Worry is useless. God knows what you need. So set your mind on the kingdom of God and its righteousness. All the rest will be given you besides. Don't seek your security in yourself and in your own efforts. Trust God.

Judging others

7 "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. [2] For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. [3] Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? [4] Or how can you say to your neighbour, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? [5] You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye. [6] 'Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.

In this section we find four exhortations: not to judge, not to give sacred things to dogs, ask and you shall receive, and follow the Golden Rule: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you."

"Do not judge": make no negative judgments about your neighbour. Do everything out of love for the other. Never make an object of the other. Judgment is God's business not ours.

Swine were impure animals for Jews.

Ask, search, knock

7 "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. [8] For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. [9] Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? [10] Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? [11] If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Jesus tells the disciples to pray with the sure hope that in answer to their requests they will not receive something useless or dangerous. God will give what is most needed, symbolized by bread and fish. The Father is like the woman in Isaiah 49.15: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you."

The Golden Rule

12 "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

Here Jesus articulates the Golden Rule. It forms the summary of the central teaching of the Sermon.

The narrow gate

13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. [14] For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Matthew 7.13-27 forms the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount: enter by the narrow gate of Jesus' teaching. Everyone has a choice to make. Don't follow the masses. Make a personal choice.

15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. [16] You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? [17] In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. [18] A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. [19] Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20] Thus you will know them by their fruits.

Who are these false prophets? Most likely members of the community of Matthew who do not follow the way laid out by the Sermon on the Mount. You will only know these prophets by what they do.

The only criterion for a true prophet is doing the work of God, not just words.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) – continued

Concerning self-deception

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' 23 Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'

Hearers and doers

24 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. 25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell – and great was its fall!"

28 Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, 29 for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

The rock upon which to build one's house of faith is to "do" the words of Jesus. That is the ultimate choice. Blessedness will follow.

See M. Dumais, "Sermon sur la Montagne" in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible* (Paris: Editions Letouzey & Ane, 1994), 772-931.

Guiding questions

1. After reading the text carefully, identify the three major sections of the Sermon on the Mount. Give these three major sections a heading or title.
2. What passages struck you the most? Why?
3. What areas of human life and behaviour are covered by the Sermon on the Mount?
4. What would the world look like if the Sermon on the Mount were fulfilled?

The ethics of the Sermon on the Mount: the justice of the kingdom of God

What does Jesus want us to do? The following points will help us interpret the Sermon on the Mount.

It is an ethics of the kingdom of God: already in our midst but not yet fully revealed

The Sermon on the Mount is clearly about the kingdom of God. The first beatitude opens with it: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus tells us what life is like when God enters the human scene. He pronounces as blessed the poor, those who mourn, the meek, the hungry and thirsty, for they are the first beneficiaries of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom appears like a topsy-turvy world. It does not proclaim everyday attitudes, behaviours or motives. It is clearly a life lived at the limits of human possibility. What does a life at the limits of human possibility look like? It is a life where God is in charge. It is a world that in its actions and its being reflects the God of Jesus. Jesus talks about a world in which there will be no expressions of anger or name-calling; a world of forgiveness; a world without adultery or divorce; a world in which everyone's word is reliable; a world without retaliation and where people break the cycle of violence; a world where people share with all, even their enemies; a world in which there is no judgment of others; etc. This is the world where the kingdom of God is among us. The kingdom of God is about God's intense desire to be part of our lives and our history. Jesus is the best expression of this desire of God and the perfect example of what the kingdom of God means for human life. If the disciples live this life, they will be the salt of the earth, a light to others.

An eye for an eye… then, the whole world becomes blind.

Mahatma Gandhi

Guiding questions

1. According to the Sermon, how does God desire to be among us?
2. What are the ethical repercussions of Jesus' teaching? That is, if you took Jesus' teachings to heart, how would your moral stance or orientation be affected? How would your behaviour change?

It is an ethics to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5.48)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus names God, "Father" (in Aramaic, "Abba"). He mentions Abba/Father many times in the Sermon, and at its centre we find a prayer to Abba/Father. By placing Abba so centrally in the Sermon, Jesus insists that our moral life makes sense only if we have a good relationship with Abba/Father. The real motive for the Sermon, according to Matthew, is "that you may be children of your Father in heaven." (5.45) A few lines further this is stated even more strongly: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (5.48) Jesus says that it is our vocation to become "children of the Father." The reasons for following this vocation are simple. Abba/Father has made us His sons and daughters. But to be a

child of God has repercussions. As the Father loves all, so the sons and daughters of Abba/Father ought to love all, even enemies. To be a son or daughter, one becomes a brother or sister to all. This is the heart of the Sermon. Jesus reminds us about the generosity of God, who gives good things, knows what we need, cares about everyone, and forgives. If God is so generous, God's sons and daughters must be likewise so that "you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." (5.45)

Guiding questions

3. Locate the places in the Sermon where Jesus mentions the Father. Make a collage of the sayings.
4. Reflect on the saying: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (5.48) How do you understand this saying?
5. What is the image of goodness that Jesus uses to describe the Father?
6. How can these sayings become a way of life? How are they ethical?

grace:
Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is favour, *the* free and undeserved help *that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life.*

***CCC* #1996**

It is an ethics that makes us righteous

The Sermon on the Mount has a name for this way of life – "righteousness." Righteousness is commonly understood as being upright, blameless or morally right. Upright people act with justice. In the Bible, righteousness and justice are not only about what we do, but are something we receive. Righteousness is best translated as "to be put in the right." We are made righteous through the loving action of God. It is a gift. To be righteous is both to receive this gift and to act in accordance with the gift. The gift of the kingdom is Christ's own life in us. Christ's life in us – the Holy Spirit – is what makes us right before Abba/Father. His life in us arrives as gift. The Sermon is about this righteousness. We are "right" before God because He sees His Son, who lives in us.

Guiding questions

7. What is meant by righteous?
8. How does the Sermon on the Mount make us right before God?

Jesus' teaching illuminates our options

Jesus illumines one's options and conditions one's choices for the kinds of actions we ought to perform (e.g., loving, forgiving, healing, etc.), but our loyalty to him does not determine precisely what shape that action will take in specific circumstances. Even the commands of Jesus such as the great commandment of love, as well as the radical commands such as "turn the other cheek," "go the extra mile," "give to everyone who asks," and the like, do not tell us precisely [how to carry them out]. They do, however, provoke the imagination and challenge us to grow from where we are now in our customary ways of behaving [to where we ought to be as disciples of Jesus].

Richard Gula[3]

It is an eschatological ethics

Eschatological means "pertaining to the end time" or "the fullness of time." When talking about the kingdom of God, we are talking about a different kind of time than ordinary clock time. When God reveals Himself in history, the present becomes filled with new possibilities. The present time encounters what time cannot contain: God. This encounter with God in time makes the time eschatological, as the fullness of God enters the present time. The present time cannot contain this fullness. It can only show bits and pieces of this fullness. Therefore, eschatological time is a time filled with tension. It has given us a glimpse of what is possible, a glimpse of God's goodness and love, but it can only reproduce God's love in fragments. You could compare it to a journey where you begin to travel because you have had a glimpse of what you will discover at your destination. The Sermon sends us on this ethical journey. We already have a foretaste of the kingdom through Jesus. We now do what we can under God's grace to bring it to its fulfillment. The guide and agent on the journey is the Holy Spirit. The present time strains to put into effect what has been revealed as a possibility for a human life, but it can't express its fullness. Our goodness is only a shadow of God's goodness, but we are on the way.

Eschatological ethics strives for the infinite good. There is an infinite distance between Abba/Father's goodness and ours. Jesus made us aware that this distance is not something for which we are judged, but one that is bridged by God's excess of love and goodness. Jesus is that bridge, sent by God to share our world and our lives. Jesus wanted this surplus of love and goodness to be the motivator of our actions. Our lives may give only brief glimpses of this infinite goodness and love, but these glimpses are important and real.

How do we show this goodness and love in our lives? Jesus does not place limits on how far each one of us should go. He does not say to us, "Go this far and that is enough." Jesus asks us – in fact, commands us – to enter by the narrow gate. Give with what is within you to give. Our actions should not be driven by guilt but by generosity. Give with the measure that has been given you. Eschatological ethics is an ethics of response to an experience of being loved. No one of us can ever do enough. It calls upon our best efforts even though the result appears to be only a fraction of God's goodness, even if, as Jesus said, it is only a cup of water given to one of the little ones. (Matthew 10.42) All gestures of a generous heart count. All New Testament ethics operates with this eschatological tension.

Guiding questions

9. What is meant by eschatological?
10. How is the ethics of the kingdom of God eschatological? Give some examples.
11. Why does Jesus not seem to give us exact ethical norms? How do we know what Jesus wants us to do in a particular circumstance?

To be right with God is to be right with one another

Our relationship with God is measured in our relationship to the poor, the mourner, the meek, the hungry and thirsty. When Matthew tells us the story of the final judgment, he leaves no doubt. When the Son of Man comes, our relationship to Jesus is measured by our relationship to the other: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.… Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (25.35-40)

Guiding questions

12. Compare what was stated about the "other" in the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) with what is stated in the Sermon on the Mount.
13. Why is our relationship with God so frequently stated in terms of what we do for one another?
14. Describe situations in our time similar to Matthew's judgment of the nations where what we do for others is a glorification of God?

It is a gospel ethics

Is the Sermon on the Mount a law similar to the Ten Commandments, which constitute the heart of the Torah? It is true that Jesus uses the language of commandment. But can you "command" someone to love an enemy? Can you "command" someone not to worry about tomorrow, or to enter through the narrow gate, or not to look dismal when fasting? Does Jesus command when he speaks about anger, the lusty look, divorce, oaths, retaliation, loving our enemies, almsgiving, prayer, fasting and treasures?

To use the language of St. Thomas Aquinas, [4] Jesus' teaching is an ethics based on the New Covenant – a new way of relating to God and one another. It goes beyond the Mosaic law, calling us to do more, and even "to be perfect…as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5.48) Is Jesus laying a heavier burden on us? Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that are

weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11.28-30). Jesus invites us to come to him and to love as he loves. As St. Augustine writes, "love makes light and nothing of things that seem arduous and beyond our power."[5] That is why some biblical scholars (like Joachim Jeremias) do not consider the Sermon to be a law in the sense of divine legislation imposed upon the community under pain of punishment for violations. He calls the Sermon a "gospel": the good news that the kingdom of God has come. And with the coming of God the human order of business has changed dramatically. Our relationship with God has shifted dramatically. The shift is due to the incredible commitment God made to us. The commitment can be expressed in one name: Jesus. The gospels present Jesus as God's commitment to us. The ethical significance has to do with our response to this invitation. We have the knowledge to understand who is making this invitation and commitment, and we have the freedom to respond with personal commitment.

Guiding questions

15. Describe what Jesus is doing and saying in the Sermon on the Mount.
16. Some read the Sermon on the Mount as a new law with more stringent commandments than the law taught by Moses. Do you agree? Why? Why not?
17. What does the Sermon on the Mount mean for your Christian living?
18. Define a gospel ethics. How is this "good news"?

What might the character of one committed to Jesus look like?

Her general way of seeing life might become characterized by a set of acquired and nurtured moral sensitivities that search out those often invisible to many in society – the poor, the outcast, the ill and infirm. She might come to possess a basic posture toward life that is more sensitive than most to human suffering and is at the same time unconcerned with her own needs. She might have a "feel" for where people hurt and be able to empathize deeply. She might acquire certain specific dispositions, such as an attitude or initial strong trust in people and a lack of suspicion and fear of strangers, an underlying hopefulness about improvement of the human lot, a deep appreciation for non-human life in the world of nature, and a severe impatience with people's claims to high and enduring achievement. There may be particular intentions present as well, all of them with plausible ties to the reigning example of Jesus in her life: to always seek non-violent resolution to conflict; to champion the causes of the oppressed; to see the kingdom of God before all else.

Richard Gula[6]

The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and of Christian life. God alone can make it known to us by revealing himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

CCC #261

By the grace of Baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," we are called to share in the life of the Blessed Trinity…

CCC #265

The New Testament revelation of God

The New Testament reveals a wonderful, awesome enrichment of our understanding of God. It reveals God's innermost secret: God's very being is love. God is an eternal exchange of love: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (*CCC* #221) Hence, the one God is threefold love. The one God is a Trinity of three persons in what St. Basil in the fourth century called a great dance of love. Jesus is revealed to be the perfect image, the incarnation, of God's love. Christians learned to recognize in Jesus God's Son, the perfect expression of Abba/Father. Why would God want to become flesh and dwell among us? Why did the Holy Spirit come upon Mary and allow her to give birth to Jesus? Only love can be its reason. God's love cannot remain enclosed in Self – this becomes clear in Jesus. All love is a gift of self. The whole mission and life of Jesus is a gift and an expression of God's love. When God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – created humans in His likeness, this love became implanted in our hearts and bones as both our deepest self and greatest desire. This is the deepest meaning of Pentecost. The Spirit, the gift and fullness of God's love, is poured out over the disciples and over the world. All of creation is filled with this love and takes on the image of the triune God. As Jesus said, "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28.20)

What impact does this understanding of God have on how we interpret the Sermon ethically and morally? Everything is set in motion by this outpouring of God's love. The Sermon itself is an expression of the kingdom of God. Our first response to it is to receive it with gratitude and be converted by it. It makes the Sermon first of all an ethics of the gift. We are invited to welcome this gift. And welcoming this gift is not a private, personal act. Our welcome consists of responding to others inspired by the love we have received. Here Jesus serves as an example. He is both the full self-gift of God and the full response to the gift of God in his mission of liberating people. The Christian ethic is based on this relationship between gift and response.

If our first response is to enter into a new lifestyle inspired by this gift, what happens to our responsibility for our own lives? Does everything become gift? This gift still demands our effort; we are still responsible for making something of ourselves. Just as a child is loved into existence and thus enabled to respond with love to others, so the love of God enables us to respond with love and generosity. The gift also enables us to respond knowingly and freely to the gift dimension of life. Another way of saying we have the "ability to respond personally" is to say we have "personal responsibility." This love engages our reason and informs our reason. It urges us to enter into our commitments to others. Before any of our efforts, the creative love of God is there first. Even our effort and decision to respond to generosity freely and in accordance with reason are part of God's gift.

Jesus as the eternal Word of God and light of the world

Like Matthew, John wanted to tell the story of the words and deeds of Jesus, but more than the other gospel writers, John entered into the mystery of Jesus. John calls Jesus the Word of God, saying, "and the Word became flesh and lived among us." Jesus came as light and life into our world. In this chapter we explored this light on our path of life through his moral teaching. The prologue to John's gospel proclaims the identity of Jesus, "full of grace and truth."

Gospel of John 1.1-18

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Chapter review

Summary

- Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) contains the heart of Jesus' ethical message.
- "The kingdom of God" is at the heart of Jesus' teaching. When Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is among you," he is saying that God is now acting among you.
- The gospels say that the coming of God is manifested in the very person of Jesus.
- For Jesus, this nearness of God had all sorts of implications for human existence, and certainly for ethics. Life is gifted by the generosity of this coming God. God's gift calls forth our own generous response, namely to love one another with the generosity that is described in the Sermon on the Mount. If God is so generous, God's sons and daughters must likewise be generous.
- The kingdom of God is not first of all something that we do, but something that we receive. For us to be just and righteous is both to receive this gift and to act in accordance with the gift.
- Eschatological ethics strives for the infinite good. It is an ethics of response to an experience of being loved. No one of us can ever do enough. It calls upon our best efforts even though the result appears to be only a fraction of God's goodness.
- Our relationship with God is measured by our relationships with one another. "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me…"

Glossary

apocalyptic literature: A style of writing that evolved during Israel's troubled history around the time of Jesus. It focused on the end of history and the time of God's purifying judgment. It frequently employed frightening imagery of end-time wars between good and evil and of convulsions in nature.

beatitudes: A form of pronouncement that presupposes that a good or happiness has already been given or is about to be received. The Sermon on the Mount contains a list of beatitudes: "blessed are the poor in spirit…"

eschatological: Pertaining to the end of time, in the sense of its fullness. The coming of the kingdom of God at the end of time, according to Jesus, has already begun in his life, death and resurrection. Eschatological ethics is an ethics that insists that we can already live what God will realize or reveal at the end.

exegesis: The analysis of texts in their original context. Uncovering the historical, cultural, linguistic, etc., particularities that the original author was dealing with in order to better understand the original meaning and intent of a text.

gospel: The unique literary genre that proclaims the life, death and resurrection of Jesus from the perspective of the living faith of particular early Church communities.

hermeneutics: A way of interpreting texts and events to help us understand what they mean for us in the twenty-first century.

inspiration: Sacred Scripture is inspired by God. "What Christ entrusted to the apostles, they in turn handed on by their preaching and writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to all generations, until Christ returns in glory." (*CCC* #96)

parousia: Term used to refer to the second coming of Christ at the end of time.

Torah: The five books of Moses that contain the core teachings: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. How does Jesus' Sermon on the Mount bring fulfillment to the Torah?
2. The kingdom of God was at the centre of Jesus' thinking and teaching. Describe in your own words what Jesus meant by "the kingdom of God."

Thinking and inquiry

3. For these questions, recall Chapter 1 and the fundamentals of ethics that we explored with the help of Aristotle, Kant and Levinas. Review as well the tool of *hermeneutics* as explained on page 86.
   - Aristotle said that ethics is concerned with discovering what is good for human beings, what permits them to reach the possibilities of their nature, what is their internal orientation, or what they are intended to be. If we used Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as the "hermeneutical lens" through which to see Aristotle's point about seeking happiness, how would we understand our final good – that is, the ultimate good that we seek in life?
   - Kant stated that what is good is our will to do our duty for no other reason than that it is our duty. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus invites us to perfection. How do the beatitudes help us to understand our duty before God and before others?
   - According to Levinas, the face of the other makes us responsible. In Jesus' face we see the face of God. How does the face of Jesus call us to live a life of beatitude?

Communication

4. Jesus used parables to describe the kingdom of God, stories that referred to the everyday situations and things of the listeners, and that always had a surprise twist at the end to illustrate his point. Take any one of the sayings of Jesus in the Sermon and write a story that expresses how someone lives, or is trying to live, this saying in daily life.
5. Write a commentary (for a school assembly or for a prayer service at your local parish) on the saying of Jesus: "Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you." (Matthew 5.42)

Application

6. Find a newspaper article that discusses an issue of social justice such as Native rights, ecological problems or terrorism. Critique the article. Are efforts being made to overcome this injustice in keeping with the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount? Why or why not?
7. Think of an ethical situation that you have found yourself in recently and feel that you handled well. Describe how you reacted. Compare this response to the teachings in the Sermon. What does the Sermon have to offer you to see this situation in a different light? Explain.

Church: The sacrament of God's grace

CHAPTER 6

"The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the [people] of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in [the] hearts" of the disciples of Jesus – and this is "why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history."

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes) #1

Church, legacy of Jesus, work of the Spirit

A story is told of a desert hermit, named Anthony. One day, several other hermits came to him, asking, "Father Anthony, tell us, how are we to be saved?" The old hermit told them: "Do you listen to the Scriptures? It will go well for you." They replied: "But we want to hear it from you, Father!" The old hermit then told them: "The gospel says: 'If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, offer him the other cheek as well." They said: "We can't do that." The old hermit then told them: "If you cannot offer the other cheek, accept at least that they slap you on one cheek." They said, "We can't do even that." Anthony then said, "If you cannot even do that, do not return evil for evil." Again they said, "We can't do that." At that point Anthony said to his disciple: "Prepare them a small flour cake because they are sick. If you cannot do this and you do not want to do that, what can I do for you? You are in need of prayers."

This story from the ancient desert monks shows the ethical and moral challenge facing the Church: how to proclaim and put into practice gospel ethics. In the previous chapter we called this ethics "eschatological." Jesus gave us a glimpse of what this ethics would look like in its fullness. But who can live this life of perfection? Like the monks who came to Anthony, the followers of Jesus reflect his view of life only dimly, sometimes much too dimly. This chapter will examine how the Church follows the way of Jesus and how it proclaims and puts into practice the ethics of the kingdom of God. In the previous chapter we saw how Matthew applied this ethics in the early Church. In this chapter we will see how the Church lives out this way of life today.

Focus your learning

Cognitive

What does it mean to say the Church is a sacrament of God's love in history?

Practical

How does the Church have an impact on our moral vision?

Affective

How does an appreciation of our history and tradition guide our day-to-day living?

Key terms in this chapter

apostle
Church
communion
conversion
Gentile
magisterium
mission
sacrament

Key thinkers

St. Paul
Bishops of Vatican Council II

Fifty years after Jesus' death, the situation had changed for the community of Christian believers. By this time the words of Jesus had gathered disciples in a great variety of places. Up to this point the followers of Jesus had been loosely organized. The Christians, as they became known, would gather on the day after the Sabbath *to break bread together* as Jesus had taught them. These were not structured communities. Charismatic prophets wandered from community to community. It was somewhat chaotic. So Church leaders, including the apostles, began to organize the communities. They wanted to be sure that after those who still remembered Jesus in the flesh had gone, a second generation would remain to keep alive the memory of Jesus. It was necessary to begin to plan and organize how the community could translate Jesus' words and deeds into practices, teachings, moral behaviour and worship. Structures of authority had to be set up. A certain discipline needed to be established. Decisions had to be made on many issues, for example, on how to settle conflicts within the community.

The role of the Holy Spirit

Christians would gather on the day after the Sabbath to break bread together as Jesus had taught them. "Breaking bread together" is the phrase the early Church used for Sunday celebration of the Mass.

The story of the Acts of the Apostles gives us an idea of how the initial passage from Jesus to the Church took place. It begins, as did the story of Jesus, with the sending of the Holy Spirit. The story of the Church was not to be different from the story of Jesus. And yet it was. Although Jesus was no longer there to teach his followers in person, they did not have to find their way alone. They had been promised the constant presence of the Holy Spirit who would help them find their own way of following Jesus within constantly shifting historical situations and challenges. In the Acts of the Apostles we see the first path that the disciples trod in Jerusalem to follow Jesus. In Chapter 2.41-47 of the Acts we read the following account:

> So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

What a simple and beautiful way to describe how God took hold in the world. The link connecting Jesus with the first followers was the

Holy Spirit. The Spirit came upon the group of men and women in Jerusalem who had been with Jesus from the beginning and who had experienced how God had raised Jesus from the dead. The Spirit took hold of them, opening their eyes so that they could see and interpret the event of Jesus. They now saw with an intense joy how God had been involved in the story of Jesus from the beginning. Through the Spirit everything changed. They began to proclaim Jesus, and without fanfare, others came to believe. The trickle of followers became a steady stream. They baptized them; they taught them; they prayed with them; they broke bread together on the first day of the week; and they began to follow the example of Jesus and his disciples by sharing their possessions. They began to do in simple ways the actions that we identify as the actions of the Church. The Spirit guided them in the following of Jesus, who was to be the norm for their actions. The Church began to take shape.

norm: standard or pattern; customary behaviour.

Read the accounts of the early Church in Acts 2.42-47 and Acts 4.32-35.

Guiding questions

1. How did the earliest communities of believers in Jesus gather and live? What did the first communities of followers of Jesus look like?
2. What role did the apostles have in these communities?
3. What was the role of the Holy Spirit?
4. Why was it important to organize this community and provide guidelines for its members?

Apostle to the Gentiles

Who was Paul?

Before the gospels were written, one of Jesus' followers, named Paul, began writing letters to Christians throughout the Roman Empire. He wrote his letters as early as twenty-five or thirty years after Jesus' death. Paul was not among the first followers of Jesus – in fact, he only joined them after he had first tragically done everything in his power to destroy the followers of Jesus. We know Paul quite well through his letters. His time as a follower of Jesus began somewhere in the early forties of the first century and ended with his execution in Rome in the sixties. Prior to his conversion, Paul was known as Saul. He took on his new name when he turned to Christ. Paul describes his earlier self (Saul) in the Letter to the Galatians as being "zealous for the traditions of my ancestors" (1.14). From all accounts this did not mean that Saul was just another pious Jew who kept the Torah in all its details. If Saul was a law-abiding Jew, his zeal for the law was no gentle affair.

Saul was a Jew with an agenda. For Saul the law was a weapon: the sword that was to divide the true Israel from the false. Saul displayed his zeal with the knife.[1] Anyone with another interpretation of the law had better be careful. His was an agenda set by the Shammaite Pharisees, the most radical and severely strict of the two branches of Pharisaism of the first century.

Gentile: A person who is not part of the Jewish faith, or not of Jewish ancestry.

Saul's conversion (Acts of the Apostles 9.1-22)

9 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest [2] and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. [3] Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. [4] He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' [5] He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. [6] But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' [7] The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. [8] Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. [9] For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' [11] The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, [12] and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' [13] But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; [14] and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' [15] But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; [16] I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.' [17] So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' [18] And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, [19] and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, [20] and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' [21] All who heard him were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?' [22] Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

What did the Shammaites stand for? The followers of the Pharisee teacher Shammai lived in the latter part of the first century BC. Unlike other Jews, the Shammaites did not fight over interpretations of the Torah. Their passion was not piety; it was politics. They saw the great prophetic promises as not yet having been fulfilled. Israel's story was not complete. Israel was only a token of what it was promised to be. God's plan was being blocked and people in Israel were the cause. What must a true Israelite do when the temple was in the hands of unworthy high priests, when the people were subjected to rulers like Herod and Pilate, when the imperial powers were idolatrous heathens like Tiberias and Augustus? For the Shammaites,

politics and religion were inseparable. Shammai believed that the kingdom of God could not come for Israel and Israel could not be free, because foreign Roman pagans were in power and most Jews had found ways of living with the enemy. Only the sword could purify Israel from those who trampled on the law or refused to take it seriously.

In his zeal for the law, Saul believed he needed to act for God to rid Israel of these polluters of the law. Only when these polluters had been brought in line would Israel be freed from the yoke of foreign domination. It was time to take matters into his own hands. As one of the Shammaites, Saul believed that the time for the climactic event where God would set all things right was at hand. At that time God would vindicate Israel in one final act of judgment, and Israel's destiny to be the light to the nations would be realized. Saul wanted to be on the side of the true Israel when this great event was to take place. He saw it as his task to stamp out, by whatever means available, even violence, the current disloyalty to the law and so to help usher in the new era.

For Saul, Jesus was a dangerous person

For Saul, Jesus was a dangerous person and so were his followers. Their agenda was totally different from his. They did not seem to take the law seriously; they showed no particular reverence for the temple. Worst of all, they proclaimed that Jesus had risen from the dead. How could a resurrection have taken place when the world was still in the same state of rebellion against God? when the pagans had not been defeated? when the law had not been given its place of honour in people's lives? when the Gentiles had not come streaming to Israel? How could there have been a resurrection without all these things having taken place? If what the followers of Jesus proclaimed were true, Saul would have to rethink everything in his life. Because the climactic event that Jewish tradition associated with the coming of the Messiah had not taken place, Saul could only conclude that the Jesus sect was a dangerous delusion. Jesus could not be the Messiah, nor could he have risen from the dead. With that in mind, read Luke's account of Saul's conversion in the Acts of the Apostles 9.1-22.

When Saul heard Jesus from out of the blinding light, he realized he had been wrong about God. He realized that Jesus was the Messiah, the anointed one of God. If this was so, then with Jesus the fullness of time had come. Saul must have realized with a shock that God had done everything already that God had promised to do at the end of history, at the final judgment. Saul suddenly found himself heading in a new direction. His conversion to Jesus became a mission to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. If with Jesus the final times had come, and, as Paul understood it, in the final times the Gentiles were to be part of God's design, it was time to begin the mission to the Gentiles. The fact that all this had happened while history continued to unfold meant also that, until Jesus returned again, it was the age of the Church. For the rest of his life he gathered communities of Christians into the Church. And because he was convinced that the Gentiles were to play a part in fulfilling God's promise with the resurrection, Paul became the Apostle to the Gentiles.[2]

Guiding questions

1. Describe Paul's mission in life before and after his conversion.
2. How was Paul instrumental in opening up the early Christian community to the Gentiles (non-Jews)?
3. The word "conversion" means to change one's mind and heart and behaviour. Paul had a dramatic conversion that turned his life upside down. In the story on page 112, the student's conversion also turned her life in a new direction with new priorities. In both cases they recognized Jesus had become a part of them and their new way of life. What sort of conversion experiences have you had, and how have they changed your life?

Conversion today

Saul's conversion in his encounter with Jesus – to become Paul – has been echoed in the lives of many others. Throughout the centuries people have met Jesus in all sorts of circumstances and found through him a new meaning in their lives. Here is a contemporary account of a conversion. The encounter with Jesus is different from Saul's, but the revelation of Jesus is as real.

Until I moved away from home, I had no experience of religion, no understanding of what Church was about, and thought Jesus was a great man of history, a person like Mahatma Gandhi or Mother Teresa. My parents didn't go to church, and they used to tell me that I should be free to choose whatever religion I wanted to, or none at all as they had done. In any case, I won't complain about my childhood. I grew up in a loving home, was safe and well cared for, and was given many opportunities to develop my interests in sports, music and academics.

I graduated from high school in 2000, and took a trip to Europe that summer with my cousin. We backpacked, hitched rides and took the train through France, Germany, Switzerland, and ended up in Italy. As luck would have it, Rome was packed with young people from all over the world for World Youth Day. In some ways this was a nuisance, since every cheap place to stay was full. We hadn't known that this World Youth Day was going on until we got there. The streets were full of roaming groups of young people carrying their national flags and singing songs. It seemed that wherever you went, people were singing. One day we were in the subway station. Before you knew it, a group on the other side of the station platform started singing. As soon as they were done, a group on our side of the tracks sang a song in response. We got on the train, and there was this group from Eastern Europe with a drum, tambourines and guitars just rocking the passenger car.

After a few days of dodging all these huge groups, my cousin and I were ready to head out. We headed to the train station and sat down in an empty car, and before you could blink, were surrounded by a group of Catholic young people from Kentucky, of all places. This was the first chance we took to actually have a conversation with these people. We told them how we were backpacking around Europe and partying, and they told us about this gathering with the Pope. We asked them why everybody walked around singing all the time. One of them said, "When you're happy, you have to let it out."

Having returned home to Saskatchewan, I went about my business getting ready for my first year at university. I was heading to University of Toronto in the fall. Sometime during the second semester of my first year, I was feeling really depressed, wondering what I was doing so far from home. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. I seemed to be on automatic pilot going nowhere. For some reason, I thought of that train ride out of Rome and what that student from Kentucky had said, "When you're happy, you have to let it out." What I remembered was not only his words, but also the whole group he was with. They had a joy about them that you could reach out and touch. He had said something about get-togethers at the Catholic Newman Centre at his university. I stopped by the Newman Centre at U of T.

Fast forward to 2002. World Youth Day was happening in Toronto. I had gotten on the subway train at Islington station after a catechetical session at Resurrection Parish. As the train rumbled along the Bloor line towards the centre of town, groups of young people kept pouring into the train, together with this group from Hungary. In no time, they were singing to the beat of a drum and tambourine, and the locals didn't know what hit them. These young people were happy, and they had to let it out. Before we got to the next subway station, everybody was smiling and laughing.

I learned that Jesus is more than a historical figure. I met him face to face through these young people in Rome and Toronto. I met him at the Newman Centre at the University. I too discovered a reason to sing, having found direction for my life, and the source of true joy and goodness.

The Church develops a self-understanding: The Trinity in history

What we see developing during these early days of the Church is its unique self-understanding. The early disciples saw clearly the hand of God in the events that shaped the Church. They attributed the origin of the Church to the Holy Spirit who came upon them at Pentecost. The Spirit breathed a new life, the life of Christ, into the community of believers. Because each Christian was living "in the Spirit," they came to understand that they were uniquely related to one another. St. Paul's favourite term to describe the community was "the Body of Christ." And what was God's plan behind all this? What did God have in mind? To have the world reflect a communion of life and love similar to God's own. The way to create this communion was to gather people together in community. And so we see the intense gathering activity of the early Church.

The growing diversity of its members from the different peoples of the Mediterranean basin was the outward sign of God's desire to gather people. God seems to revel in diversity! This purpose of God was not new. It was the underlying plan of God already evident in the Old Testament. That is how we interpret the call of Abraham and Sarah. God wanted to restore creation after the sin of Adam. We hear it in the call of Moses as God created a new nation. We can also hear it in the call of the prophets. God's purpose is most evident in the mission of Jesus. Matthew recalls how, shortly before he died, Jesus said, "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23.37) This desire underlies his calling of the disciples and the task of the Church. On the eve of his death Jesus prayed to God: "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17.25-26)

The Church then is intended to be an instrument of God's love or grace. The Church is where the love with which God the Father loved Jesus is made visible and takes form. We see Jesus Christ in the way the Church reaches out to the world, particularly to the poor and the sick. The Spirit is everywhere at work to have the love of God penetrate the earth and its peoples. The Spirit is the energy, the fire, the joy with which people put on Christ or become like Christ. The Spirit is in all things so that everything may be recreated in the image of Christ. The Church is the sacrament of God's activity of gathering, the sign of God's love in the world.

Grace is God's self-gift of love in us. It is our participation in the relationship of love that is the Trinity. (*CCC* #1997) It is the active presence of God's love in our lives.

The Holy Spirit in the life of the Church

What is the Spirit's mission? It is to complete what God the Father sent Jesus to do. Jesus was to show the world how great God's love is. As John tells us about Jesus: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." (13.1) Jesus revealed God's love to be the love of a friend who would give up his own life to preserve the life of a friend. It is a love that does not hesitate to humble itself and to empty itself of all the trappings of the divine to become human like us. This is the love that underlies the Church. This is what the Spirit is bringing forth in the world. The Spirit is reaching out everywhere to bring everything in all its diversity and difference into the unity of God.

The challenge of the Church in history

The task of the Church to be an agent of God's love is a daunting mission. The early Church had no clear roadmap. Jesus had not told the disciples what they were to do in new situations, such as when Gentiles joined them in large numbers. They had to rely on the presence of the Lord and the work of the Spirit. This need to respond to new challenges has repeated itself throughout the history of the Church. The Church faced these challenges every time it took root among new peoples or faced cultural changes. Three periods of this history stand out. The periods are of unequal duration, but they point to the dramatic shift that has taken place in the last period, of which we are part.

1. The period of Jewish Christianity (AD 30–130)
2. The period of Greek and European Christianity (AD 50–1964)
3. The period of global Christianity (1960–present)

1. The period of Jewish Christianity

The Church first took root among the Jewish people, with Jerusalem as the starting point for the spread of Jewish Christianity. Wherever the disciples went on their missionary journeys, they first turned to the Jews that lived in the towns and cities of the lands around the Mediterranean. But as we have seen already, the confrontation with Jewish rabbis demanded that they find a new way of living Jewish life. We tend to look at the first period of the Church as a time of great enthusiasm and joy. It was. There was great excitement that God had fulfilled the ancient promises made to Israel. Those baptized in the name of Jesus were eager to put the words and the deeds of Jesus into practice. They began to gather on the first day of the week for the breaking of the bread in memory of Jesus. They shared possessions. Some went so far as to sell everything to help the poor and to create a community of equals. Here we have the Church as it ought to be.

But the story of the early Church was not always idyllic. Conflicts arose from the beginning, as reported in the Acts of the Apostles. In the Church of Jerusalem we are told of a certain Ananias and Sapphira who pretended to sell all they had to give to the community but lied about it (Acts 5). (The desert monks who came to Anthony to be instructed and failed to follow what they learned were by no means the first!) Also, we are told how goods collected for the poor were distributed inequitably, with the Jewish members being favoured to the disadvantage of the Greek-speaking converts. In one of Paul's letters we are told of the scandalous behaviour of the wealthy members of the community in Corinth. They would eat the best food at the communal meals and leave little for the servants and slaves, who could join them only after their work was finished (1 Corinthians 11.17ff). Of Peter, to whom the keys of the kingdom were given and who was to confirm the faith of the others, we are told how hesitant he was to sit at table with a Roman centurion because he was afraid to violate the food laws (Acts 10). The Church was also forced to deal with the presence of sinners in the community. Were they to remain in the community or ought they to be expelled? In Matthew's gospel (13.24-30) we see how he uses one of Jesus' parables about weeds growing among the wheat to address the situation in his Church. The Church concluded that it was not only for the perfect. In the parable of the wheat and the weeds, Jesus encourages the community not to expel the weeds from the community. The weeds were to grow up with the wheat.

Guiding questions

1. In general terms, how would you describe the task of the Church in the world?
2. In specific terms, name three or four of the challenges faced by the early Church.
3. How can the Church be both holy and at the same time a community of sinners?

The holy Church of sinners

In the New Testament, St. Paul describes the Church as the Body of Christ because the Holy Spirit abides in the Church. Yet, despite its high calling and God's election, the Church shows the human reality in all its historical ambiguity. The Church is at once graced and sinful. Today we can see all too well the history of failures of members of the Church. The list of their sins is saddening and scandalous.

During the Second Vatican Council in 1963 Pope Paul VI asked for God's pardon for what members of the Church had done. He limited his plea for pardon to the events that led up to the separation between the Western and Eastern Church. Pope John Paul II went a step further. In a moving ceremony on March 12, 2000, he declared a day of memory and reconciliation. He asked that the memories be healed for the historical offences perpetrated in the second millennium of Christianity. In a homily and prayers of intercession he prayed for forgiveness and a healing of memories for a number of sins committed by members of the Church. Among the sins he mentioned were the historical division among Christians, the intolerance of others even to the point of disrespecting other cultures, the use of force to evangelize peoples, the many failures to denounce injustice, the "tormented" relations with the Jewish people over history and the anti-Jewish attitudes which may have contributed to the Shoah, and the responsibility in part of Christians for the rise of atheism in modern times. The Pope wished to heal the memories of the Church so that the Church might enter with a renewed spirit into the twenty-first century. In one of the prayers of that day Pope John Paul II prayed:

> *Certainly such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, is a scandal to the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature.*
>
> **Pope Paul VI**

Lord God,
your pilgrim Church,
which you ever sanctify in the blood of your Son,
counts among her children in every age
members whose holiness shines brightly forth
and members whose disobedience to you
contradicts the faith we profess and the Holy Gospel.
You, who remain ever faithful,
even when we are unfaithful,
forgive our sins
and grant that we may bear true witness to you
before all men and women.

2. The period of Greek and European Christianity (AD 50–1964)

The Church of Jewish Christianity did not last long. By the second century there were few historical traces of this original Church. Jerusalem had been destroyed. In its place came the encounter of the Church with a world dominated politically by Rome and culturally by Greece. The first encounters between Jewish Christianity and the Greco-Roman world took place within a few years after the death of Jesus. These encounters raised all sorts of ethical and theological questions. Was circumcision required for Greek converts? Must they obey the Jewish Mosaic law, particularly its food laws and the laws governing ritual purity? Must they keep Sabbath? Could they eat meat sacrificed to idols? The more the Church moved out of the Jewish world into the Greek and Roman world, the more it faced local questions to which there were no ready-made answers. As a Christian, could you become a soldier in the imperial army? (No.) If your spouse refused to accept your conversion to Christianity, did you have to stay within this marriage? (No.) Do you baptize again those who have strayed from the faith? (Again, no.) What do you do with those who in the periods of persecution recanted their faith? Must they be baptized again? (No.)

In 321, Constantine ordered that Sunday should become a public holiday.

Each time another people joined the Church, new questions, new moral and doctrinal issues, were suddenly thrust into view. Sometimes these issues were debated – sometimes not. But each time another people was evangelized, they brought with them new issues, new challenges, and new perspectives to the Church's life.

Above – An ancient coin bears the image of Alexander the Great.

The second period of Church history was dominated by Europe. Europe's dominance had begun in ancient times under the conquest of a large portion of Asia by the Macedonian king Alexander the Great. (Remember Alexander, Aristotle's student, from Chapter 1?) In the first century the Roman Empire took over from Greece. The Roman Emperor, Constantine, converted to Christianity in 312, and shortly afterward, Christianity was not only tolerated, but in fact received imperial favour. Constantine's policy was to link the Christian Church with the secular state. (Until then, the Roman state persecuted the Christians, and many were martyred for their faith.) One of the repercussions of this close relationship between Church and state was that the Emperor was no longer held in divine esteem, but was recognized as being subject to Christ the King. As a consequence, new moral questions arose. For example, was it right for the formerly pacifist community of Christians to bear arms now in the newly Christianized Roman army? In 330, Constantine moved his capital to Constantinople. It was a Christian city from its inauguration, and eventually became the centre of the Eastern Church.

The repercussions of these imperial designs over the world dominated Europe until the collapse in the twentieth century of the Austro–Hungarian Empire and British Empire. One of the main areas of moral debate throughout these centuries was over the question of power. Popes struggled against emperors, and emperors against the power of the papacy. Was it right that the Church accept to wield power as did emperors and kings? Was it right that for much of this time the pope, and many bishops, were also temporal rulers, waged wars, lived in palaces, owned vast tracts of land and lived in a wealth that often scandalized the poor? Here in summary form are some of the major developments during this period:

The first encounter with Greek philosophy (2-5 centuries)

Christian thinkers such as Origen, Athanasius, Tertullian and Augustine used Plato's philosophy, or neo-Platonism, as a tool to make the gospel understandable. This philosophy introduced into Christianity ways of thinking, language and images that were closer to the Greeks than to the Jews. Whereas the Jews did not permit pictorial representations of God, Christians began very early to create statues, paintings and icons of Jesus.

The evangelization of Northern Europe by Irish and Celtic monks (8-9 centuries)

The Irish brought with them their fear of the supernatural, their preoccupation with demons and fairies, and their concern for safety from those powers that could provoke the anger of these demons, and even of God. What characterized the Christianity of these monks were their new penitential practices. From them indirectly came the current practices of frequent private confession, spiritual counselling and heroic deeds of penance.[4]

The encounter with Islam and the rediscovery of Greek philosophy and civilization (8-13 centuries)

Through the Arabs, thinkers in medieval Europe such as Thomas Aquinas rediscovered the writings of Aristotle. With this rediscovery began a rich period of expressing the Christian message with the aid of Aristotle's theories of knowledge and metaphysics. The encounter with Islam was not always so beneficent. Islam was perceived as a constant threat. Past encounters had already led to the series of crusades against Islam in an attempt to regain Jerusalem for Christianity.

Christianity divided

The schism that divided the Eastern Church and the Western Church began to occur in 1054, and was complete by the end of the Crusades – a split that has not yet been healed. Then, in the sixteenth century, another parting of ways took place during the time of the Protestant Reformation. This division between Catholic and Protestant Christians was so acrimonious that it led to several bloody religious wars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These were so violent that an exhausted Europe called for tolerance of religious differences. Some historians suggest that atheism in Europe first became socially acceptable because of the atrocities committed by Christians against each other.

European empire

At the turn of the fifteenth century Europe launched a series of voyages of discovery. So began the European empire. Between 1492 and the end of the Second World War, Europe colonized virtually every continent in the world. It spread its mercantile forms, its laws, its religion, its civilization everywhere it went. Europe became wealthy through its colonies. It imposed

schism: "The refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him."

***CCC* #2089**

Protestant Reformation

The term "Protestant" derives from the word "to protest." At the end of the Middle Ages, Catholicism experienced a period of decay with serious abuses in the sale of sacred goods (church offices, indulgences), in the office of the papacy (for a while, in addition to the legitimate pope there were two other contenders), the lack of training of the clergy, the worship of the Church, and the abuse of power by bishops and priests. Martin Luther (1483–1546) is seen as the foremost leader in this protest against the abuses in Germany. Other reformers such as John Calvin and Zwingli soon followed. Most of Northern Europe came to follow these reform movements. It gave rise to numerous conflicts and wars in the subsequent centuries.

Martin Luther

its economic form of capitalism wherever it went. It all but destroyed other civilizations, such as the Aboriginal cultures of America. The Church, directed by Christ's command to go and teach all nations (Matthew 28.19), participated in this expansion – if not its methods – and began to evangelize the world by implanting the Church on every continent.

Age of rationalism

rationalism: The philosophical view which holds that nothing can be accepted as true unless it can be proven by reason alone.

The great counter-movement to the vision of the Church began in the seventeenth century. This period was characterized by a refusal to accept any authority that could not justify itself using reason. The age of rationalism had an enormous impact on the Church, which bases its vision on revelation. With rationalism came also the industrial revolution and the subsequent technological revolution. In the nineteenth century the Church realized that it was losing the allegiance and hope of industrial workers. And so it began to loosen its ties to the ruling classes and began to support workers in their efforts to organize. The Church also began recognizing in a new way its responsibility to the poor, especially among the working classes.[5]

3. The period of global Christianity

Beginning in the twentieth century the Church has moved in a new direction. Unlike the second period, during which events were centred on Europe and its outposts in America, the world of the third period is becoming more global. Already at the end of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) the German theologian Karl Rahner had spoken of a true world Church – a global Church. This is to be a Church found in all countries, embracing a great variety of cultural expressions. The Church is no longer to be centred in and dominated by one culture. It is to become what it is called to be: catholic. Robert Schreiter, a U.S. theologian, says that to be catholic in this global sense, the Church will have to be a Church of solidarity where the global and the local will be in constant interaction – a Church that welcomes the immense diversity of peoples and cultures and shapes them into a pluriform unity. This is a Church where the local cultures and practices are not sacrificed to the global and where the global is a celebration of the diversity of the local. This is the specific challenge of our time.[6]

Guiding question

As the community of believers in the early Church encountered the developments in the world, they had to discover what it meant to be faithful to Jesus in these situations. What do you think is the greatest challenge for Christians to remain faithful in the world today?

The Church and moral teaching

The Church is the continuation in history of the mission of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Even though the Church sometimes fails to live up to its responsibilities, it is the agent who makes it possible to encounter Jesus even today. In the Spirit, the Church continues the work of gathering and building communion in the world through acts of love of others, through outreach, through preaching and through the sacraments. The Church takes very seriously its task to pass on what Jesus taught. This care is not only in preserving doctrine, but also in guiding moral life. Richard Gula outlines three tasks of the Church in guiding moral life.[7]

1. The Church shapes moral character.
2. The Church guards and maintains moral tradition.
3. The Church is a community of moral deliberation whenever and wherever moral issues emerge.

1. The Church shapes moral character

The Church has an impact on our moral vision. The Church's position on ethical and moral issues is reported widely in its own publications, the press, television and Internet, and is taught in churches, Catholic schools and Catholic homes. But these official pronouncements are not the only contribution that the Church makes to moral life and to the formation of moral character. Much of the Church's impact on our lives is through its effect on our imagination. Moral character requires more than ideas for its formation. It requires imagination. The Church is most effective through its rituals and images, through its art and architecture, through its symbols and stories, through the Bible and the liturgy, through its social outreach programs, and through interacting with other Christians, particularly in developing countries. These actions touch our imagination. They shape our vision of the world. They enable us to see this world as being immersed in God's love. These Catholic traditions are common to cultures around the world and make us feel at home in a familiar surrounding.

The liturgy is the primary tool through which the Church teaches. Liturgy celebrates again and again the events of our faith – creation, covenant, sin, incarnation, redemption and resurrection. More than our formal teachings, our celebrating these events in liturgy shapes our moral character step by step until the story of salvation becomes our story.

2. The Church guards and maintains moral tradition

Over the centuries the Church has reflected on and been confronted by many moral issues. In doing so, the Church has formed a large body of moral teaching that assists each one of us in the formation of conscience. The Church's teaching can be found in many different documents with different levels of authority, but it is not documents that carry out this teaching mission. It is people. Four different groups carry this moral tradition forward: the faithful, theologians, priests and pastoral ministers, and the teaching authority of the Church.

The faithful

Our first teachers in the faith are in most cases our baptized parents and friends. By the example they set, the words and images they use, the attitude they display to the other, the love they exhibit toward one another, and the fidelity they show toward the Church, they have an enormous influence on our moral development as children. Catechists and schools also give important witness to the moral truths of the Church. Increasingly today laypeople are receiving the call to pass on the tradition. They do so by getting involved in issues of justice, by standing for their faith within their careers and chosen paths of life, by running food banks and soup kitchens, by working with AIDS patients, by volunteering at hospitals and prisons, by welcoming refugees, by opening their parish churches for Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon meetings, by distributing goods through the St. Vincent de Paul Society. What better way to guard and maintain the moral tradition than to give witness to the justice and mercy of God!

Theologians

If baptized believers introduce us to the moral tradition, theologians interpret this moral tradition. Theologians play an important role by bridging the gap between tradition and the present time. On the one hand, they interpret the ancient tradition found in the Scriptures and in the teaching tradition of the Church through the centuries. On the other hand, they contribute to the teaching mission of the *magisterium* by researching and interpreting moral issues that are of concern today. Their role has become all the more vital since current genetic research and medical advances in reproductive technologies have increased the complexity of

In many academic and theological groups, an awareness is maturing that science and faith are not opposed to each other, but, on the contrary, need and complete each other.

Pope John Paul II

Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.

Albert Einstein

moral decision-making. Theologians, however, are not the official teachers of the Church. This responsibility lies with the bishops. The theologian's task is to present the ancient message using ideas and images that are accessible today. Their work is indispensable to ensure that the Church remains in creative continuity with the past.

Priests and pastoral workers

Priests, deacons, pastoral assistants, administrators and catechists also strive to make these teachings plain to ordinary believers. They seek to do so in a way that responds to the individual's cultural, social and personal needs. Ordained ministers, that is, priests and deacons, also preside and celebrate the sacraments for the community. These are graced moments of encounter with Christ and can be a source of profound ethical significance bringing reconciliation and peace with neighbour and God, bringing healing through the sacrament of the sick, celebrating Christ's love for husband and wife in matrimony or bestowing the power of the Holy Spirit through confirmation. The seven sacraments are personal encounters with the Risen Christ giving us the grace to respond in faithful and committed action with our lives.

The teaching authority of the Church

The "official teaching" of the Church on moral matters is called the *magisterium*. The *magisterium* is the teaching office of the Church. Who holds this right to teach with authority in the Church? Who is the *magisterium*? Bishops – in union with the Bishop of Rome, the Pope – hold this responsibility. They are ordained to speak for the Church in a way that neither theologians nor baptized believers do. It is the *magisterium*'s task to teach the faith and to ensure that believers honour the values of tradition in their lives. For that to happen, the *magisterium* needs to connect with the moral experience of baptized believers. How does the *magisterium* accomplish this mission?

a) Bishops delegate. Since they cannot do all the teaching themselves, they designate others to do it. The teachers and catechists in your school, for example, have been delegated to teach the faith and to instruct students in the moral teaching of the Church. Catholic schools are just one way that bishops give others the responsibility to teach the faith of the Church. They also do so by setting up commissions of experts, and by founding pontifical academies and universities such as Saint Paul University in Ottawa and the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto.

b) Bishops also give a teaching mission to theologians and to all those who speak in their name. For example, they approve certain books, such as the textbook you are reading, and other catechetical materials for use in schools or for the general instruction of Catholics. This approval is called the *imprimatur* (literally, "it may be printed").

c) Bishops also teach directly. They publish formal definitions of faith, especially in collegiality with the Bishop of Rome. Together with the Bishop of Rome, they promulgate the decrees of ecumenical councils. They write encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, pastoral letters and declarations under the authority of the papal congregations. Each of these writings is official, but each does not carry the same authority. For instance, the decrees of an ecumenical council require a higher level of assent in faith than an encyclical. An

apostolic exhortation is more authoritative than a pastoral letter.

d) There are two levels of *magisterium*; extraordinary and ordinary. Extraordinary *magisterium* is in effect in two situations. In the first instance, an ecumenical council, the college of all bishops united with the pope, pronounces a solemn decree (for example, the ecumenical council of Chalcedon (451) proclaimed that Jesus Christ was simultaneously fully God and fully human). The second instance is a solemn decree, when the pope speaks explicitly as the head of the Church. Such statements are referred to as *ex cathedra* statements (literally, statements "from the chair," meaning the chair of Peter, the first Bishop of Rome. These are very infrequent. (The last time was in 1950. See *CCC* #891.)

Ordinary *magisterium* refers to the normal daily teaching of the bishops throughout the world. Ordinary *magisterium* also includes the ordinary teaching of the pope in encyclicals and apostolic letters. Are these statements infallible? Catholics believe that the Church is protected from fundamental error in matters of faith and morals. In all other occasions the teaching, although it may not be defined as infallible, is nevertheless binding for all believers.[8]

3. The Church is a community of moral deliberation

Ethical positions are not developed in a vacuum. They emerge in response to events in a community and in the world. Bishops consult experts in the field. They seek to stay tuned to the moral climate of the time. They are aware of the difficulty of making their voices heard amid competing moral messages.

The bishops enter into dialogue and debate on moral issues so that everyone may arrive at moral maturity. The faithful have a right to understand the reasons and convictions that support the moral positions of the Church. In today's culture, with its unprecedented opportunities to be informed by powerful communications media, the Church must work harder than ever to communicate its moral positions so that everyone has the possibility to make informed choices in his or her moral life. That is why dialogue and debate and consultation are necessary – so that the Church can be a community where morality is discussed openly and freely.

One example of this type of collaboration can be seen in a pastoral letter on ecology, developed by the Canadian bishops, and published on October 4, 2003, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. The letter was developed by the Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Eighteen months earlier, the idea for a letter on ecology was proposed

Sample list of documents produced by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

- "A Pastoral Letter on the Christian Ecological Imperative" – October 4, 2003, Social Affairs Commission
- "Rediscovering, Recognizing and Celebrating the Spiritual Heritage of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples" – May, 1999, Commission for the Evangelization of Peoples
- "Marriage Matters" – January, 2004, The Catholic Organization for Life and Family
- Pastoral Reflection Guide to "The New Millennium" – 2002, Theology Commission
- "Jubilee: Renewing Our Common Bonds with the Jewish Community" – October 13, 2000, Episcopal Commission for Ecumenism

These documents can be found at the Web site: www.cccb.ca.

by the bishops' Programs and Priorities Committee to a plenary session of the Canadian bishops. Joe Gunn, the chair of the Social Affairs Commission, prepared a series of drafts of the letter and discussed them with the bishops who make up the Social Affairs Commission. At these meetings, guest speakers were brought in, such as Professor Heather Eaton of Saint Paul University, Professor Jean-Guy Vaillancourt of the Université de Montréal, and Elizabeth May of the Sierra Club. Drafts were also sent to ethicists and ecologists around Canada for their review. In all, the letter went through fifteen different drafts. After this extensive external review, it then went through an internal review by the Conference of Bishops. The bishops, in turn, sent it to the Conference theologian who requested still further changes to the text. Such a lengthy process of consultation is common for this type of document. The same care for accuracy and detail is taken when the pope writes an encyclical.[9]

Guiding questions

1. The formation of moral character requires imagination. What do you think this means?
2. Describe the different levels of teaching authority in the Church.
3. Referring to the example of the Canadian bishops' pastoral letter on ecology, explain the importance of dialogue and consultation as the Church develops moral teaching for today's increasingly complex world.

A letter from a teacher to her students

This chapter begins with a quotation from *The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* that says, "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the [people] of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well… Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history." This letter of a teacher to her students reflects how true this is. We, the Church, are the sacrament of God's grace to the world.

Dear Students,

You are my report card. You are my certificate to be seen by all. You are a living presence of Christ in our school community. In the day-to-day joy that you bring into my life and the lives of others, you are Christ alive in this world. As you face the challenges that this troubled world throws at you and you still persevere with hope, you are Christ for others. In every friendship and community celebration, you allow the Spirit to live through you. You bravely change the way that Jesus and God are perceived in the community, and you help me to reassess how I see Jesus.

What a blessing we have to further the Kingdom here on earth! Yes, we are a people of resurrection and we are a Kingdom people. I am thankful for your acceptance of the Holy Spirit. I see how you leave the imprint of Christ on the hearts of those you help. Your work in your communities, your compassion for younger students in the school, and your respect for your parents are signs of the love of Christ in this world.

We will continue to be transformed by the Holy Spirit. All of you and I myself will remain reflections of God's glory. There is freedom when the Spirit of the Lord is present. Let us continue to live in this freedom.

Mrs. Janet Bentham

You are the Body of Christ today

Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which Christ looks with compassion on the world.
Yours are the feet with which Christ looks to do good.
Yours are the hands with which Christ blesses all the world.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

St. Teresa of Avila
(1515–1582)[10]

Chapter review

Summary

- After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came upon the followers of Jesus. They came to understand how God the Father was with Jesus from the beginning. They began to do in simple ways the actions that we identify as the actions of the Church. Jesus became the norm for their actions.
- St. Paul's conversion to Jesus became his mission to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. If with Jesus the final times had come, and, as Paul understood it, in the final times the Gentiles were to be part of God's design, it was time to begin the mission to the Gentiles. The fact that all this had happened in the midst of time and history meant also that until Jesus returned again, it was the time of the Church. For the rest of his life he gathered communities of Christians into the Church.
- The mission of the Spirit was to give the life of the Risen Christ to the community so that it might become, to use a favourite term of St. Paul, *the Body of Christ*. The mission of this Church was to show the world how great God's love is. Jesus showed God's love to be the love of a friend who would give up his own life to preserve the life of a friend. It is a love that does not hesitate to humble itself and to empty itself of all the trappings of the divine to become human like us. This is the love that underlies the Church.
- Despite its high calling and God's election, the Church shows the human reality in all its historical ambiguity. The Church is both graced and sinful. Our time is only too aware of the history of the failures of members of the Church. During the Second Vatican Council in 1963 Pope Paul VI asked for pardon of God for what members of the Church had done. Pope John Paul II, on March 12, 2000, declared a day of memory and reconciliation. He asked that the memories be healed for the historical offences perpetrated in the second millennium of Christianity.
- In the Spirit, the Church passes on what Jesus taught, not only in the area of doctrine, but also moral life. The Church shapes moral character. The Church guards and maintains moral tradition. And the Church is a community of moral deliberation.

Glossary

apostle: A title given in the gospels to the twelve chief disciples of Jesus, and later also to St. Paul.

Church: The assembly or communion of the baptized followers of Jesus.

communion: The Body of Christ, both in its sacramental Eucharistic form of bread and wine, and also in the assembly of the baptized followers of Jesus.

conversion: A radical transformation of values, a turning around, that takes place at the intellectual level as an awareness and openness to truth and true knowing, at the moral level when I recognize myself as free and responsible, and at the religious level where my preoccupation with myself is taken over with the love of God and love for others.

Gentile: A person who is not part of the Jewish faith, or not of Jewish ancestry.

magisterium: The official teaching office of the Church: the bishops in union with the bishop of Rome, the pope.

mission: The task Jesus left his followers: to proclaim the Good News, that is, to proclaim Jesus, to the world.

sacrament: "The sacraments are perceptible signs (words and actions) accessible to our human nature. By the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit they make present efficaciously the grace that they signify." (*CCC* #1084)

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Describe the Church's teaching role in the area of morals, and its relationship to the teaching of Jesus.
2. Explain what is meant by the Church as the sacrament of God's love in history.

Thinking and inquiry

3. The history of the Church is marred with incidents of sinful behaviour by its members. How can "the holy Church of sinners" teach with moral authority?
4. Moral character requires more than ideas for its formation. It requires imagination. How does the Church shape our moral character through things like art, architecture, music, liturgy and symbols?

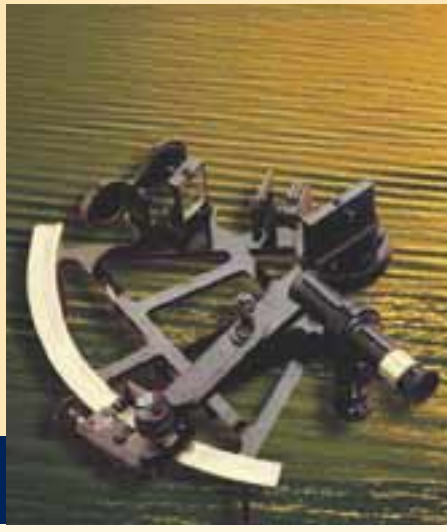
Communication

5. Reflect on the concluding section of this chapter, "A letter from a teacher to her students." Imagine that this letter was written to you personally. Write a letter of response.
6. Explore the Internet as a resource of Church teaching. Create an annotated listing of Catholic Internet sites and a description of what can be found there.

Application

7. In this chapter we explored three tasks of the Church in moral life: the Church shapes moral character; the Church guards and maintains moral tradition; the Church is a community of moral deliberation whenever and wherever moral issues emerge. Select a moral issue of our time. Research how the Church has carried out these three tasks related to this issue. Identify how the Church invites you to take part in dealing with this moral issue. Report your findings.
8. The moral teachings of the Church always have an action component; that is, they call us to act in some way. Choose a recent document of the Church, such as the Canadian bishops' Pastoral Letter on Ecology (download if from the bishops' Web site www.cccb.ca). Identify the moral issue, summarize the Church's teaching, and describe the action that it calls us to take.

Part B:
Searching for the good



Discovering the good life

UNIT III

Introduction

Unit 3 begins Part B of *In Search of the Good*. Part A introduced the principles of a Catholic approach to ethics and morality. It gave a Catholic perspective on the relationship of faith and reason in the area of ethical and moral thinking. Part B examines the various "goods" that a Catholic ethics strives after. *In Search of the Good*, while not entering into all areas of human action, explores the following key areas:

- the aim of the good life, which is happiness
- the gift of freedom
- justice in the distribution of goods
- justice in relation to ecology
- pardon, forgiveness and reconciliation in situations of moral breakdown
- marriage
- the family
- the state

Unit 3 explores the good life and our search for happiness. Happiness is not to be confused with pleasure. The gift of happiness may well include pain. Happiness is about authentic, or good, human life. It is about purposeful life. *In Search of the Good* defines ethics as the aim of the good life with and for others in just institutions (Chapter 7). From the start this resource insists that an appropriate approach to ethics, and hence to human happiness, is relational (with and for others) and social (in just institutions). The aim of ethics is the good life: a life measured by goodness.

The search for happiness also relies on the wisdom of tradition. A moral approach to happiness includes taking account of reflections through the centuries of wise people who taught and gave witness to right actions. Morality draws on these reflections. It articulates these in the form of duties and obligations of a full human life. From them are derived the laws, principles and norms of human actions. Morality asks the question posed to Jesus by a young man in the Gospel of Matthew: "Teacher, what good deed must I do to possess eternal life?" (Matthew 19.16) Chapter 8 explores laws, principles and norms of human action in view of human happiness.

What about happiness in the Christian context? What does the revelation of the Name of God tell us about happiness? Unit 2 showed how the revelation of the Name of God leads to a transformation of ethics and morality into a spirituality. Happiness is redefined. The beatitudes proclaim happiness as God's good gift, symbolized in the declaration of happiness of the poor, the hungry, the grieving, and the persecuted. With God's coming – the kingdom of God – everything will be different. As Christians we anticipate this life into our present. Chapter 9 shows how human life is transformed into a liturgy of praise and thanksgiving, a celebration of the nearness of God. "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." (Luke 6.20)

The good life: Our search for happiness

CHAPTER 7

For the kingdom of God is not food and drink
but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
Romans 14.17

The good life and happiness

Who doesn't dream of the good life? You are in school, applying yourself to your studies, sports and activities, because you understand that somehow, by developing your mind and body and spirit, you will have greater access to "the good life." We are convinced that living "the good life" will bring us happiness. Blaise Pascal was probably right when he said, "All people seek to be happy, even those who are about to hang themselves." It is universally acknowledged that despite all setbacks and failures, sickness and disability, people want to be happy. And if they revolt against their current life situation, as Albert Camus wrote in *The Rebel*, it is because deep down they believe that they *can* be happy if only something were different. The search to be happy lies behind every human vocation, every choice we make, even when we are depressed or act in anger. It is one of our deepest convictions that happiness is our due. The Christian tradition has always believed that we were created for happiness. It recognizes this desire for happiness as natural, insisting that God has placed it in the human heart. (*CCC* #1718)

We all want to live happily; in the whole human race there is no one who does not assent to this proposition.
St. Augustine

This desire for happiness is connected intimately with ethics and morality. All ethical theories insist that ethics is in search of the good. When we act, we do so to obtain a good. We play sports, we eat, we go on dates, we shovel someone's driveway, all for some good. It is not difficult to name a good in each of these actions. It may be friendship, challenge, competition, stilled hunger, love, sex, success, or any of the other things we go after in life. Our actions are never neutral. Even when I choose to do something evil, my motivation for doing so is not that it is bad. I will always choose even the wrong, or evil, action because there is some good in it for me – at least something preferable to the alternative. How is this good connected with happiness? Most ethical thinkers propose that the good life, that is, the ethical, moral life, is also the happy life. In the good that we seek, we seek also our happiness.

In this chapter we examine the way five thinkers understand the link between happiness and moral goodness. The search for the good and the desire for happiness has preoccupied ethicists and moralists for centuries. You will meet Plato, the father of philosophy, and also revisit Aristotle, Kant and Levinas, whom you met in Chapter 1. You will also be introduced to Thomas Aquinas, one of the most

Focus your learning

Cognitive
Describe the connection between living the good life and being happy.

Practical
How must you involve others in your efforts to live the good life? What skills are required to attain happiness?

Affective
Name the ways that you are supported throughout your life as you seek the good life.

Key terms in this chapter

chastity
friendship
good
happiness
institutions
solicitude
temperance
virtue

Key thinkers

Plato
Aristotle
Thomas Aquinas
Immanuel Kant
Emmanuel Levinas
Richard G. Cote

influential theologians in the Church, from the thirteenth century. We will look at what each of these thinkers has to say about the good and how human effort to seek happiness is connected to the human search for the good. Finally we will examine the impact of the good on ethics and moral living.

Plato (427–347 BC)

Our search starts with Plato, the teacher of Aristotle. Plato had a high regard for the good, comparing it to the sun: Just as the sun is the source of light and through its light we can see things, so the good shines upon all our actions and is in all our actions. We cannot locate *the* good anywhere, because it is in all things without being something itself. Nowhere do we find *the* good; we find only good things. In this way the good is similar to beauty. Beauty is found everywhere and in all things, but nowhere do we find beauty itself.

The closest we come to the good, according to Plato, is in contemplation. In contemplation we bask in the good and the good enters into our knowing. In contemplation it is as if the good radiates its warmth in us and through us to life. That is why Plato had such a high regard for philosophy. As contemplatives of the good, philosophers are, according to him, closest to the good. They have chosen the best – the happiest – life. They are happy because they know how to act in accordance with beliefs; they make true choices about the value and worth of their actions. All others, he holds, are ruled by feelings. They measure their actions by how much they enjoy them, and not by their value. The philosopher chooses particular actions because these actions are true. In his book *The Republic*, Plato wrote at length about an ideal city-state where the philosopher would be king. He realized, of course, that a state which gave such high regard to the contemplation of the good might not be a very effective state practically speaking. In fact, when some of his ideas were put into practice in Sicily, they were a downright disaster.

In his time Plato had to struggle against a movement known as sophism, which threatened to undermine all morality. Sophists proclaimed there could be no truth; all so-called truth is no more than opinion. If there is no such thing as absolute truth, then there can be no such thing as a universal moral code. In their view, moral values were nothing more than individual or cultural opinion. The sophists held that life is ruled by basic needs and desires, not by reason. A sophist named Callicles, for example, argued that the best life is a life of sensual pleasure.[1] In fact, the sophists held that it was useless to argue about the good in general. Neither goodness nor justice exists on its own, they said. There are only good people or just people. They refused any kind of thinking about moral principles or the good.

With sophists ridiculing all moral reasoning about the good, there could be no agreement on how citizens should act. The state, according to Plato, had deteriorated to a near-total moral collapse. What ruled the state was the private

pleasure of greed, the satisfaction of elemental needs for food and drink, sex, and the desire for power. This crisis led Plato to look for something that could stem this flood of social disorder and anarchy. He found it in and through reason. Reason, he said, finds the good that pervades everything. The highest pursuit in life is to contemplate the good.

Guiding questions

1. Plato places a high value on the philosopher's search for the good. Why is the philosopher's search to be preferred over that of others?
2. Where does Plato locate the good? How do we attain it?
3. In which areas do you agree with Plato? Where do you disagree?

Aristotle (384–322 BC)

You have already learned much about Aristotle's philosophy and his ideas about the good in Chapter 1. We return to him in this discussion because his theory has influenced much of the Church's moral thinking. Aristotle's concern for the good, as was Plato's, arose out of political considerations. After all, he became a philosopher in the king's court when he undertook the education of Alexander of Macedonia. Aristotle agreed with Plato about many things. All people aspire to some good and all seek to be happy. Like Plato, he was concerned with the shortsightedness of searching for happiness by following one's instincts and sensual pleasures. The search for happiness and the good, he felt, has more to do with acting intelligently than it does with following one's inclinations. Also, like Plato, he thought that philosophers were the most likely to succeed in the search for happiness and the good.

Aristotle was more down-to-earth than Plato. He considered Plato's idea of *the* good too abstract. According to Aristotle, people do not find *the* good; they find *a* good. When I go to the doctor, I want not health in general, but *my* health. My search must be identified with something real. *The* good, according to Aristotle, is to be found in God, for God is the mover of all things. The good is inscribed by God into the nature of all created things. To search for the good is to go to each thing and discover there its potential. In each case one needs to ask: What is the purpose or aim of this thing? How can it best achieve this aim or goal? Aristotle still thought that Plato was on the right track when he said that contemplation is the highest good.

Young people can become mathematicians and geometers and wise in things of that sort; but they do not appear to become people of practical wisdom. The reason is that practical wisdom is of the particular, which becomes graspable through experience, but a young person is not experienced. For a quantity of time is required for experience.

Aristotle

Review of Aristotle's theory of the good

- Absolute good can be found only in God.
- Good is inscribed by God into the nature of all things.
- To find the good in anything is to discover first its purpose, what it is for.
- A person develops good character by acting virtuously. Virtues serve to control passions.
- The good is found in the middle ground rather than in the extremes.
- The mark of humanity is the ability to reason and to act rationally.
- To act ethically is to engage our capacity to reason.
- The highest form of happiness is to live an ethical life.

However, Aristotle's contemplation is not of the *idea* of the good, but of the good that is within all things. For him it was important to know the nature of each thing. That is why he was so interested in the sciences and politics. He appreciated the practical. Each thing has an end and each thing is oriented toward the good so long as it is oriented to its end.

So what about human beings? For Aristotle people are self-directed beings. They can discover who they are and can orient themselves to their end through reason. Aristotle held that people act and reflect as they find themselves in particular situations. People seek concrete goods. What do I do here and now? Since we are already naturally oriented towards what is good, humans have to use their reason to decide what to do in each case. His advice is to avoid the extremes. Someone who aims at the middle ground is a good and wise person, a happy person.[2]

Guiding questions

1. What good would Aristotle have you strive after?
2. Evaluate Aristotle's notion of extremists. In what way are they similar / dissimilar to extremists today?
3. What is the middle way in life? How would a typical student apply this principle in his or her life?
4. What do you think of the role Aristotle assigned to the practical, wise person? Can you identify such a person in your life?

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

Until the thirteenth century the main influence upon Christian theology and moral thinking derived from Greek philosophers came from Plato. From the eleventh century onwards, there was a gradual discovery of the works of Aristotle in the West. Most of these writings came to the West through the Arabs. Their high civilization and refined scientific thinking began to filter through in Western centres of thought, particularly in the newly founded Universities of Paris, Bologna and Salamanca. Most significantly, Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican friar, incorporated Aristotle's thinking into theology. He made extensive commentaries on Aristotle's ethics. Aquinas's two major works, his *Summa contra Gentiles* and *Summa theologica*, reflect the impact that Aristotle's ethical thinking had upon him. In his texts he calls Aristotle "the philosopher."

Like Aristotle, Aquinas insisted that the ethical comes from the end that is inscribed in the nature of all creatures. What something is *for* is placed in the very core of what something is. At a person's core, Aquinas said, is a desire for the good. Following this natural desire for the good is the basis of ethics. Aquinas, as did Aristotle, equated God with the highest good. For Aquinas, however, this God is the Trinitarian God of Christianity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Aquinas's faith in the resurrection of Christ and the immortality of the human soul allowed him a vision of life with a much more refined notion of the end of human beings. Aquinas held that people were made for happiness. Aristotle had held this as well, and he had connected happiness with the good life lived by a virtuous person. Aquinas accepted this view but he added that human happiness was not exhausted with the good life lived on earth. Because of his belief in God's love for us as shown in Jesus, Aquinas held that there is a fuller happiness – called blessedness – that is to be found only in a loving vision of God. The fullness of a good life is not to be found on earth; the full good life only comes in the resurrection as God's pure gift.

St. Thomas Aquinas

Priest and doctor of the Church,
patron of universities and students
Feast day: January 28

Thomas Aquinas was born either in 1225 or 1227 into a noble family. His father, Landulph, was Count of Aquino, and his mother, Theodora, was Countess of Teano. The family was related to Emperors Henry VI and Frederick II, and to the Kings of Aragon, Castile, and France. When Thomas was five years old, his parents placed him under the care of the Benedictines of Monte Casino who were to teach him and ensure a proper upbringing. He was an exceptional student.

At the age of eighteen, Thomas decided to turn his back on noble privilege and to enter the Order of St. Dominic in spite of his family's opposition. Some members of his family were so upset with his decision, that they kidnapped him and locked him in a tower for over a year, trying to change his mind. They even sent in a woman to try to convince him that religious life was not for him. The story goes that he chased her out with a burning stick from the fireplace. The family finally relented, and he rejoined his Dominican friars.

He received the finest university education under the best teachers of his time, and his clarity of thinking and breadth of knowledge became legend. Even so, he received the nickname of "dumb ox" since he was quite large, and his humility was interpreted by some as dullness.

At the age of twenty-two, he was appointed to teach in Naples, during which time he also began to publish his first works. Four years later he was sent to Paris to teach at the Dominican school, and for further study at the University of Paris. At the age of thirty-one, he received his doctorate.

While in Paris, he was befriended by King Louis IX, with whom he frequently dined. In 1261, Pope Urban IV called him to Rome where he was appointed to teach. Later, Pope Clement IV appointed him the Archbishop of Naples, but Thomas begged him to be excused from the appointment so that he could continue to teach and to write. If he had accepted the appointment, his greatest work, the *Summa Theologica*, would probably not have been written. Even so, on December 6, 1273, he decided that he could write no more. It appears that during Mass on that day, he experienced an unusually long ecstasy. To a fellow priest, Father Reginald, he said: "I can do no more. Such secrets have been revealed to me that all I have written now appears to be of little value."

Thomas died while travelling to the Council of Lyons convened by Pope Gregory X. He died at the Cistercian monastery of Fossa Nuova in 1274. St. Thomas was one of the greatest and most influential theologians of all time. He was canonized in 1323 and declared doctor of the Church by Pope Pius V.[3]

Aquinas's ethics operated on two levels. He followed very closely what Aristotle had said about the good life and the happiness of the person who lives well and acts well. He too believed that people live the good life by using their intelligence and also their other capabilities, such as their senses, desires and physical abilities. For Aquinas, God's creation is good. To know how to use one's intellectual and sensual capacities, Aquinas said, one must follow

> *The natural law expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie.*
>
> ***CCC* #1954**

the natural law, which he described as "nothing other than the light of understanding placed in us by God; through it we know what we must do and what we must avoid."[4]

Like Aristotle, Aquinas had a lot to say about virtues. Much of his ethical writing is taken up in exploring examples of successful living. In particular, he identifies four virtues that successful people have:

1. prudence (how to reason well in moral decision-making)
2. temperance (how to remain moderate in the exercise of the emotions)
3. fortitude (how to be courageous in the face of life's difficulties)
4. justice (how to act well in relation to others)

Traditionally these have been called the cardinal virtues (cardinal: from the Latin *cardo*, meaning hinge). These virtues are the "hinges" supporting human life.

Aquinas identified a second level of moral life that had no place in Aristotle's thinking. God's self-gift to us in Jesus and the Holy Spirit changes the way we define what is good. Aquinas here introduces the three virtues of faith, hope and charity. The initiative for these virtues does not lie with us. Charity, for example, is first of all God's love for us. It is because God loves us that we can love others. Faith is first God's self-revealing action before it becomes a virtue in us. These virtues begin as pure gift. Our response to the gift is to accept it, to give praise and thanks, and then to live in accordance with the gift.

Guiding questions

1. How is Thomas Aquinas similar in his thinking to Aristotle? How do they differ?
2. What is the highest good and happiness for Aquinas?

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)

Kant's notion of the good and happiness may seem the most difficult to follow. Kant lived in the period of the Enlightenment, a time characterized by the sweeping away of any sort of authority or religion except that which could justify itself in the court of reason. No more kings, no more priests, no more bibles, no more churches – unless they could prove by reason that they had a right to have authority. Only reason had authority. It is in this context that Kant sought to find an unassailable ground for ethics.

Kant rejected an ethics such as proposed by Aristotle and Aquinas, which emphasized happiness as a byproduct of doing good. Kant argued that people who dare to take up the baton of reason will do good because it is their duty to do so. This is how people of reason act. They must find the reason for doing good within themselves. They must live autonomously. All the other goods in life – even intelligence, love, the experience of beauty or religious experience – are of lesser value than the good will. All these are only means to obtain a good will. Kant did, however, acknowledge the immortality of the soul because he realized that humans could not achieve the supreme good in this life. There must therefore be a life beyond this life. Kant's God is a God who is also held to duty. Kant's God has to make certain that human beings can indeed achieve the supreme good. In contrast with Aquinas's view, this supreme good is no longer the self-gift of God to us, but a necessary condition of reason. Faith, hope and charity lose their place in Kant's ethical theory.

Review of Kant's theory of the good

- The only good is good will.
- Good is only good if it is done out of good will and provides no personal gain.
- An act is not moral if you enjoy doing it.
- Moral acts are performed out of duty and obligation.
- Reason dictates what is good.

Guiding questions

1. What is the greatest concern in ethics for thinkers in Kant's time? What did the Enlightenment stand for?
2. What is the moral price you must pay if as an individual you want to be free and independent of any authority?
3. According to Kant, how does a person act out of good will? What would motivate such a person to act morally? How do you understand "doing your duty for no reason than that it is your duty"?

Emmanuel Levinas (1905–1995)

Levinas places the infinite Good, who is God, at the heart of ethics. For Levinas the good comes as a call, a vocation. It does not come from myself. Recall the beggar in Chapter 1, asking, "Please, can you spare some change?" I must respond. Even if I refuse, the appeal follows me. When I am called to respond to another, I am called to be good without a reward, without any self-interest. In the face of another I am turned from myself and my own interests and desires toward the other.

Levinas has a great appreciation for things like good food and wine, or the comforts of the home. However, he is keenly aware of the danger of being totally absorbed in caring for oneself. It is the other who awakens me to the highest good.

Guiding questions

1. What is the highest good for Levinas? Where do we encounter it?
2. What good is there in it for me, if the other is higher than me?

Three ways of pursuing the good

You have met five thinkers who have something to say about the good life and happiness. Each of them says something different from the others, yet there is something attractive and right in each one's thinking. So which of these ideas is consistent with Catholic ethics? A Catholic approach to ethics and morality has three components: natural ethics, the role of obligation and the impact of the gospel.

Teleological: natural ethics

Catholic ethical theory frequently turns to Aristotle's teleological approach, as reflected in the work of Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, begins with questions about human happiness. He then explores human actions, asking how evil enters into human actions, how actions are affected by passions and emotions, and how actions gradually become habits and virtues. He then explores human action from the perspective of God's self-gift. The remainder of this chapter will show what such an approach might look like in practice.

Deontological: obligation

What is the role of obligation in our decision-making? What must we do in a given situation? How do we make a moral judgment, for instance, in an intolerable work situation with an abusive boss? What are the norms for human action? What is the role of laws and rules for human behaviour in particular circumstances? We will examine these and Kant's deontological approach in greater detail in Chapter 8.

Impact of the gospel

The third component of a Catholic approach to ethics considers the impact of the gospel on us and on our actions. The gospel proclaims that the Son of God has entered human history as a man to open up possibilities for action that are motivated by God's love in our hearts. Chapter 9 will explore this gospel dimension.

Virtue

Human virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will, that govern our actions, order our passions and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery and joy in leading a morally good life. The virtuous man is he who freely practises the good. The moral virtues are acquired by human effort. They are the fruit and seed of morally good acts; they dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love.

CCC #1804

What makes for a good and happy person?

In the "natural ethics" tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas – even if we will not follow them to the letter – we can discern at least three practical considerations:

1. How do we define the standards of excellence of the "good life"?
2. What is the role of the other in attaining the good life?
3. What is the institutional context of this good life?

Paul Ricoeur defined this teleological ethics as "aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions."[5]

1. The standards of excellence of the "good life"

There is an old saying: "Plant an act, reap a habit; plant a habit, reap a virtue; plant a virtue, reap a character; plant a character, reap a destiny." The saying repeats what we have stated right from the beginning: all "good life" starts with you – an agent – initiating a certain orientation in life. The more you repeat an action, the more set in your ways you become, the more your action defines who you are – your character. The question we ask here is how you as an agent may be helped in your pursuit of the good life. Are there examples to follow? What have wise people said? Are there standards of excellence we might look at? Are they the same for everyone?

a) There are no recipes

The Catholic tradition believes, as we saw in Chapter 4, that each person created by God is unique. From birth each of us is called by God

to become the person that God created us to be. That is why each person is unique and irreplaceable and why each vocation is unique and irreplaceable. Hence there are no recipes that would serve each one in achieving his or her particular aim of life. But knowing the great tradition of human wisdom about a life of excellence helps. That is why the Catholic tradition places such an emphasis on the communion of saints, the people who have set standards of human excellence. It provides these examples to help each one of us plan our own path in life.

b) Standards of excellence

When someone is called to become a doctor or a priest, the aim of this calling is apparent: to heal or to make accessible life in Christ. Within that overall aim, it is possible – despite the individual differences of doctors and priests – to propose standards of excellence. Standards of excellence are sets of best practices. Consider the game of chess. Chess has certain strategies and rules without which it cannot be played. These strategies and rules are intrinsic to the game. One can learn the rules and the best practices of the grand masters. So it is with human life. Within the aim of human life it is possible to set certain standards of excellence.[6]

c) The study and practice of virtue

The standards of excellence in living the good life have a long history. They are known as virtues. We find frequent references to them in the works of Plato and Aristotle. Catholic thinkers quite happily borrowed from their wisdom about virtues. Literally, a virtue is a kind of excellence. Hence virtue in a student would be excellence in learning, in a printer its ability to print, in a knife its sharpness. In studying the virtues one can learn the human possibilities for excellence. Put in practice, virtues become the strengths, the solidity, of our character. For example, a just person is someone who consistently acts justly. It is not enough to have only a disposition for justice for it to be a virtue. The disposition to be just must be so entrenched as to not easily be lost. At that point it is a virtue.

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What kind of excellences, or virtues, does Catholic tradition recommend? Moral theology identifies many virtues to which a human can aspire: generosity, patience, and humility to name a few. The cardinal virtues were mentioned earlier in this chapter: temperance, courage, prudence and justice.[7] For now, let us explore the virtue of temperance.

Temperance

The virtue of temperance is widely misunderstood and often maligned. Many people understand temperance to mean moderation in eating and drinking. "Don't eat or drink in excess." In some circles temperance means: "Don't drink alcohol." The negativity attached to the virtue of temperance is unfortunate. Temperance touches mainly on three essentials in life: food, drink and sex. Without them the human race cannot survive. What does it mean to be temperate in matters of food, drink and sex? Is it following Aristotle's advice about finding the mean between too little and too much? And if so, what is too little or too much? Is it only quantity? No. Temperance means that I should take proper care of myself. My life must be well-ordered. I must "preserve" myself. Intemperance is a breakdown of the powers that are intended for self-preservation. Intemperance is a destructive and selfish love, whereas temperance is a love that is life-giving and selfless.

Let us start with this life-giving, selfless love. Temperance touches the most basic appetites and passions of human life. The passion for food, drink and sex are powerful forces. Plato saw these sensuous cravings as "an ugly brute of a horse" which the human mind, like a rider, had to control. There is a danger in seeing these passions only as something to repress, to hold down so that they cannot rear their ugly head. The virtue of temperance, however, is not just about repressing the desire for sensual pleasure; it is the tempering of this desire – that is, using these passions for human growth. Our delight in food, drink and sex show how strong in us is the desire for self-preservation. Our enjoyment of these things is one of the prime forces behind self-preservation, both of ourselves as individuals and of the human race. They are part of our desire to exist. So even though temperance is directed to the self and is enjoyable, it is not selfish when it is integrated into genuine human growth. Hence temperance is a positive, life-affirming capability in life, not a negative, self-denying one. And so for Aquinas, abstinence humanizes our desire for food, sobriety humanizes the pleasure of drinking, and chastity humanizes our desire for sexual pleasure.

Destructive and selfish love (intemperance) means using these forces of self-preservation for

An illustration of Adam and Eve from a twelfth-century mosaic from Monreale Cathedral in Sicily. In this version, perhaps influenced by the first Genesis account, God introduces Eve to Adam. Note the fruit-bearing trees in the background (see Genesis 1.26-30).

their own sake. Intemperance abuses food, drink and sex so that they are no longer there for self-preservation, self-assertion and self-fulfillment but become the objects of addiction. These desires become ends in themselves. For example, the desire for food becomes intemperate when one's sole preoccupation in life becomes eating, to the detriment of one's health. The misuse of food, drink and sex can easily become crutches in life, ways of escaping our human and Christian responsibilities. Intemperance can also signal that we do not like or love ourselves.[8]

Temperance and chastity

"Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness…. So God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1.26-27) This revelation is one of the fundamental building blocks of our understanding of sexuality and chastity. A second fundamental revelation comes to us in Genesis 2.18, 21-23: "Then the LORD God said: 'It is not good that the man should be alone….' So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.'" Here Adam recognizes himself in the woman, he recognizes that the other complements him and completes him.

Reflecting on these Scriptures, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini writes the following:

> My body has a precise word inscribed in it: this word is the *other*; it is a calling for the other; the body becomes itself in the face of the other, by relating to the other.
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> But the other is a mystery that cannot be reduced…; if I want to own it, it is no longer the "other" and I am left alone, with no one else. The sex difference makes man and woman unfinished in themselves, each definable only with reference to the other. There is no space here for…Narcissus….
>
> In the Bible, the man-woman couple is not meant to be simply a means for the preservation of the species, as is the case for the other animals. Insofar as it was called to become the image and likeness of God, it expresses in a bodily, tangible way the face of God, which is Love…
>
> It is precisely in the reciprocal love of man and woman, a love that is neither self-enclosed nor self-sufficient, but open to the God who wants to be one with man and woman, that the body, bearing as it does the seal of God, leads us back to God….Therefore, sex contains a sublime word of love that completes the person in the likeness of God, whose Holiness is Love….
>
> The classic rule about sexuality is very simple. The gratification we receive from sexual acts acquires a true human meaning when it is directed to the loving union of a man and a woman who are bound to each other by total, reciprocal fidelity and who are open to procreation. Whatever falls outside of this rule falls outside of the Christian order….

As Karol Wojtyla, now Pope John Paul II, wrote in *Love and Responsibility*, chastity is "a transparent attitude with respect to

an individual of the opposite sex." …Far from being negative, chastity is true mastery of the self; in making this choice, we acknowledge that Jesus is master of our bodies and our lives…. Chastity makes us live our body in the freedom of the Spirit, a freedom that begets love, joy, peace, patience, benevolence, moderation, self-control, courtesy, meekness, forbearance (see Galatians 5.22).[9]

Canadian spiritual writer, Fr. Ron Rolheiser, puts it this way:

> Chastity, properly defined, means living in such a way that our own needs, desires, agendas, and impatience do not get in the way of letting gift be gift, other be other, and God be God. Obviously this depends upon proper respect and proper waiting.
>
> We can learn this by looking at its antithesis. We lack chastity when, for whatever reason (lack of respect, lack of reverence, impatience, selfishness, callousness, immaturity, undisciplined desire, lack of aesthetics) we relate to others, nature, or God in such a way that they cannot be fully who and what they are, according to their own unique rhythms and preciousness. We do this when we short-circuit patience and respect.

Sex, because it so deeply affects the soul, speaks most loudly about chastity or lack of it. Sex, like all other experience, is only chaste when it does not short-circuit full respect. But it often does so in a variety of ways. Prematurity, unfair pressure, subtle or crass force, taking without giving, posturing an intimacy that one isn't ready to enter, lack of respect for previous commitments, an unwillingness to include the whole person, disregard for the wider relationships of family and community, failure to respect long-range health and happiness, ignoring proper aesthetics, all of these make for a lack of proper respect within a sexual relationship…And, as is obvious, the key element in all this is WAITING. Chastity is 90% about proper waiting.

Carlo Carretto, one of the great spiritual writers of recent times, spent many years alone, a hermit in the Sahara desert. During these long, quiet years, he tried to hear what God was saying to us. In one of his books, written from this desert solitude, he suggests that perhaps the most important thing that God is trying to tell us today, especially in Western culture, is this: Be patient! Learn to wait - for everything: each other, love, happiness, God.[10]

Chastity means the integration of sexuality within the person. It includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery.

CCC #2395

Christ is the model of chastity. Every baptized person is called to lead a chaste life, each according to his particular state of life.

CCC #2394

Chastity as self-giving

Chastity is the joyous affirmation of someone who knows how to live self-giving, free from any form of self-centred slavery. This presupposes that the person has learnt how to accept other people, to relate with them, while respecting their dignity in diversity. The chaste person is not self-centred, not involved in selfish relationships with other people. Chastity makes the personality harmonious. It matures it and fills it with inner peace. This purity of mind and body helps develop true self-respect and at the same time makes one capable of respecting others, because it makes one see in them persons to reverence, insofar as they are created in the image of God and through grace are children of God, re-created by Christ who "called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2.9).

Excerpt from:
The Pontifical Council for the Family.
The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, 1995. #17.

Temperate use of food and drink

How does temperance apply to food and drink? Remember that temperance for Aquinas meant that a person was to enjoy food and drink within reason. Food and drink are fundamental to survival. The enjoyment we experience from eating is necessary to encourage eating and sustain life. In the same way, we were meant to enjoy the taste of drink. It is true that one could live their whole life without drinking alcohol and still survive, but Aquinas does not see this as a reason to avoid all alcohol. Rather he reasoned that the practice of the virtue of temperance was concerned with protecting the body from harmful substances. Consuming either food or drink in excess or failing to consume the necessary food and drink is a vice that undermines the body's health. He called the practice of excessive eating or drinking the vice of indulgence. When we indulge our sense of taste by eating even when we are not hungry and for the sole purpose of pleasing the sense of taste, our actions are harmful to our bodies. Most people today are aware of the harm that overeating or under-eating can cause – obesity, bulimia and anorexia are all too familiar in today's society.

Drunkenness is a vice. Like food, alcoholic drink is not in itself an evil, but the excessive consumption of alcohol results in long-term harm to the body. Furthermore it results in a loss to the faculty of reason. Drunkenness not only has physical and psychological effects on the body and mind, it also has a moral effect. The harm can extend to others. Alcohol consumption is one of the major causes of traffic fatalities and high injury accidents. Relationships are often damaged and a family suffers greatly when one of its members is an abusive drinker. Excessive alcohol consumption can significantly limit moral reasoning, resulting in harmful actions. Intemperate acts of eating and drinking are destructive and selfish acts. We were meant to enjoy our food and drink, but only within reason and for the good of others and ourselves.

Guiding questions

1. What is virtue?
2. How is the virtuous person a person of character?
3. How does St. Thomas Aquinas identify temperance? Give some examples of intemperance.
4. How would Aquinas describe a chaste relationship between an engaged couple?
5. Why does Aquinas acknowledge the good of the pleasures of eating and drinking?

2. The role of the other in attaining the good life

I cannot live the good life by myself. Aristotle realized this and in his ethics he reserved an important place for friendship. Aristotle had a unique take on friendship. Friendship, he wrote, is not primarily a feeling of attachment for another. It is that, but even more it is a virtue, one of those excellences of life. As such, friendship is a deliberate activity that requires continuous exercise. The friendship that is essential for the good life is something we must work at.

What is friendship?

Real friendship consists first in a frank, unhesitating opening of one's heart and mind to the other; it is the altogether free and independent communication of one's own person. Hence it allows the other to see right in and know us as we really are, unstintingly sharing what we ourselves are and have learned. This is possible only if there is a willingness to communicate on both sides. That is where many an acquaintance falls short of friendship.

Furthermore, the openness of friendship calls for the total disarmament belonging to faith. Encounters in friendship are necessarily encounters without weapons. Between friends, there can be no built-in reservations, mental restrictions, or time limits. Only in total vulnerability can believing partners reveal themselves to one another in perfect availability and friendship. They must encounter one another not *despite* their human defects, but simply *with* their defects, because these happen to be part of the friend's makeup and nature.

Hope is also an essential feature of human existence generally, and of friendship in particular. Without hope there can be no true friends. Hopeful partners are so intimately united that one cannot let the other down without at the same time totally betraying himself or herself and breaking the engagement on which the other has placed all of his or her hopes. When I say to a friend, "You can count on me," I do not restrict "you" to any one aspect or part of my friend's being. As we can see, this personal involvement is much more than the intermittent and often capricious relationship of companionship, helpfulness, and obligingness; it is a permanent union in which two partners sustain one another and are at each other's abiding and resourceful disposal. Over and above the determination of common interest and reasonable expectation, they discover one another as unique personal subjects. They do not draw their hope from each other's human possibilities, talents, and qualities, as though they were somehow reading the future in them. It is not the possibilities in the other that engender hope; rather it is hope that creates new possibilities and a new future for mutually helpful friends.

True friendship exists only between those who love one another; it culminates in a willingness to spend oneself for the other – and this not only ungrudgingly, without reckoning the cost, but eagerly. Indeed, if need be, one will even give up one's life. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15.13). Love alone reunites friends to the extent that they share one another's existence completely and wholeheartedly. In loving friendship the element of self-giving finds its deepest expression, since the gift that is given is ultimately always the givers themselves. It is at once the gift of personal being and the gift of being truly personal. More than any other interpersonal relationship, love reaches and transfigures the centre of those who have become friends. Not only do such individuals come to possess themselves more authentically, but the uniqueness of their person is given its hitherto undisclosed real value. Thus with true friendship, a new sphere of existence is created and something quite unique takes place: the free self-giving of one person to another.

Excerpt from:
Richard G. Cote, *Universal Grace: Myth or Reality?*
(Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1977), p. 56-58.

Our Lord, the Word of God, first drew men to God as servants, but later he freed those made subject to him. He himself testified to this:

"I do not call you servants any longer, for a servant does not know what his master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, since I have made known to you everything that I have learned from my Father."

Friendship with God brings the gift of immortality to those who accept it.

From: "Against Heresies" by Saint Irenaeus, bishop
(Lib.4, 13,4-14, 1: SC100, 534-540)

Solicitude: The other, not as friend, but as an ethical appeal

To live well, I need to live with others. However, the "other" has many faces – not everyone is my friend. Levinas, as we saw, presents us with another person whom I did not choose as a friend. This other person does not enter into my life because of the way that I reach out and invite him or her. The beggar forces himself or herself into my consciousness, raising the question of my generosity. The other invades my life and makes me responsible for him or her. This is perhaps not a friendly moment. This can take place in various ways, and not only on the street corner. To be confronted by television images of the African AIDS pandemic, to experience the devastation of a flood or a forest fire in the grief of the victims who have lost everything, to be stricken by the anguish of a mother and father whose daughter died because of a senseless, preventable accident allows the other to take over something in my life. Here I am not the active agent. I suffer the other. I can only give sympathy, my compassion – I can only share the pain of the other. This experience of other is important for truly living the good life.

solicitude: Anxious concern for another.

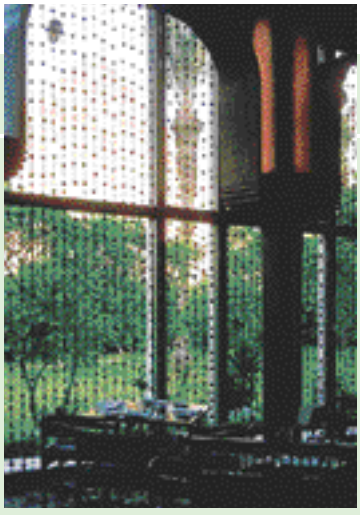
For example, consider the experience of someone who wants to help the poor in a developing country in person. People often embark on such a mission with the idea that they will make a contribution or do something for the poor. They soon realize upon their arrival that they can't do very much, that the problems are much larger than anticipated. But then something else happens. The "suffering other," the poor, offer something unexpected. Most people coming back from such an experience in a developing country tell you that they received much more from the poor than they gave. It is a gift that comes perhaps from the resilience of the poor, a gift that comes from weakness itself.[14]

We have here two types of experience of the "other" that enter into ethics: one comes from friendship, the other from the appeal of the needy other. Whether out of friendship or through the appeal of another person, the good life, the ethical life, is lived with and for others. The good life at which ethics aims is a matter of giving and receiving. To say it in other words, one cannot live ethically without "solicitude" – without a regard for the other.

Guiding questions

1. What does friendship have to do with ethics?
2. Why must I care for the other?
3. Give examples of how the good, or ethical, life is lived "with and for others."

Living with and for others



Poustinia

By Catherine Doherty

What is transparency? I see a window washed clean, through which whatever light is outside comes in, as if there were no window at all. For the window is so well washed, so transparent, that it ceases to be glass, and blends, or seems to, with the air around it. If there is sun outside such a window, it floods the room with its golden light, obliterating the window completely, because of its transparency.

Is transparency, Lord, the window you desire to make out of [those] who love you or try to? In our polluted, opaque world it is difficult to keep ordinary windows washed clean. Even if they can be washed clean, there is little light and sunshine that can seep through them. We have polluted the air to such an extent that even sunlight barely reaches the earth.

Is the word transparency your answer, Lord, to our polluted world, our polluted minds, hearts and souls? It may be, because if we unpollute our inner selves, then of course we will be selfless; and if we are selfless we easily will unpollute the air, the water and the earth, because selfless [people] in love with God are not subject to greed, and it is greed that today pollutes the earth. But greed pollutes the inner [self] before it pollutes the earth.

Lord, is this your way to unpollute the world? For if the person were truly defenceless, forgiving, and loving, the result would be transparent minds, hearts and souls. A transparent soul would show you to everyone who seeks you, for unless we become transparent, others will not know you. For every human face is an icon of Christ, as is every human heart. But for his icon to be reflected in a face, it must be painted in the heart.[15]

Guiding questions

1. Investigate: Who is Catherine Doherty?
2. According to Catherine Doherty, what is transparency?
3. What are some examples of the spiritual pollution?
4. What is the type of icon that is referred to here?
5. What is the meaning of the last sentence?

3. The good life needs just institutions

The good life goes beyond individuals and includes the social structure of institutions. Institutions are stable sets or systems of meanings, beliefs and values. Over time, the values of food, shelter, health, education, economy, and religion become stabilized in social institutions. We see this in such institutions as the family, the state, health care, churches, and the market economy. Ethics is very much interested in the way that these institutions promote and stabilize our search for the good.

Whatever you undertake in society, you are drawn into one or another institution. You live in a family, go to school, belong to a parish, work at the supermarket, save your money in a bank. Institutions structure the expectations of people who live together in society. They direct how things get done in order to promote and protect the social good. They are the backbone of the common good. In institutions we find engraved our values, beliefs and practices. Most of these we have inherited. Over the centuries our ancestors have invented and refined the

institutions that shape our lives. Some, like the family, are natural institutions. The institutions of marriage (the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others) and the family go back to the earliest memories of humanity. But, as is evident today, not all families are alike. They have changed dramatically in the last century. Other institutions have developed over time to meet particular needs, such as protection, justice, health, education, and so on.

Institutions are the spaces in society for acting together, and where justice and equality play a central role. (Chapter 13 examines justice: the virtue that governs institutions.) Justice concerns itself about right relations among people, not only in general, but also in institutions. As John Rawls says: "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought."[16] Institutions are as good as the people who are part of them and who are willing to put their efforts into them. Here is where the ethical enters into the picture. We are all responsible for making the institutions life-giving and just, for changing them if they become destructive, for protecting them when they are attacked. Institutions are repositories of meanings, beliefs and values. If there are no people for whom an institution has value, the institution will die for lack of commitment to the values and meanings that it promotes.

Decline in institutions?

Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone*[17] says that younger people between the ages of 18-29 are 50% less likely to be involved in institutional frameworks than their grandparents and great grandparents. The weakening of institutions is a phenomenon of our time. The glue that keeps our communities together is weakening. People are less involved in community activities of all kinds. Putnam has examined this in a variety of areas. He recognizes a decline in newspaper reading, running for public office, attending public meetings, entering a seminary, volunteering to serve on a committee, going to church, getting together with friends, relatives or neighbours, eating the evening meal with the whole family, and so on. People seem to be less ready to pitch in and give their energies to a community project. If people do volunteer or participate in an organization, this does not necessarily mean meeting people and working with them. There is less of a desire to rub shoulders with others. Today, says Putnam, young people prefer to use the Internet or the telephone.

A new generation of community shapers and institutional builders

A study by Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby published in 2001 does not reflect Putnam's findings. His research indicates that "a fairly high 65% of teens say that they expect to be involved in their communities in the future." This finding is consistent with current research in the United States by William Strauss and Neil Howe, who find that teens are "gravitating toward group activities… in such areas as team learning and community service." These researchers believe that today's teenagers are going to be "community shapers and institution builders."[18]

Guiding questions

1. What is the importance of institutions for ethics?
2. How do institutions incorporate values in their structures?
3. Why are institutions important for society?
4. Who is right? Is Putman's analysis correct, or do you think Bibby's observations are closer to the truth?
5. What is your involvement in institutions? Of which institutions are you a part?
6. How much time each week do you spend in interaction with others through or in an institution (family, church, school, sports, health facilities, community service)?

Wisdom paves the way to the good life

Every person desires happiness. Happiness comes to those who live the good life. In order to live the good life, you have to discover what the true good really is. You recognize that the good life is not lived alone, or with a closed circle of friends, but with all others in the human community. For this, you need to turn to the institutions that provide a framework for living together in a way that promotes the good life. Happy are those who find wisdom to recognize the markings of the good life.

Happy are those who find wisdom,
and those who get understanding,
For her income is better than silver,
and her revenue better than gold.
She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.
Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.
Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.
She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;
those who hold her fast are called happy.

Proverbs 3.13-18

Chapter review

Summary

- God has placed the desire for happiness in the human heart.
- The desire for happiness is connected with ethics and morality. All ethical theories insist that ethics is after the good.
- Plato said that reason finds the good that pervades everything. The highest pursuit in life is to contemplate the good.
- Aristotle taught that the good is inscribed by God into the nature of all things. To find the good in anything is to discover its purpose. To live the good life is to live according to our purpose, according to reason.
- St. Thomas Aquinas agreed with Aristotle about the good life and the happiness of the person who lives well and acts well. He identified another level as God's self-gift to us in Jesus and the Holy Spirit that changes how we define the good. He introduces the virtues of faith, hope and charity into the ethical discussion.
- Kant said that the good is only good if it is done out of good will and provides no personal gain. Moral acts are performed out of duty and obligation.
- Levinas wrote that it is the other who awakens me to the highest good.
- A Catholic approach to ethics and morality has three components: natural ethics, the role of obligation, and the impact of the gospel.
- What makes for a good and happy person? –"aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions."
- Human virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will, that govern our actions, order our passions and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. The cardinal virtues are temperance, courage, prudence and justice.
- I cannot live the good life by myself. Friendship is essential for the good life, and is something that we must work at developing.
- The good life involves giving and receiving; one cannot live ethically without "solicitude" – without regard for the other.
- Institutions structure the expectations of people who live together in society. They direct how things get done in order to promote and protect the social good.

Glossary

chastity: "Chastity means the integration of sexuality within the person. It includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery." (*CCC*, #2395) "Christ is the model of chastity. Every baptized person is called to lead a chaste life, each according to his particular state of life." (*CCC*, #2394)

happiness: The gospels speak of happiness in terms of beatitude – blessedness. God has placed the desire for happiness in the human heart in order to draw us to the One who alone can fulfill it. We find happiness in life by living the good life; that is, life in the way of Christ.

institutions: Social constructs that give structure and form to a community's set or systems of meanings, beliefs and values. For example, educational institutions give a concrete structure and form to the value of learning.

solicitude: anxious concern for another.

temperance: restraint of human passions and appetites in accordance with reason; self-control of the body.

virtue: Human virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will, that govern our actions, order our passions and guide our conduct according to reason and faith.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain the relationship between ethics, the good life and being happy.
2. Identify how Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant and Levinas would describe the good life, and how that relates to happiness.

Thinking and inquiry

3. Explain how the practice of the virtue of temperance supports the good life and the human search for happiness.
4. Write a description of "the good life" as advertisers would have us believe. Critique this notion of the good life from the perspective of Christian ethics. In what ways is their notion of the good life correct? In what ways does it fall short?

Communication

5. Create a series of ads for the good life, each ad from the perspective of one of the thinkers featured in this chapter.
6. Create an ad or series of ads for the good life based on virtues.

Application

7. Research the vision statements and mission statements of four to six institutions. Identify the values that they uphold. Compare their reasons for existence with this chapter's discussion of the human search for the good life and for happiness.
8. Go to a bookstore (or bookstore's web site) and identify the kinds of books that are trying to help people in their search for the good life. List a number of books under the various categories of books that you discover. Identify and explain how some books are on the right track for helping people discover the good life, as well as how some are on the wrong track.
9. Optional: Read a popular self-help book that promises the reader a shot at the good life, and write a review based on what you have learned in this chapter.

Norms for moral living

CHAPTER 8

Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes,
and I will observe it to the end.
Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
and observe it with my whole heart.
Lead me in the path of your commandments for I delight in it…
Give me life in your ways.
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
Psalm 119.33-35, 37b, 105

Imagine, if you can, a world without rules or laws. It would be even more chaotic than Hockey Night in Canada where the referees showed up without whistles. A well-refereed game in which the players are free to use their hockey skills within the well-understood parameters of the game, is a joy to watch. Driving in traffic that is orderly and predictable, and that is moving within the commonly recognized boundaries of the law, is a pleasure. A banking system with its strict rules and guidelines is what allows you the freedom to use your bank card to purchase goods and services. The countless rules and regulations that place boundaries around life's activities here in Canada, for the most part, free you to enjoy life with a minimum of worries.

The author of Psalm 119 asks the Lord to instruct him in the ways of life. For him the law given to Israel on Mount Sinai is not some burden. He does not see it as a limitation on his freedom or as an imposition by some supreme lawgiver. It is an instruction, a teaching that leads to freedom and order, and ultimately to the well-being of all. This chapter explores how norms and laws function in life.

Recall the distinction between ethics and morality (see Chapter 1, page 8). This distinction is also the difference between the approach to Chapter 7, and this chapter. Chapter 7 drew on the ethical tradition. In it, you looked at the *aim* of the good life: happiness. You saw how this good life is to be found with and for others in just institutions. The ethical tradition sees human action from the perspective of the end, as you learned from Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. According to this approach, when you are faced with a practical moral question, your first question is, "What is my goal?" The ethical tradition does not tell you how to make a particular moral decision or what you should do in a specific situation. It does not account for competing claims made, for instance, in biomedical stem cell research

Focus your learning

Cognitive
What are norms, laws and rules?

Practical
How do norms function in promoting and protecting the good life?

Affective
The psalmist writes, "Lead me in the path of your commandments for I delight in it…" How can rules and laws be a source of delight?

Key terms in this chapter

common good
inclination
law
maxim
moral principle
natural law
norm
obligation
passion
proverb
rule

Key thinkers

Plato
Richard Gula
Immanuel Kant
Thomas Aquinas

between the dignity of human life and the cure of diseases. For that, you need to look at the moral tradition.

The moral tradition is about obligation and duty. You have already encountered Kant (see Chapter 1, pages 14-17), the thinker who has become identified with this approach. His deontological approach has informed the thinking of a number of Catholic moral theologians. These thinkers approach the moral life by examining the role of norms. Norms are rules, laws and maxims in life. They are the focus of this chapter.

Norms and obligation

And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning – you must walk in it.

2 John 6

Why do we need rules and laws to be able to talk about morality? Is it not enough to present the goals and aims of human life, as we did in the previous chapter, and leave it to people to make up their own mind on how to live? Why does every society and institution seem to think it is necessary to create laws and rules besides? Why is the road to freedom paved with obligation?

In the previous chapter, we explored the human attraction to do the good just because it is good. Doing the good makes sense because it fits with what is best within ourselves. We do the good knowing that it is a source of happiness. We are motivated to do good because we are attracted to it; we desire it in our lives. Essentially, the motivation for *doing* good is that it *is* good. Then why do we need rules and laws? Societies set up governing institutions and delegate lawmakers to make and enforce laws and rules to protect those things that the people of that society consider to be important for the common good. In other words, laws *define* the way people ought to act in a society for the common good. They set norms for action, rules to follow, laws to be obeyed. And with norms come obligation and duty. Laws do not "invite" us to seek the common good; they "command" us. They use imperative language: "You shall not…," or, "You shall…"

What are norms?

"Moral norms are criteria of judgment about the sort of persons we ought to be and the sorts of actions we ought to perform."[1] Criteria are standards that serve as guides for action. We see them in many forms: laws, rules, principles, commandments, and maxims. They carry varying degrees of obligation. For example, the divine law, "You shall not murder," obliges us more than the traffic law telling us not to exceed a certain speed limit. The law to pay a minimum wage to workers carries a higher obligation than the rule of etiquette to eat with your mouth closed. Even though these examples differ in their degree of obligation, what they have in common is that they all obligate us in some way. Where does this duty, or obligation, come from? Why do we say that we *ought to* or *must* do something? Here are some possible answers:

Norms are declared by an authority

Some norms come from God, some from humans. Thus, for instance, the norms found in the Ten Commandments are proclaimed with God's Name and authority behind them. In the case of the Church (ecclesiastical law) we recognize the authority of the pope, bishops, priests and our parents. In the case of civil law, we recognize the authority of the prime minister,

members of parliament, judges, doctors, teachers, police and, once again, our parents. Our obligation to these authorities is derived from the power that has been given to them through election, delegation, ordination, and so on. Positions of leadership empower these persons to make laws, set rules, and prescribe behaviour.

Norms must be reasonable

For norms to become obligatory, they must be reasonable. If norms are to be a guide towards the common good, they cannot be arbitrary. If a rule is reasonable and is explained rationally, it creates a sense of obligation to obey it. Whether you accept a norm as obligatory, then, does not come from the outside (an authority) but from within (your reason). If an appropriate rule is explained and justified, you feel impelled from within to follow it. Duty and obligation are rational. For Kant (see "On duty and obligation," page 150) reason was the prime source of obligation.

Norms involve our freedom

A norm obliges us, in our freedom, to act in a certain way, addressing our sense of responsibility. Because moral norms promote and protect values, they guide us and they seek our assent. It is true that societies build in deterrents for those who refuse to accept either the law or the authority of the ones who declared the law. Penal codes allow the properly delegated authorities within society to impose punishments (fines, prison terms, etc.) on those who break the laws. But norms are not first of all about penalties. In fact, they are about freedom.

Here are five ways in which moral norms function to assist our freedom:

- First, norms impart wisdom. By transmitting the moral wisdom of the past, they put us in touch with the experience of those who have gone before us. This can protect us from a lot of error and hurt.
- Second, norms afford us a measure of security. Because we are a nurtured species, we rely on easily learned rules to give us some measure of comfort when we do things for the first time as we mature.
- Third, norms help us to make decisions with speed and accuracy. Often we are too busy to sit down and think about the right thing to do. If moral norms are known and appreciated, we waste less time and get the right thing done by following the norm. For example, the norm *caveat emptor* which means "buyer beware" tells us to think twice, as does the maxim, "You don't get something for nothing."
- Fourth, moral norms are helpful in examining our conscience. We all know at a general level that we are not perfect. But to examine our hearts honestly, we need some criteria to judge our actions.
- Fifth, norms function to unify a people. A sense of purpose and common goals are main ingredients of community. Norms, in other words, promote and protect values that unify a people by enabling them to live in harmony. Norms assist freedom in at least these five ways.[2]

Norms direct our inclinations and desires

Norms are guides that help us steer through the maze of human inclinations and desires. They can be compared to signposts guiding us through a tricky terrain. The "ought" of norms curbs our many inclinations. All moral theories pay attention to our desires, passions and inclinations (see "Passions and inclinations" on page 151).

Guiding questions

1. What is meant by the term "moral norm"?
2. Why do you feel obliged to act when your parents or other authorities in your life tell you to do something?
3. Give some examples of norms that you think enhanced your freedom to make a decision. Did they give you a sense of duty in making the decision?

On duty and obligation

Thomas Aquinas writes that the root of the word "law" comes from the Latin *ligando*, meaning "to bind," or "what must be done."[3] He argues that the obligation to follow a law exists because law comes from reason, and because law is tied to the common good. He defined law as "a reasonable decision promulgated by a competent authority for the common good."[4] For Aquinas, law to be reasonable had to be morally right and not arbitrary or capricious. To be reasonable, law had to be just, treating all people alike, otherwise it was not written for the common good. To be reasonable, law had to be possible to keep, otherwise it is unreasonably difficult. Finally, to be reasonable law had to be useful, because useless law is worse than useless. It is harmful.

To Aquinas, you obeyed a law because it was reasonable and because it preserved the common good. In his time, finding a reason to obey a law was not an issue. It became an issue in modern times with Immanuel Kant. Kant argued for a rational ethics, independent from any outside authority, fearing that morality would take a nosedive in his time if it were not based on reason alone. He articulated the spirit of his time (the beginning of the nineteenth century) in the slogan, "Dare to know!" People were less and less willing to let others, including God, determine what they were to do. He encouraged his contemporaries: "Be your own authority! Don't let others oblige you. Set your own duty or obligation." Kant realized that this was not easy. You must want to be autonomous (which means literally, "to be a law unto oneself"); you must want to be reasonable; and most of all, you must have a good will. That is why for Kant a good will was the highest good. Kant would never have accepted a morality based on "doing my own thing as long as I don't harm anyone." He stood for a morality where people act out of duty and obligation that they set for themselves.

Kant's famous maxim has endured: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."[5] The person is always to be treated as an end, never as a means. As Christians we find a resonance of this maxim in the Golden Rule of Jesus: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 6.31)

Guiding questions

1. Kant wanted people to be free and autonomous. What does it mean to be autonomous? Why is it not equivalent to doing whatever you want?
2. How important do you think it is that people are obliged to do certain things? Do you ever experience obligation? Describe a situation.
3. When would you say you are acting with a "good will"?

Passions and inclinations

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines passions as "emotions or movements of the sensitive appetite that incline us to act or not to act in regard to something felt or imagined to be good and evil." (#1763) In other words, passions are feelings, desires or emotions, such as love, hatred, sadness, fear and anger. The *Catechism* calls love the "most fundamental passion." Love evokes in us a desire for something which we feel to be good. It also generates a hope in us to obtain the good. Once we have obtained the good, love is transformed into pleasure and joy. (#1765) Passions are sensual, that is, they are related to our senses and to our body.

Passions are a gift of God. They are not evil or something you need to try to stamp out. In fact, they are an important part of your search for the good because they engage your senses, allowing your attraction to the good also to be a physical attraction. *Morally* speaking, however, your "passions are neither good nor evil." (#1767) They become *morally* good or evil when you govern them with reason. Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Kant all maintained that people ought not to be ruled by their passions and sensual inclinations. Rather, their reason should regulate these passions and inclinations. Hence "[p]assions are morally good when they contribute to a good action, evil in the opposite case." (#1768) Your passions are an important part of who you are. To become the person you were meant to be, your passions must be integrated into your whole person. As the Catechism says, this is the work of the Holy Spirit in you. This work is complete when you love God with your whole being, that is, "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." (Matthew 22.37)

Guiding questions

1. What are passions?
2. What do the philosophers mentioned above propose that you do with your inclinations and passions?
3. Discuss the statement: "Your passions must become integrated into your whole person." Is this possible without self-control? Why or why not?

Laws

The law is the highest expression of a norm for action. Law is commonly understood as a guide or directive for human action. However, the word "law" has a very specific meaning. As we use it here, law refers to the judgment of a lawmaker about the means necessary for the common good.[6] According to this definition a law requires:

1. a lawmaker
2. a specific directive of action
3. a consideration of the common good
4. a specific group of people for whom the law is intended
5. obligation

For this reason we are not talking here about laws of nature or physics. They do not fulfill all five conditions of law. In order to see how law is part of moral life, let us look briefly at these five conditions.

1. Lawmakers

Who are the lawmakers? We identify two kinds of law: God's law and human law.

a. God's law is also called eternal law. We find it expressed in two ways. First, we find it revealed in the Bible and other sacred texts. It is in this first sense that we spoke of God's law of the covenant at the heart of which are the Ten Commandments (Chapter 4). These laws were written down by human hand, and so they require human interpretation. In order to understand them properly, we turn to the Church as an authentic interpreter of God's law. For this reason, the Catholic Church has its own law found in the *Code of Canon Law* (last promulgated in 1983). But God also reveals this law in a second way. Since we are in the image of God and created by God, God's law is also written in our capacity to reason, in our inclinations and passions, in our actions and relationships. We call this natural law. (Read more on natural law below in "Moral principles and natural law" on page 155.)

b. Human law has its own legislators. In Canada these legislators are first of all elected members of federal parliament and provincial legislatures. Municipal governments also have the right to pass laws, called municipal by-laws. Through the democratic process of voting for their representatives, and more directly through referenda, citizens are also legislators. Also, over time societies create what are known as laws of custom that are then recognized by the courts.

2. The law itself – a specific directive

Laws tend to be very specific, spelling out exactly how the subjects of the law are to act. That is why we have laws covering every area of human life: property, housing, food safety, economic life, criminal justice, traffic, transportation, and so on. Similarly, the Church's *Code of Canon Law* covers all the aspects of the life of the Church (such as the laws, customs and decrees of the Church, the celebration of the sacraments, the administration of material goods, and sanctions) in order to allow the Church to function as a community.

3. The common good

Who comes first, the individual or society? Catholic social teaching – without denying the rights of individuals – holds that laws are primarily intended to give shape to the common good.[7] What is this common good? It is not the sum total of all material goods of a society. The common good refers to the general well-being of all in a society. It includes such things as peace, security, protection of the law, and good order. It is a dynamic process in which a society, by means of its laws, seeks to meet the needs of all and to protect the freedom of all. Catholic social ethics gives priority to the common good over private good. This is consistent with the recognition of persons as relational beings. (Chapter 11 will explore this in greater depth.)

Example of a canon law

Since Christ's faithful are called by baptism to lead a life in harmony with the gospel teaching, they have the right to a Christian education, which genuinely teaches them to strive for the maturity of the human person and at the same time to know and live the mystery of salvation.

Canon 217, *Code of Canon Law*

The Code also acknowledges the rights of parents to have a Catholic education for their children and to avail themselves of the assistance from civil society. (See #793-806.)

4. A specific group of people

Laws function within an institutional framework. They address the people who participate in these institutions of society and the Church. Institutions, as the contexts in which we live the good life (Chapter 7), are guided by laws to help them realize the good life, or the common good. One way in which the Catholic Church seeks to use laws to promote the common good can be seen in what it calls the "preferential option for the poor." Aware of the impact that sin and disorder have on the dignity of persons, the Church proposes that preference be given to the poor. That is, it urges that laws governing institutions be attentive to the well-being of those on the margins of the institutions (the poor, the homeless, the sick, the disabled, and so on).

5. Obligation

So important is the common good, that we are morally obliged to choose the means necessary to achieve it. Therefore, if a law contributes to the common good, we are obligated to follow it. For example, if I want order and security for myself and for others, I must support police protection and a system of justice. If I want safety on the roads, I must follow the speed limit and refrain from driving while under the influence of alcohol and drugs. If I want social services, education and health care, I consent to pay taxes. Since our obligation to follow a law is derived from our moral obligation to the common good, a law that does not promote the common good or that clearly infringes on the dignity of persons (such as laws that would allow human cloning, certain types of stem cell research, abortions, slavery) loses its right to obligation. Instead, it becomes obligatory to oppose and seek to abolish such laws. Unjust laws do not oblige.[8]

Law is a directive judgment of lawmakers regarding the means necessary for the common welfare.

Thomas Davitt, S.J.

Guiding questions

1. What is the importance of laws in society?
2. How do laws promote rather than limit personal freedom?
3. What sort of "goods" do you think are necessary for the common good of Canada or the world? Give your reasons.

Rules

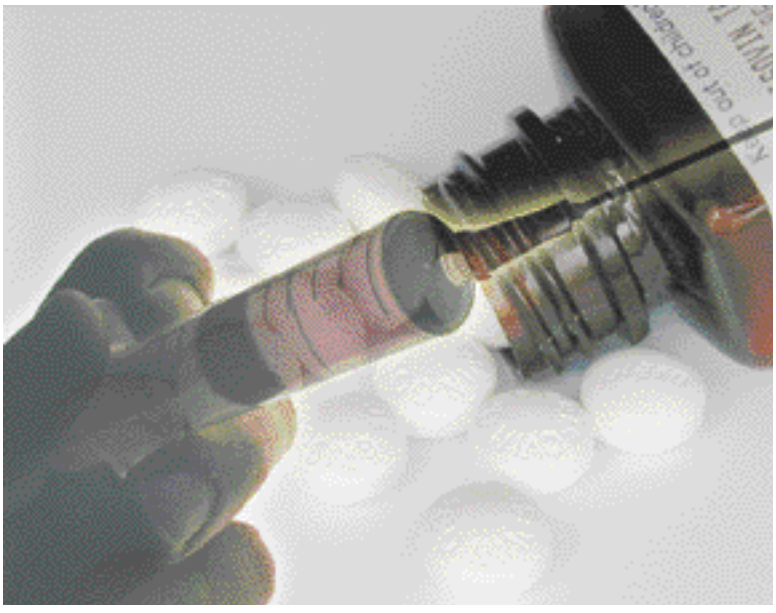
With rules we enter into a different class of norms. Rules are not strictly legislated but are nevertheless obligatory guidelines for action. Rules indicate how we ought to behave in certain situations. Rules can be absolute, generally binding, or relative.

Absolute rules

Absolute rules are rules that generally apply under all circumstances. Here are some examples of absolute rules: "You shall not murder." Always be just. Love God and love your neighbour as yourself. The Golden Rule: "Whatever you wish others to do to you, do so to them" (Matthew 7.12; Luke 6.31). Do good and avoid evil. Be honest. Be chaste. Be grateful. Be humble. Be prudent. Be reasonable.[9] These rules are more like guides to action. They do not enter into detail as to what you must do in a particular situation.

Generally binding rules

Generally binding rules apply in all circumstances unless there is another compelling rule in conflict with this rule. The rule "Do not lie," or "Be truthful," is one such generally binding rule. A lie occurs if you intentionally deceive or tell an untruth to someone who has the right to



the truth. But the rule "Do not lie" depends very much on what you understand to be a lie. For example, you would not have to tell a thief the truth about the whereabouts of valuables. In the same way, "Do not kill" is generally binding, but in a legitimate war or in self-defence, this rule is superseded by other values. So if telling the truth betrays what has been said in confidentiality or places another person in danger of death, you are not bound by the rule to "be truthful."

Sometimes when there is a conflict between rules it is quite easy to see which must be followed. But in many cases it is difficult to make such a judgment, as in situations of war and medical practice. When, for instance, is it permissible for soldiers to fire upon a civilian vehicle that is speeding toward them? When is it permissible to remove a ventilator from a comatose patient? When does the administration of medication to ease pain become euthanasia?

Maxims and proverbs

You have probably heard nuggets of wisdom like these: "People who live in glass houses should not throw stones." Or "A bird in the hand is better than two in the bush." Maxims, proverbs or rules of thumb offer guidelines or advice. They come from customs of the past, from culture, and from communities or institutions like a school or a parish.

In the Scriptures we find a number of books that provide us with words from the wise. Because they are from the Scriptures, they are normative. They are known as the Books of Wisdom (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirach and Job). Some of these books, particularly Wisdom, are attributed to King Solomon, the wisest of Israel's kings. Here are some examples from the Book of Proverbs:

"Speak for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy." – Proverbs 31.8-9

"For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer (of gossip), quarreling ceases." – Proverbs 26.20

"Make no friends with those given to anger, and do not associate with hotheads, or you may learn their ways and entangle yourself in a snare." – Proverbs 22.24-25

"Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who is able to stand before jealousy? – Proverbs 27.4

"Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips." – Proverbs 24.28

"Do not wear yourself out to get rich; be wise enough to desist." – Proverbs 23.4

"In all toil there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty." – Proverbs 14.23

Guiding questions

1. What is the difference between laws and rules?
2. What norms govern behaviour in your school? What type of norms would most effectively promote the common good in your school? Give examples.

Moral principles and natural law

Moral principles are basic truths we use to determine rules of conduct. In moral reasoning, principles enable us to measure our moral obligation or to figure out how we ought to act in particular situations. They touch on every aspect of our lives where ethics and morality are at stake.

When Catholics seek to determine whether a certain action is right or wrong they often refer to "natural law." The word law is used here in a different sense than we used it earlier. Natural law is not found in any book of laws. If it is "written" anywhere, it is, as Pope Leo XIII said, "written and engraved in the soul" (*CCC*, #1954). It is a "law" written within us in our capacity to reason. The Catholic tradition, therefore, turns not only to the Bible to find norms and principles for human moral action. It also turns to human nature and what we may learn about human nature through reason. As the *Catechism* says, "The natural law expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie" (*CCC*, #1954).

Natural law, as a principle for moral action, affirms that we have the capacity to figure out what is good. We can trust our genuine search for the truth. The natural law is available to anyone who is willing to think about our living together in the human community. Anyone who seeks to know what it means to be human is engaged in understanding natural law. As Thomas Aquinas says, "The natural law is nothing other than the light of understanding placed in us by God; through it we know what we must do and what we must avoid" (as quoted in *CCC* #1955).

Thomas Aquinas mentions as the first principle of natural law: "Do good and avoid evil." He also says that our inclination to preserve and protect life, to procreate and educate, our tendency toward truth and our inclination to cooperate with one another, are all derived from natural law. Whatever relates to right reasoning belongs to the natural law.[10]

But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

James 1.25

Guiding questions

1. What is the meaning of "natural law"?
2. How can you determine whether you are acting in accordance with natural law?

Jacques Maritain on natural law

"Natural Law is natural not only in so far as it is the normality of functioning of human nature, but also in so far as it is naturally known: that is to say, known through inclination, by way of congeniality or connaturality, not through conceptual knowledge and by way of reasoning…. Natural Law is made manifest to practical reason in certain judgments, but these very judgments do not proceed from any conceptual, discursive, rational exercise of reason. They proceed from…inclination." (*Moral Principles of Actions: Man's Ethical Imperative*)

Thomas Aquinas on natural law and reason

"Since all things are ruled and measured by the Eternal Law [God's Law], we must conclude that they participate in this Law insofar as they derive from it the inclinations through which they tend naturally toward their proper operations and ends…. Thus the rational creature by its very rationality participates in the eternal reason, and because of this participation has a natural inclination to the actions 'rooted in reason.' It is this participation in the Eternal Law enjoyed by the rational creature which is called the Natural Law." (*Summa*, I-II, 93,1)

Thomas Aquinas on natural law and human law

As Augustine says, "that which is not just seems to be no law at all": wherefore the force of a law depends on the extent of its justice. Now in human affairs a thing is said to be just, from being right, according to the rule of reason. But the first rule of reason is the law of nature, as is clear from what has been stated above. Consequently every human law has just so much of the nature of law, as it is derived from the law of nature. But if in any point it deflects from the law of nature, it is no longer a law but a perversion of law. (*Summa*, I-II, 95,2)

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Psalm 139.13-14

Case study 1: Assisted human reproduction

Ilya and Franka have been married six years. Franka had always dreamed of having a large family like her parents, but she has not succeeded in becoming pregnant. In exploring other avenues with her doctor, she is told that she stands a good chance to become pregnant through in vitro fertilization using her husband's sperm. What moral principles come into play?

In October, 2003, the House of Commons passed Bill C-13 entitled *An Act Respecting Assisted Human Reproduction*. The Bill touches on many issues of assisted human reproduction. For example, it talks about in vitro fertilization, embryo and stem cell research, cloning, transfers of gametes, embryos or fetuses between animals and humans, sex selection, surrogacy, marketing of gametes and embryos or the commercialization of embryos, and the patenting of humans. The government of Canada has worked to provide an ethical framework to the Bill, inviting interested parties to present their ethical views to improve the Bill. Among the respondents were the Canadian bishops and the Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF). In their briefs they spoke about a number of moral principles derived from the Catholic tradition. Here are some of these principles:

• ***Respect for human life and human dignity***

The briefs quote the Canadian Physicians for Life in their discussion on human stem cell research: "It is an objective scientific fact that human life begins at conception/fertilization. This is not a 'faith' position or a 'belief'. We are human beings even at the one cell stage. A human embryo is not a 'potential human being'. It is a human being." An embryo is known and loved by God.[11] The principle used in the response by the bishops was that "The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception."[12] We cannot, therefore, reduce an embryo from being a human person by saying it is just a source of organic material for therapeutic cloning or stem cell research. Because of the dignity of human life, killing an embryo for the purpose of finding cures for diseases such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's – however desirable such a cure would be – is not acceptable. Human life cannot be destroyed for the potential benefit of others.

• ***A child is a gift***

Even though the desire for a child by infertile couples is deeply personal and powerful, fulfilling this desire must first of all benefit the child, not the couple. The moral principle is that a child can never become an object or a thing. A child may not be exploited merely to fulfill the desire of the infertile couple. "The child is a gift, the most precious gift of the relationship, the most gracious gift of all."[13] A child is never a possession.

• ***The integrity of procreation***

This principle touches on assisted conception such as in vitro fertilization. The Catholic Church honours and respects the act of human procreation between a husband and wife as God's design. In vitro fertilization is considered unacceptable for two reasons: First, it separates procreation from the physically intimate expression of the love of husband and wife. Second, it can lead to the destruction of embryos that remain after the treatment. This would undermine the principle of respect for human life and dignity.

• ***Concern for the most vulnerable***
This principle – often called the "preferential option for the poor" – is emphasized by the Catholic Church because the poor and weak need special protection. The Church seeks to be a voice for the infertile couples, for the children conceived through assisted reproduction, and for children with disabilities. Also, the embryo itself – human life at its most vulnerable – needs protection.

• ***The common good***
The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#1906), as we saw above, describes the common good as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and easily." Humans are created within a family not only as individuals, but also as part of a society. We are social beings, part of a larger community. In what we do we also accept responsibility for the good of all and of each individual. In Catholic moral teaching the common good of individuals and of the people of a nation such as Canada as a whole is always a factor.[14] In evaluating the common good, the health and interests of women who are most affected by these new technologies must be given an especially attentive hearing. Essential to the common good is universal respect for the inalienable right to life of every human being at every stage, from embryo to natural death.

Guiding questions

1. What "goods" are at stake for Ilya and Franka?
2. When the goods that Ilya and Franka desire come into conflict, what process should they follow to guide their decision?
3. Describe how their moral reasoning might unfold.

Case study 2: Euthanasia and assisted suicide

Lynn is suffering from ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. The disease has progressed to the point that it has begun to affect her respiratory muscles. She is afraid of the certain death that awaits her. She asks her doctor to help her to die before she loses all power to breathe. What moral principles come into play?

In 1994, the Canadian bishops sent a brief to the Senate Committee on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide. The issue of euthanasia and assisted suicide has become a national issue because of highly publicized and emotional cases of two Canadians, Tracy Latimer and Susan Rodriguez. In their brief the bishops cited three principles:

• ***Human life is relational***
Human life is a good that is essentially different from all other goods. It is not a good we possess, but a good of which we are stewards. We do not own life, even our own lives. Life is always a most precious gift – a gift which we

have received from others and which we are called to make fruitful and to preserve. This means that protecting human life and its fruitfulness is not only a matter of self-preservation, but also of sustaining the common good of society. We are a part of a web of human relationships.

• ***We are mutually responsible for life***
From the first principle follows that human life is *inter*dependent. We are in this together. We need to be wary of such language as, "I must be able to have *control* over whether I live or die." Our supposed mastery over life is shown by the reality of death to be an illusion. After all, how much power and control do we have over life if we cannot control death? Isn't all life dependent on the support of others? That is why suicide is always such a painful experience for those left behind. It is experienced as a failure to protect the life of another. We are responsible for the other.

• ***Our care for the other must be governed by compassion, not pity***
How, then, do we respond to the person who is suffering? How do we maintain his or her dignity? We ought to respond out of compassion, not pity. Suffering and pain, the bishops say, challenge us at the very core of human life. They reveal our weakness and vulnerability. Suffering is not what God intends for us – even though Jesus showed that suffering can also be powerfully healing for others. But that does not make suffering a good to be sought. We must always seek to reduce it. Compassion opens us to sharing and entering into the suffering of another, whereas pity leaves the sufferer isolated to fend for him or herself. That is why the Catholic tradition strongly supports palliative care of terminally ill people and appropriate medication to ease pain, even when such medication may hasten death.[15]

Catechism of the Catholic Church

#2276: Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible.

#2277: Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists of putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable.

#2280: Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him. It is God who remains the sovereign Master of life. We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for his honour and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of.

#2282: Voluntary co-operation in suicide is contrary to the moral law.

Guiding questions

1. In Lynn's case, who are the moral agents, and how should they be involved in the case?
2. What goods are at stake?
3. What principles take priority in a case such as this? Explain.

In possession of Gyges' ring: If you could get away with it, would you?

In Plato's book, *The Republic*, an exchange takes place between the philosopher Socrates and his student, Glaucon. Glaucon wants to prove to Socrates that "…no [one] is just of his [or her] own free will, but only under compulsion." If both the just and the unjust were given the freedom to do whatever they liked to do, he argues, the just would "travel the same road as the unjust." He uses the story of Gyges to make his point:

> Gyges was a shepherd in the service of the ruler of Lydia. During a violent rainstorm and earthquake, the ground broke open where he was tending the king's sheep, creating a chasm. Seeing this and marvelling, he went down into it. There he saw, besides many other wonders, a hollow bronze horse. The horse had window-like openings. Gyges climbed through one of these openings and found a corpse wearing nothing but a gold ring. The shepherd took this ring, put in on his own hand and came out. He arrived at the usual monthly meeting to report to the king on the state of the flocks, wearing the ring. As he sat among the others waiting to give his report, he happened to twist the ring towards himself, and as he did this he became invisible. The others at the meeting went on talking as if he had gone. He marvelled at this and, fingering the ring, he turned the hoop outward again and became visible. When he realized the ring's magical power, he at once arranged to become a messenger to the king. With the ring's power, he seduced the king's wife, killed the king with her help, and took over the kingdom.

If there were two such rings, argued Glaucon, one worn by a just person and the other by the unjust, they both, in the end, would act in the same manner. If they could both do as they pleased without the possibility of being discovered, they would no longer have any reason to behave in a just manner. There would be no social compulsion to do the right thing. The one wearing the ring would step beyond society's rules and do as he or she pleases.[16]

Guiding questions

1. According to Glaucon, why do people behave justly in society?
2. Imagine that you have come to possess Gyges' ring. How would you be inclined to act? Why?
3. What if everyone in your class had one of these magical rings? Would your answers or reasons given to question 2 change or remain the same?
4. How does acting according to moral principles hinge on something greater than "being able to get away with it"?

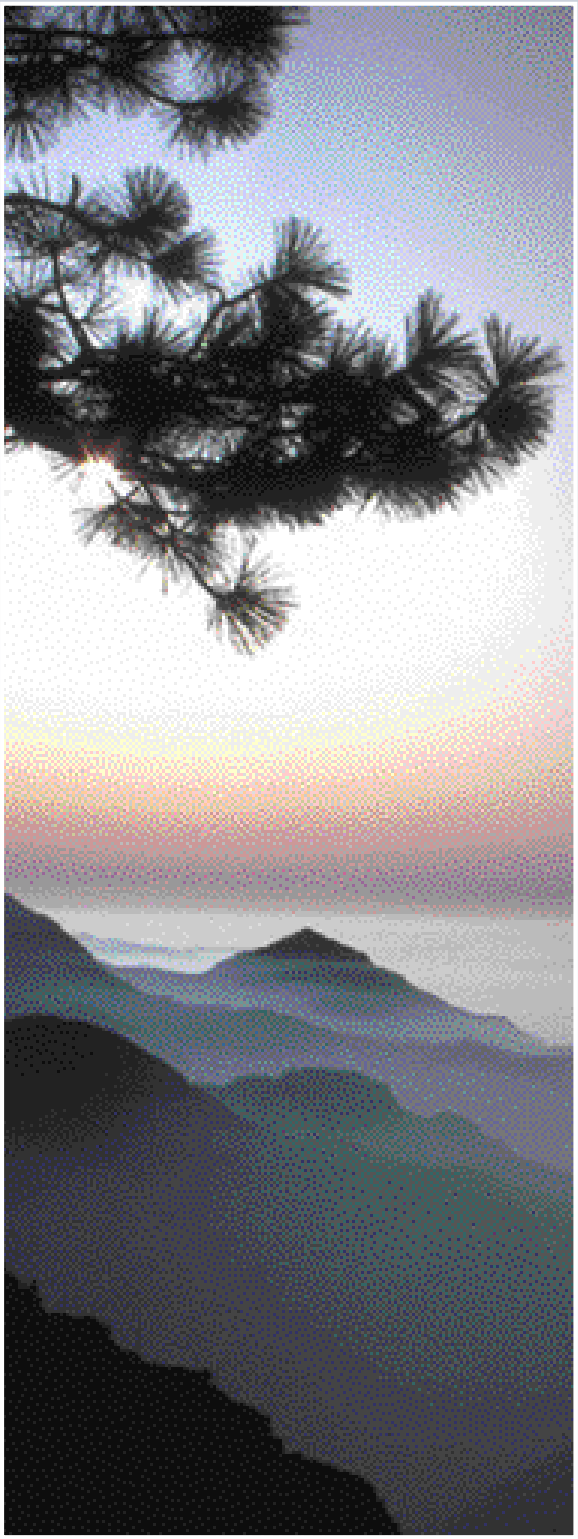
The prudent person

There is clearly a lot that goes into moral decision-making. There are norms, laws, rules and principles to consider. It is not just about following your inclinations, or doing what "feels" right. If to be human is to be moral and ethical, if the ethical and moral sets us apart and is an indispensable part of our identity, it is important – even obligatory – that we attend to this aspect of human actions. Persons in all the different professions – teachers, doctors, bishops and priests, business people, lawyers, nurses, members of parliament, engineers, builders – have created professional and ethical codes of conduct. For the common good of society, we expect that these codes will be followed. We expect people to be ethical and moral in their dealings with others. The penalties for failing to do so are often high. People are removed from positions; they are charged by the legal system; they lose their good name; they are fined; they are imprisoned. We are not moral, as has been stressed, if we act out of fear of these penalties. Human morality originates in a moral person who acts according to the good. To act according to the good with all of these norms, laws, rules and principles to consider, also requires prudence.

Christianity has considered prudence the foremost of the virtues. Prudence is not timidity. In the true sense of the word, the prudent person is one who is unlikely to be found in an embarrassing situation or in a conflict. The prudent person is clever and circumspect. In Christian ethics prudence goes together with the search for goodness. The prudent person is the one who has the ability to make good choices, who has an almost instinctive inclination toward goodness. We need prudence in order to harness impulses, inclinations and instincts. The virtue of prudence is what makes us moral people. Prudence seeks out right reason. It evaluates motives for action. It makes moral decisions that follow sound reason. It judges how to make justice and love of God real in day-to-day activities. The prudent person is the wise person who has the ability to do good and avoid evil. At heart, every moral and ethical person has a healthy dose of prudence in his or her heart and judgment.

Guiding questions

1. Who would you consider to be a prudent person?
2. How do you become prudent?
3. Why is prudence important for moral life?



Psalm 19

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hid from its heat.

The law of the LORD *is perfect, reviving the soul;*
the decrees of the LORD *are sure, making wise the simple;*
the precepts of the LORD *are right, rejoicing the heart;*
the commandment of the LORD *is clear, enlightening the eyes;*
the fear of the LORD *is pure, enduring forever;*
the ordinances of the LORD *are true and righteous altogether.*
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can detect their errors?
Clear me from hidden faults.
Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
do not let them have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,
O LORD*, my rock and my redeemer.*

Chapter review

Summary

- "Moral norms are the criteria of judgment about the sorts of persons we ought to be and the sorts of actions we ought to perform." Norms promote and protect values. They come in different forms – laws, rules, principles, commandments, and maxims – and carry varying degrees of obligation.
- Kant's maxim: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end." The person is always to be treated as an end, never as a means. As Christians we find a resonance of this maxim in the Golden Rule of Jesus: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 6.31)
- Law is commonly understood as a guide for human action. As we use it here, law refers to the judgment of a lawmaker about the means necessary for the common good.
- Rules are not strictly legislated but are nevertheless obligatory guidelines for action. Rules indicate how we ought to behave in certain situations, and can be absolute, generally binding, or relative.
- Moral principles are basic truths we use to set rules of conduct. In moral reasoning, we use principles to measure moral obligation or to determine how to act in particular situations.
- Natural law affirms that human beings have the capacity, through reason, to discover the good. As Thomas Aquinas says, "The natural law is nothing other than the light of understanding placed in us by God; through it we know what we must do and what we must avoid."
- To do what is good while considering all these norms, laws, rules and principles also requires prudence. The prudent person is the wise person who has the ability to do good and avoid evil.

Glossary

common good: The general well-being of all within society.

inclination: Natural disposition towards a perceived good. Related to passions.

law: The judgment of a lawmaker about the means necessary to promote and protect the common good.

maxim: A general truth or rule of conduct.

moral principle: Basic truths used to determine rules of conduct. In moral reasoning, principles are used to measure moral obligation or to determine how to act in particular situations.

natural law: The original moral sense which enables people to discern by reason what is good and what is evil, what is true and what is a lie.

norm: Norms are guides for action. They come in the form of laws, rules, principles, commandments, and maxims. They come with varying degrees of obligation.

obligation: Something you are bound to do by duty; your responsibility.

passion: Feelings, desires or emotions. Morally speaking, they are neither good nor evil in themselves, but are morally good when they contribute to a good action, and morally evil when they contribute to an evil action.

proverb: A brief, popular saying or adage containing a nugget of wisdom.

rule: A prescribed guide for conduct or action.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain the distinctions between norms, laws and rules.
2. Describe the relationship between passions and inclinations on the one hand, and norms, laws and rules on the other.

Thinking and inquiry

3. How is "natural law" a moral principle, and not a law like other laws?
4. Write a brief essay on why the moral principle of "concern for the most vulnerable members of society" is a key part of Christian moral teaching.

Communication

5. Using your daily news media (newspapers, TV, radio, Internet), develop a creative presentation on how rules and laws are needed to protect and promote the common good of your community.
6. Drawing on the Book of Proverbs and on conventional wisdom, develop a creative presentation of moral maxims for young people today.

Application

7. Explore how your school rules contribute to the common good of your school community. What improvements would you recommend, and why?

Living in praise and thanksgiving

CHAPTER 9

God loves.
May I be acceptable in Thy sight.
We are all one in His grace.
The fact that we do exist is acknowledgment of Thee O Lord.
Thank you God.

God will wash away all our tears …
He always has …
He always will.
Seek Him every day.
In all ways seek God every day.

Let us sing all songs to God
To whom all praise is due … praise God.
No road is an easy one,
But they all go back to God.
With all we share God.
It is all with God.
It is all with Thee.

God breathes through us so completely …
So gently we hardly feel it …
Yet it is our everything.
Thank you God.

Lyrics from John Coltrane, "A Love Supreme"

Gospel dimension of the good life

The message of the beatitudes and of the impact of God's goodness and love has been an inspiration for many artists. One such inspiration came to the jazz tenor saxophonist John Coltrane. In a memorable concert on September 9, 1964 he and the other members of his jazz quartet performed "A Love Supreme." By all accounts this was a monumental and most inspiring event. It had been a rough road to this evening. Coltrane had been a drug and alcohol addict. Because he was so undependable (he would almost always show up late for concerts, dressed in clothes that looked like he had slept in them for days), he had been twice fired from the Miles Davis Quintet. In 1957 Coltrane had an experience of God that changed his life. From that moment he wanted to express his thanks in song "to make others happy through music." The moment came in the summer of 1964 after the death of a close friend and the birth of his first child. Coltrane went into seclusion and in three days wrote "A Love Supreme." He made it "a humble offering" to God.[1] In the original liner notes Coltrane put his experience into words:

Focus your learning

Cognitive
Explain the relationship between the beatitudes and our vocation to happiness.

Practical
Name the various ways that we are called to respond to God's generosity.

Affective
How is God calling you to live in praise and thanksgiving?

Key terms in this chapter

beatitude
charity
liturgy
spirituality
vocation

Thankfully, now and again through the unerring and merciful hand of God, I do perceive and have been duly re-informed of His *Omnipotence*, and of our need for, and dependence on Him. At this time I would like to tell you that *no matter what … it is with God. He is gracious and merciful. His way is in love, through which we all are. It is truly – a love supreme*.

It never entered my mind, Jesus,
that in the dance I am the dancer,
but the force of your love, Jesus,
has most certainly led me to dance....
I had already forgotten
that I had begun the dance.
Joy fills every heart, Jesus,
so that words are lacking.

Mechthild of Madgeburg, 1212–1277

In Chapters 7 and 8 we examined the ethical and the moral dimensions of the good life. In this chapter we look at the gospel dimension of the good life. We consider the impact of the revelation of God in Jesus upon our moral and ethical life. We also take a look at how this revelation of God calls for a personal response. Just as Coltrane in his search for happiness recognized his dependence on this gracious and merciful God, and need for a personal response, so too are we, each one of us, invited to respond to God's generous offer. In this chapter we have the privilege of sharing in the personal stories of three people who have responded to God's call to a vocation to be lived in praise and thanksgiving.

Christians from all centuries tell us that our greatest happiness, our most delightful joy, comes from God. Happiness and joy have a divine origin.[2] God placed happiness in our hearts as a reflection of God's own joy and happiness. As Meister Eckhart, a Rhineland mystic of the 13th century said, "God will rejoice, yea, God will rejoice through and through: for there is nothing in His depth which is not stirred by joy." The only One who can fill the deep desire for joy and happiness in us to the full is God. Mary had obviously found this when she exulted in her prayer: "My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour." (Luke 1.47) God is the highest good that we can enjoy. No other good compares.

If God fulfills our desire for happiness, how do we attain it? This can happen only in a relationship with God, which is initiated by God. This has been revealed to us as a relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The previous chapters emphasized what we must do as we strive to live ethically and morally. This chapter emphasizes what God brings to the relationship, and our response to God and to God's personal call to each one of us. It represents a considerable enrichment of how we understand ourselves as ethical and moral beings.

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me

In Luke's gospel we find this picture of Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry: during the synagogue service Jesus stands up to read. He is given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolls the scroll until he comes to chapter 61. He reads the following passage:

> The spirit of the LORD GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. (Isaiah 61.1-3)

After he finishes the reading he says to the people of Nazareth, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4.21) In Chapter 61 of the Book of Isaiah the prophet speaks of himself as one anointed with the Spirit of the Lord God for a special mission. On this occasion in Nazareth, Jesus presents himself as this messiah, (in Greek messiah is translated as Christ, the anointed one). What the prophet said the messiah would do, Jesus says, is now happening "in your hearing." This is the message that Jesus extends to us in the beatitudes.

The ruins of the synagogue pictured above date from around A.D. 200. It may have been built on the foundations of a synagogue that existed during the time of Jesus.

The Gospels present us with two versions of the beatitudes. In Chapter 5 you were presented with Matthew's beatitudes. Here we will explore Luke's version of the beatitudes and what they mean for our vocation to happiness.

Luke's beatitudes (Luke 6.20–26)

The beatitudes are the Christian blueprint for the building of the kingdom of God on earth.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

'Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

'Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

'But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

'Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

'Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

'Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.'

Whom is Jesus addressing in the beatitudes?

Matthew:

- The Sermon is addressed to those who have welcomed Christ and belong to the community of disciples: first the disciples, then the crowd who has come from all the regions of Israel.
- Poor in spirit: someone who is poor within, knowing him or herself to be totally dependent upon God to live and grow; a humble person; a person who is not attached to the things of this earth.
- Mourners: those afflicted with intense sorrow, keen suffering or a great loss. Spiritual sufferers are those who mourn for their own sins, and for the sins of others.
- The meek are the same poor in spirit of the first beatitude. The meek are those who do not get upset by the contradictions of life, who remain patient. The meek are not weak, but rather are persons with great spiritual power.
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: the just or righteous are those who hunger to live completely the will of God with and for others according to the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Those who thirst for holiness.
- The merciful are those whose hearts are always ready and eager to forgive completely and unconditionally. The merciful are those who feel from deep within the misery of others. They open their hearts and do whatever they can to relieve the distress of others.
- The pure of heart are without malice or evil, authentic and loyal to God and neighbour. They are people without guile, who say and do everything as authentic human beings. Those who are childlike, innocent, loving unconditionally.
- Peacemakers are those who are actively involved in building peace, wholeness, and well-being. Peacemakers help to reconcile persons in conflict. They show an active interest and love for the enemies themselves. They are at peace with God and with themselves.
- The persecuted here are those who suffer because they follow the gospel of Jesus as found in the Sermon. Those who suffer are the ones ridiculed because they are faithful to Jesus.

Luke:

- The poor are the real poor, those who have to "crouch" for their living (beggars).
- The hungry are the poor who have no food and no way to sustain themselves.
- Those who weep are the rejected and the distressed because of their poverty.
- The last group are those who are rejected because they follow the way of Jesus.
- The rich, the full, and the laughers are those whose lives are centred on themselves and their selfish desires and who forget the poor and God. They are the famous, the ones flattered by the adulation of their fans, the ones who consider themselves above others.[3]

Jesus' proclamation of the beatitudes

The beatitudes are rich texts filled with meaning and paradoxes as we have already observed in Chapter 5 with Matthew's telling of the Sermon on the Mount. But nowhere is this clearer than in the stark and startling version of Luke. When Jesus stood up in the synagogue to read from Isaiah's scroll, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me … to bring good news to the poor," he set out his agenda. He said that with him God had entered into the struggles of all people. In Nazareth he talked about the poor and captives, the blind and oppressed people. This was to be their time for freedom and good news. God would "give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit." (Isaiah 61.3) It would be God's gift. In Luke's beatitudes Jesus is even more blunt. He points to those who "crouch for a living" (beggars), who have no food to sustain themselves and have nowhere to turn, who weep and are distressed because of their poverty and helplessness. In a strange twist Jesus declares them to be happy. This paradox is indeed difficult to grasp. A happy beggar? A happy starving person? A happy weeping person? Happy, not at some time in the future, but happy now! The kingdom of God *is* yours – now! God has come close to you. This is the mystery of the kingdom that Jesus presents as a key to understanding his person and mission.

A brief phrase in the text of Isaiah may help us to understand the paradox. At the end of the passage from Isaiah which Jesus proclaims in the synagogue, Isaiah states that the *messiah* makes the proclamation in order to display God's glory (Isaiah 61.3). The poor, the mourners, the hungry are declared happy not because they are good, not because they have earned it or deserved it. For Jesus there is no other reason than that God is good. Through them God's glory will be displayed. Jesus wanted to drive home these paradoxes that if for us a happy beggar or a happy weeping person is impossible, for God it is not impossible. The heirs of the kingdom – in whom God's goodness and happiness has entered – were not the "good" or the pious, but the beggar, the sinner, the prostitute. Did they deserve it more than others? No, but God heard their cries. And to use the language of Levinas (see Chapter 1), their cries, in a sense, "made God responsible." In their weakness and exclusion they cannot force the hand of God. They are an appeal to God's goodness. And so, the poor, more than anyone else, were a sign that what Jesus proclaimed could only come forth out of God's goodness.[4]

The ethics of the beatitudes

What do the beatitudes say about ethics and morality, since they are first of all about what God has decided to do on our behalf? They are about God's way of being with us and God's abundant generosity. What is the orientation the beatitudes give to us?

- ***We are called to recognize that all is God's gift***

  The beatitudes invite us to acknowledge that everything comes out of God's goodness and abundance. It all starts with love. We are not our own origin. We are first of all God's gift. Our Catholic religion is based first of all on recognizing what God has done for us, and only

The original Greek word that is used in the beatitudes is *makarios*, which means both "blessed" and "happy." For this reason the translation found in the Jerusalem Bible reads: "How happy are you who are poor …" while the New Revised Standard Version translated *makarios* with "Blessed are you who are poor …."

The beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness. This desire is of divine origin: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfil it.

CCC #1718

Everything comes out of God's goodness and abundance.

The beatitude we are promised confronts us with decisive moral choices. It invites us to purify our hearts of bad instincts and to seek the love of God above all else. It teaches us that true happiness is not found in riches or well-being, in human fame or power, or in any human achievement – however beneficial it may be – such as science, technology and art, or indeed in any creature, but in God alone, the source of every good and of all love.

CCC #1723

The ethical aspect of the beatitudes is more evident in Matthew's version than in Luke's. Luke is more concerned to show God's generosity. Matthew is more insistent that this generosity also has ethical repercussions. The beatitudes are invitations to be poor in spirit, peacemakers, meek, to hunger for justice as a response to God's generosity.

then on what we do in response to God's love. Of all the gifts, Jesus is the greatest gift. This sets the tone for the whole message of Jesus.

• ***We are called to repent and believe the good news***

Our response to this is, therefore, not first of all an ethics or a morality. Our first response is repentance or what the Christian tradition has called conversion. Mark's gospel says it well. After his baptism Jesus begins to proclaim the good news. His first point is that the kingdom of God has come near. This is the time of God's generosity. The people are asked to "repent and believe in the good news" (1.13). To repent or to convert is to let go of one's previous ways of living and looking at life. To convert is literally to turn around, to understand and live differently. It means to accept what God is doing in our midst. Accept God's generosity and love and make these the starting point of your life.

• ***We are called to live a life of praise and thanksgiving***

Our second response to this generosity is to live a life of praise and thanksgiving. If the beatitudes are about God's goodness, we should first thank God. When on the day of Pentecost the people asked the disciples of Jesus what they must do, the disciples invited them to be baptized in the name of Jesus. Take on his life, his death, and his resurrection, they were told. Be immersed in that life through baptism. That is why liturgy and participation in liturgy are so important for Christian life. The gift of God's life and love needs to be received and celebrated. Before ethics comes liturgy. *(For a further discussion of this topic, see the sections below on the virtue of charity, spirituality, and liturgy.)*

• ***We are called to live generously***

Our third response is an ethics, the motivation for which is radically different from that discussed in the previous two chapters. It is not an ethics that I construct. It is not an ethics of obligation. It is an ethics of response – gospel ethics or eschatological ethics – as we saw in Chapter 5. It is living God's gift and responding generously with what I can give, acting not out of fear, but out of love by God's grace.

Guiding questions

1. How are the beatitudes pronouncements about what God has done for us?
2. If the beatitudes are about God's generosity, how are they connected with our moral life?
3. What do the beatitudes call us to do?

The power of a real blessing

Not long ago, in my own community, I had a … personal experience of the power of a real blessing. Shortly before I started a prayer service in one of our houses, Janet, a handicapped member of our community, said to me: "Henri, can you give me a blessing?" I responded in a somewhat automatic way by tracing with my thumb the sign of the cross on her forehead. Instead of being grateful, however, she protested vehemently, "No, that doesn't work. I want a real blessing!" I suddenly became aware of the ritualistic quality of my response to her request and said, "Oh, I am sorry – let me give you a real blessing when we are all together for the prayer service." She nodded with a smile, and I realized that something special was required of me. After the service, when about thirty people were sitting in a circle on the floor, I said, "Janet has asked me for a special blessing. She feels that she needs that now." As I was saying this, I didn't know what Janet really wanted. But Janet didn't leave me in doubt for very long. As soon as I had said, "Janet has asked me for a special blessing," she stood up and walked toward me. I was wearing a long white robe with ample sleeves covering my hands as well as my arms. Spontaneously, Janet put her arms around me and put her head against my chest. Without thinking, I covered her with my sleeves so that she almost vanished in the folds of my robe. As we held each other, I said, "Janet, I want you to know that you are God's Beloved Daughter. You are precious in God's eyes. Your beautiful smile, your kindness to the people in your house, and all the good things you do show us what a beautiful human being you are. I know you feel a little low these days and that there is some sadness in your heart, but I want you to remember who you are: a very special person, deeply loved by God and all the people who are here with you."

As I said these words, Janet raised her head and looked at me; and her broad smile showed that she had really heard and received the blessing.[5]

Christian life begins not with us but with God. Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) says, "All gifts which God ever gave in heaven or on earth were given with one sole purpose – to make one single gift: God. With all the gifts God desires only to prepare us for the one gift, which is God."[6] When Christians speak of charity, this is what they are talking about. Charity is first of all God's gift, the gift that Paul called "God's love… poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." (Romans 5.5) In his first letter John echoes: "This is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us…." (4.10) We call this love charity not to confuse it with the many other meanings of the word love. We tend to use charity to mean a gift of money or ourselves to one who is poor or needy. Something of the original meaning still shines through. Charity originally meant the power of God's love in us. Hence charity is a particular type of love. Jesus gave it the meaning, "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 15.12)

To love one another with the same love with which Jesus loved us may seem a tall order.

Hell is the pain of not being able to love.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky,
The Brothers Karamazov

Jesus loved without any self-interest – simply out of goodness. The reward of this love is to be with the loved one. A lover needs no more than to be with the beloved. In God's love we become the beloved of God. We are loved into being. Charity means this selfless love – this outpouring of love without a desire for anything in return. In this way it exists in God. God is this total self-giving love.

If God communicates himself to us, *where* is the gift of this love? It is fully found in Jesus and the Holy Spirit. But the gospel also tells us that it found its home in creation and took up a dwelling in our hearts. It is the love with which God created the world. The world and we are the result of an outpouring of charity. It is with this same love that God sent Jesus. Through Jesus and the Spirit, it is now at work everywhere. It fuels everything we do. It is the love that inhabits all our loves – the love of parent for child, the love of husband and wife, the love we call friendship, the love that gives direction to our life, the love of self, the love for the earth, and so on. Just as the true love of a parent becomes the capacity to love the child, so the love of God becomes our capacity to love. It is in all our loves. Somewhat paradoxically we can say God's love is "my love." It is this love, this capacity to be loved and love, that is our greatest joy and happiness in life. This is the centrepiece of Christian spirituality.[7]

Guiding questions

1. What is the Christian notion of charity?
2. How is charity the centrepiece of Christian spirituality?

Walking the road of love: Christian spirituality

Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk, spiritual writer, and resister of the American war in Vietnam, said one day that "if you want to know me, don't ask me where I live, what I like to eat, how I part my hair; rather ask me what I live for, in every detail, and ask me what in my view prevents me from living fully for the thing I really want to live for."[8] Merton was a true seeker of God both in the monastery and in the affairs of the world. He realized that to love God in the world he needed to live with his heart and mind the fire of God's love within himself. To live the fire of God's love for us is to be so inspirited by God that one does whatever one does out of love. This is what it means to live Christian spirituality.

Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I. begins his book on spirituality trying to describe what this exchange between God's love and our everyday life feels like. He writes:

It is no easy task to walk this earth and find peace. Inside of us, it would seem, something is at odds with the very rhythm of things and we are forever restless, dissatisfied, frustrated, and aching. We are so overcharged with desire that it is hard to come to simple rest. Desire is always stronger than satisfaction.

Put more simply, there is within us a fundamental dis-ease, an unquenchable fire that renders us incapable, in this life, of ever coming to full peace. This desire lies at the center of our lives, in the marrow of our bones, and in the deep recesses of our soul. We are not easeful human beings who occasionally get restless, serene persons who once in a while are obsessed by desire. The reverse is true. We are driven persons, forever obsessed, congenitally dis-eased … Desire is the straw that stirs the drink.

At the heart of all great literature, poetry, art, philosophy, psychology, and religion lies the naming and analyzing of this desire. … Desire intrigues us, stirs the soul. We love stories about desire – tales of love, sex, wanderlust, haunting nostalgia, boundless ambition, and tragic loss. … Sometimes it hits us as pain – dissatisfaction, frustration, and aching. At other times its grip is not felt as painful at all, but as a deep energy, as something beautiful, as an inexorable pull, more important than anything else inside us, toward love, beauty, creativity, and a future beyond our limited present. … Spirituality is, ultimately, about what we do with that desire. … Augustine says: "you have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."[9]

God's love exists deep within each of us, in our restlessness, just as we reside deeply within God. God won't let go of us. Love is a powerful force in life. If spirituality is what we do with this love, how we channel love in our life, how we make our life fruitful with love, then it is not difficult to realize that spirituality and ethics or morality are not far apart. In fact, our ethics and morality must be nourished by spirituality.

This spirituality of love must permeate all our moral decisions and our search for the good. It takes, however, a religious conversion for our moral life to become immersed in the ways of love. Religious conversion – being totally in love with God – totally transforms our moral outlook. What previously may have felt like a moral obligation, a submission to the will of another, with the infusion of love can transform us into the cheerful and generous giver. The Spanish mystic John of the Cross tells how in him it began "one dark night, fired by love's urgent longings."[10] No wonder Paul wrote a hymn to love. He reminds us in the First Letter to the Corinthians that love is indeed the greatest gift (13.13). Ethics and morality need to be fed by the spirituality of love.

Guiding questions

1. Thomas Merton said, "If you want to know me … ask me what I live for." If you were asked, "What do you live for?" what sort of response would you give? How would it be related to your spirituality?
2. What is the role of "desire" in Christian spirituality?
3. Richard Gula writes that "morality is the public face of our spirituality." What do you think he means?

Morality is the public face of our spirituality

The moral life is born out of this holy longing to be loved and to love. Without spirituality, morality is cut off from its core religious experience and so loses its character as a personal response to being loved by God, or being graced. With its roots firmly planted in spirituality, moral living strives to give freely in love what we have received freely in grace. Morality, in other words, is the public face of our spirituality.[11]

Richard Gula

The vocation of humanity is to show forth the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father's only Son. This vocation takes a personal form since each of us is called to enter into the divine beatitude; it also concerns the human community as a whole.

CCC, #1877

Living the vocation of love

Exploring our vocation to happiness

Meet Ted and Miriam van der Zalm

Miriam and I met in the poverty stricken country of Tanzania. As a young man, I went to Africa with a Catholic mission organization. I wanted to do something to help relieve the suffering of the poor, especially the children. I was asked to begin a water project by drilling water wells and to build windmills in the rural villages where the women were walking five to ten kilometers a day in search of water. By trial and error, persistence and trust in God I was soon drilling water wells and building windmills! In the mission field a small airplane was necessary in order to reach the out stations when the roads were washed away during heavy rains. Armed with the confidence that with God anything is possible, I went back to Canada to learn how to fly. After six weeks of intense training I received my pilot's license and subsequently flew a single engine Cessna from Ontario to Tanzania.

After serving three years in Africa, I was still a single young man and very lonely at times. I prayed to God to help me to find that special someone with whom I could share this life. Months later, I met Miriam who was a missionary from Italy. We were married in Canada and returned to Africa to spend another seven years.

Ted and Miriam van der Zalm with Fr. Juan, who came to bless the well they drilled for the community of Laguna el Pito.

After our first child was born in Tanzania, Miriam and I felt that it was time to return to Canada to provide for our young family. As our family grew, I tried a number of professions, but nothing came close to the satisfaction that I had experienced in Africa. Then one day I applied and was hired as a pastoral worker for one of the local Catholic high schools in the Niagara District.

Gradually God placed in my heart the idea of becoming a teacher. At first I rejected this idea, but eventually I gave in to God's call and went to school to take evening and weekend courses, continuing to work so that Miriam could stay home and care for our now four children.

Even then, God continued to call Miriam and me through the cries of the poor. Eventually we stepped out of our comfort zone once again and with our five children, and with the help of a number of volunteers, we drove drilling equipment to Guatemala. We slept in tents for eight months as we drilled deep-water wells in order to bring clean, reliable sources of water to the impoverished villages. We were also able to build three elementary schools during this time.

Interview with Ted van der Zalm about his vocation as a Catholic lay person

In Search for the Good (SG): *At the heart of it, what is a vocation and where does it come from?*

Ted van der Zalm (TZ): A vocation, simply put, is what God is calling us to do with our lives. On a universal level, God calls all of us. In the book of Genesis we are told that we are all created in God's image and likeness. God is good. God is love. If we are created in this image and likeness, then we are also called to reflect this goodness and this love in our own lives. We are called to strive to be good as God is good and we are called to love as God loves.

There are also the vocations that are unique to each individual. These personal vocations help us to fulfill our universal calling. God calls me to a particular life of goodness and love, and to come into a deeper relationship with him. He provides me with the tools necessary to do this. These tools are the talents that enable me to live my personal vocations – to be a well driller, a bush pilot, a pastoral worker, a husband and father, a schoolteacher. These personal vocations bring me into the relationships that I need to help me live the life of love that God is calling all of us to.

(SG): *How would you describe your vocation?*

(TZ): I would describe my vocation, first and foremost, to be in relationship with God. Not just a casual relationship, but a continually deepening relationship of unconditional love and commitment. After taking one step closer to God, he calls me to take another. We cannot build a relationship with God all by ourselves. God calls us into relationship with others. It is how we live in relationship with others that will either bring us

closer to God or take us further away from him. God has blessed me with my wife Miriam. With her as my life-long partner, our love helps us to build a stronger relationship with God. Our life together has been a process of growth with its ups and downs, a journey throughout which we have learned the meaning of commitment, of reconciliation, of patience, and also of a deep and abiding joy. Our marriage has been a holy place where our love for each other and for our children has been sustained by the grace of God. Living as husband and wife and dealing with life's challenges as a married couple, we are a testimony to our children of God's desire to have a center position in our lives. Our marriage provides our children with a family environment of unwavering love that forms and sustains them physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally, giving them a firm foundation from which to explore the world, and to become contributing members of society. Our work in the developing world is again a testimony to our children and to the people who know us of the awesome things that God will allow us to do if we allow him into our lives. Ultimately, our marriage is a living sign of God's love in our lives.

(SG): *How did you come to know your vocation?*

(TZ): My vocation was not always clear to me. God had placed in my heart a soft spot for the poor and down trodden. At school I always felt sorry for the kids who were being picked on. My heart always broke to see the poor starving children who were displayed on TV. One day I mentioned to my parents how great it would be to help the poor children have enough food to eat. The following year, my parents had me change high schools. Thinking that God might be calling me into the priesthood, they explained to me that they were sending me to the seminary. They knew that I would not have the courage to do this on my own for fear of being laughed at by my friends. My parents asked me to try the seminary for one year and if after that time I did not feel that the priesthood was for me, they would allow me to return to my regular high school.

I finished my last two years of high school in the seminary. Because of the seminary's structured prayer life and curriculum that was centered on God, my relationship with God began to grow. It felt great to be close to God and I wanted more. I continued to study in the seminary for the following two years of university. During this time I came to accept that God possibly was not calling me to the priesthood. I did not want to lose my relationship with God by leaving the seminary, yet I had to be honest with myself that I did not feel comfortable with the idea of becoming a priest. Not sure of what to do, I left the seminary but continued to pursue a degree in religious studies. In my final year of university, a religious congregation that I had gotten to know over the years asked me if I would be willing to come to Africa and help them begin a water project. My vocation began to become evident to me.

Looking back, even though it was not obvious to me at the time, I can see how God was guiding me and steering me in the direction that he wanted me to take. Even though I did not know what God wanted from me, God patiently opened doors for me. Even though I made many mistakes along the way, God did not give up on me. God's unconditional love for me kept me coming back to him. As long as my own heart was open to accept God's love, my relationship with him kept growing.

(SG): *What does it mean to discover or discern God's call for you?*

(TZ): God's call is not always obvious. God doesn't always talk to us directly and does not always answer us immediately, when we want. Many times God sends someone into our lives with the answer that we are searching for, or the answer comes to us much later in life. To discover the call that God has for us we must first place our life in God's hands and believe!

Our secular world can confuse us greatly as to what is important in life. It is so easy for us to get pulled into the attractions of the material world. Because we are human, we will falter and stumble along the way. It is during these times of stumbling that we must believe that God has not given up on us. He is patiently waiting for us to come back to him and continue our faith journey. Every one of us is very important and special to God. God loves us more than we can imagine and has a special plan for each of us. We must be willing to have the patience and persistence to discover that plan. God's true plan for us can be fully realized only by being in relationship with God. In human terms of measurement, we may feel successful by our collection of possessions, but we will never be truly happy and free until we are on the path of fulfilling what God has planned for us.

When attempting to discern one's vocation, we must recognize the fact that God's way is not always our way. What we may feel is good and right for us may not be a part of God's plan. We must be open to change and be persistent. Good things don't always come easily. The work that God has laid out for us can be very difficult at times. When we encounter difficult or seemingly impossible situations, our instinct is to stop. Many times we are tempted to use the difficulty that we encounter as an excuse that it was probably not meant to be. Through prayer and persistence, God will help our actions to become successful. I know that Miriam and I would never have been able to bring life-giving water to the people in Guatemala if we quit every time we hit a roadblock or listened to the people who told us that it was not possible.

(SG): *What gives you a sense of happiness, joy or satisfaction in your vocation?* ➤

(TZ): What gives me the greatest sense of satisfaction is the confident realization that I am following the path that God has set out for me. My sense of joy and happiness comes from a deeper relationship with our God of love. I try to stay away from basing my happiness on human ways of measurement. For example, if my personal vocation allows me to be financially successful, I cannot base my happiness on that. Financial success is only temporary; therefore the happiness that it brings can only be temporary. Miriam and I are seeking everlasting happiness and joy. We believe that whatever God's blessings are to us, they are given to us to help us realize our universal vocation, not so that we can live an easy life. We have what we have because God expects us to use these blessings as a tool to bring us closer to him. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches: "Come you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepare for you…for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink…" (25.34-35) Our material blessings are not meant for us to live an easy life here and now. God provides us with the means that enable us to say "yes" to those who need us.

(SG): *Can people be truly happy in life only if they are living out their vocation?*

(TZ): To truly live out one's vocation is nothing short of living an adventure! I look at my own life as testimony to the adventure. Living in Africa for ten years, providing thousands of people with life-giving water, flying a single engine aircraft half way around the world, being a bush pilot, learning to speak five languages, beginning a non-profit organization called the Niagara Warehouse of Hope, mobilizing elementary school children to help poor children get an education through the House of Hope project, meeting my wife to be in Africa, becoming a high school teacher, working on a Masters Degree, organizing the Wells of Hope project to drill water wells in Central America, living in a tent for eight months in Guatemala with my wife and five children….need I go on?

If we are discussing "true happiness" then the answer is obvious. True happiness can only be found in God. Part of our human nature is to be happy. It is God who has placed this desire in us. There is a lot of false or temporary happiness out in the world. The media has successfully deceived a great portion of our population to believe that the happiness we naturally seek rests in material possessions, good looks, athletic prowess, taking the dreamiest vacation. Chasing these forms of happiness only delays our achieving the true happiness that God is calling us to. When we follow the route laid before us by the media and advertising, we soon discover that the happiness we sought is only temporary. Money cannot buy the happiness we seek, our good looks don't last forever, our bodies cease to be the fastest and strongest, vacations come to an end. True happiness is a happiness that lasts forever. Only God lasts forever, and he invites us to share this everlasting happiness with him. How can we expect to be with God when we don't know him? Our universal vocation of building a relationship with God will bring us the true happiness that we seek.

Exploring our vocation to happiness

Happy are you

My name is Sr. Shelley Grant, CND. I am a sister of the Congregation of Notre Dame.

After graduating from high school, I applied to a number of small universities where I hoped to be known as an individual rather than as a number. I was elated when I was accepted into St. Thomas (Catholic) University in Fredericton, N.B. I was born and raised in the Baptist faith, and my first experience of the Catholic Church was at the beginning of this university year. All students, regardless of their denomination, were invited to attend the opening Mass. During the Mass a feeling came over me that I had never experienced before. I didn't know what it was about but I couldn't ignore it. Something was stirring very deep within me that I wouldn't forget. It was such a wonderful experience to be celebrating with so many young people. Everything was so alive – the

priests in their bright vestments, the bishop, the music, the participation. Looking back I would say that this was the beginning of my journey to the Catholic faith.

In November of 1978 I entered into the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* – a guided process of prayer and study

walking by the only Catholic school in the city. The sisters, dressed in their habits, were outside with the children. I asked Mom who they were and she said they were people who worked for God. My response at that time was, "I am going to be one of them some day!"

Three years after I became a Catholic I began pondering what to do with my life. At that time there was a sister at the university who was an assistant chaplain. She was full of life and enthusiasm and a great love of God. The feeling that I had experienced in 1978 was stirring deep inside me again. I couldn't run from it. I spoke with the sister and asked her about religious life. She put me in contact with a vocations director. I spent some time finding out as much as I could about sisters and was surprised to discover that there were hundreds of different religious congregations! My next question was, "How do I narrow it down?"

After much prayer and discussion with my family, friends, and the vocations director, we decided that, since I had been a Catholic for only three years, I should work for a year before entering a religious community. In the fall of 1982 I was hired as pastoral assistant in a parish in Fredericton. I lived at the rectory with two priests and a housekeeper. This time proved to be invaluable for me. I learned many things about the church and had the opportunity to discern my vocation.

In the fall of 1983 I entered the Congregation of Notre Dame of Montreal. Choosing religious life for me was a free response to God's call, a life-long process, and a journey of faith. We do not "have" a vocation; we discover how we "are" our vocation as we journey through life led by the Holy Spirit.

If you freely choose something you love, then hopefully you will experience happiness. If you are not happy then you must re-examine why you made this choice. It is God's generosity and freely given gift that make me happy. If I were not happy I could leave, but all vocations pose challenges and struggles that must be dealt with. That is life.

My ministry over the last number of years has been life-giving but not easy. For eight years I worked with street people in Ottawa – with men and women who were barred from all the city shelters. I loved and respected these people very much. They taught me a lot about life.

After working in Ottawa I was invited to move to the Yukon to be pastoral administrator of a mission in Carmacks. It was a huge challenge for me to leave a big city and move to a small rural community. I had no idea

what survival or challenge meant until I moved north. I had to learn how to build fires, clean chimneys, chop wood, cope without water for months, and drive for two hours to buy groceries. I also attended to the pastoral needs of the local people. I was mandated by the Bishop to lead the Sunday liturgy, prepare people for the sacraments, baptize the children, and officiate at funerals. I got involved in the life of the community by becoming a paramedic on the ambulance crew and by substitute teaching in the schools. The challenges have been many. After five years, I still am pastoral administrator of the mission in Carmacks but no longer live there. I travel to the mission a couple of times per month to lead the communion services and attend to the pastoral needs of the people. At present my main ministry is Religious Education Coordinator in the Diocese of Whitehorse. I travel 6,500 kilometres throughout our rural diocese twice a year to visit each mission and parish and help the people.

How does a person come to know his or her vocation in life? For me it began with an attraction to a particular way of life. I saw some people living a way of life and I wanted to try it out. I prayed and asked God for guidance. I needed to have a mentor or a spiritual director to discuss ideas with. I had to continually ask questions like, "How do you know?"

I think that sometimes people can miss their vocation in life, especially if we sit on the fence or insist on perfect clarity. We may miss opportunities in life, but God is always offering new possibilities. That is why having a mentor or spiritual advisor is important to help us work things out.

Finally, I would like to say that all is gift. We have to be brave and faithful to what we are being called. How am I living out my baptismal commitment? People are looking to us to make a difference.

Interview with Fr. Erik Riechers about his vocation to the priesthood

Fr. Erik Riechers, SAC, has been a member of the Pallottine community for over 22 years and a priest for 15. He is the Director of the Pallottine Faith Enrichment Centre in Red Deer, Alberta, the National Chaplain for the Canadian Catholic School Trustees Association, and the superior for his community in Canada.

In Search of the Good (SG): *Fr. Erik, how did you come to be a priest?*

Fr. Erik Riechers (ER): I was in my first year of university when I first experienced the call of God. Everything about my studies was going exceedingly well. I was paying for the courses with scholarship money; I was succeeding in the academic work and enjoying the intellectual challenge of academic life. Nevertheless, I felt a growing and insistent restlessness throughout the course of the year. One day while I was praying in my parish church the pastor came up to me and asked me a startling question. He wanted to know why I looked and sounded so dissatisfied. I protested and told the pastor all about my successes and how well the year was going. He however was unimpressed by my answer and told me that there was a difference between doing what you're good at and doing what God calls you to. Before I left the church that day he told me to be open to the call of God and to consider whether or not the skills and gifts of my life would not be better used as a priest in the service of God and His people.

For the first several weeks I tried very hard to ignore this priest's advice, yet with every day my restlessness and dissatisfaction grew. Gradually, I began to consider what my pastor had suggested to me. After several more weeks I finally came to the decision to interrupt my university studies and to enter the Pallottine Fathers and Brothers.

I must admit that I went into my life as a Pallottine with a grudging and reluctant heart. I went to our house of formation in Germany with the intention of giving this life a chance, but also with the conviction that if it did not work out I could just go back home and resume my former life. However, within days of my arrival I began to experience the contentment and satisfaction of the Pallottine way of life. In the course of the first four months the call to serve as a priest in the Pallottine Community grew increasingly stronger in my heart and I could truly begin to picture myself as a priest. At some point in that year the ability to imagine myself as a priest gave way to my desire to actually live that vocation. Twenty-two years later I have never even considered

another way of life. It has been a singular grace and gift to live and serve as a priest in the Pallottine tradition.

(SG): *What gives you a sense of happiness, joy or satisfaction in your vocation?*

(ER): The most satisfying part of my vocation has been the privilege of being an eyewitness to and participant in the transfiguring moments that God creates in human lives. I have been privileged to watch as the word of God has opened minds and hearts of people to love a life that they did not expect was possible. It has been a honour to touch their lives to the life and power of Christ in the sacraments, to baptize their children, to help them enter into the community of life and love in marriage, to guide them to the beauty and blessing of reconciliation and to touch their great wounds in the sacrament of anointing. It has been a remarkable joy to preside at the Eucharist, a pleasure which is as unabated in its intensity today as it was when I was first ordained.

That being said, the greatest single satisfaction of my priestly life has been the ministry of preaching. Throughout the days of my ministry I have taken an uncommon pleasure out of breaking open the word of God for men and women who hunger to hear his voice. It has been a thrilling experience to take the Scriptures and to crack them open so that men and women can truly understand how God's words are relevant to their ordinary and daily life. It has been an intense blessing to be able to assist my brothers

and sisters in drawing comfort, courage, wisdom and life itself from the Scriptures that throb with the life of the God who reveals Himself within them. For that reason I have found great joy and beauty in every pulpit that I have mounted and in every classroom, lecture hall and auditorium before which I have stood. Retreats, workshops, seminars and parish missions have all been rich opportunities to break open the Word of God that has been at the centre of my priestly life. Nevertheless, despite the extraordinary opportunities to preach and proclaim the gospel there is nothing that can compare to the core pleasure of preaching the Word of God in the midst of the Eucharistic assembly. For this one privilege alone it would have been worthwhile to give my life over to priestly service, but there have been so many other blessings as well.

(SG): *What are some of the greatest challenges that you have encountered as you have lived out your vocation?*

(ER): For me personally one of the great challenges of my vocation has been the encounter with suffering. I have encountered great human suffering in people who seek forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance, and the lost who crave spiritual direction, in the bewildered who ask for pastoral counsel and in many other men and women whose grief is raw and whose pain runs deep. It has been a constant struggle to avoid a certain hardening of heart in the face of constant pain. There is a great temptation to steel myself so that I can deal with the suffering of others without feeling it too keenly in my own heart and life. Yet, if I actually were to stand aloof and distant from the suffering of men and women entrusted to my care I would simply become a part of the problem they already face, namely, the indifference of others to their sorrow. It is a trying aspect of my life as a priest, but without it I would never have known the extraordinary richness of God's grace in unsuspecting places.

(SG): *At the heart of it, what is a vocation and where does it come from?*

(ER): A vocation is both a gift God gives to a person and a gift He demands from a person. When we are called to a vocation God gives us an overarching direction and purpose for our whole life. Therefore, vocation is always much more than any one task or function. It cannot be exhausted in any one thing we do or any function that we exercise. Instead, vocation is a call to a way of life that will weave itself into the fabric of every other thing we do in the course of our days. It will mould and fashion the way we act and react, the choices we make, the alternatives we refuse, the attitude we bring to life and to love and the way in which we choose to wrestle with all the struggles of our days. In that sense a vocation blesses us and is a real gift because it touches the essential core of everything that makes or breaks a human life. At the same time vocation is a gift God asks of us. We are responsible for letting that call of God have its way with us. We must open every nook and cranny of our lives to the penetrating and consuming presence of a God who wishes to touch it all. In that sense, a vocation from God will never just touch our intellect and will, but also our heart, our emotions and everything else within us that is authentically human. In a genuine vocation God will never simply ask for a part of our lives. He will ask for the totality of our lives for He is interested in nothing less than this.

(SG): *How does a person come to know his or her vocation in life?*

(ER): I believe that a person must allow the hungers of his or her heart to surface. It is important for a certain emptiness to exist within us, and to intentionally allow ourselves to feel hollow. Never would I tell you that this is a pleasant experience. It is always linked to personal discomfort and a sense of being unwell. It is painful and leaves us tremendously dissatisfied. Indeed, it is anything but a pleasant experience. However, it is most assuredly a necessary one.

What is the big deal of awakening our hungers? The emptiness and hollowness is the place where we can hear the voice of God speak to us of all the things satiety and satisfaction constantly drown out. What most of us satisfy are our appetites, not our hungers. We fill our desires, not our basic needs. Openness to this emptiness inside of us is the chance to hear and heed some matters of utter importance that our full, stuffed and satisfied lives never notice. You may very well be surprised, even haunted, by what you hear and discover.

(SG): *Is there only one true vocation for each person?*

(ER): Indeed, there is only one true vocation for a person. There may be many and varied tasks for a person in the course of a lifetime's vocation, but the vocation always remains the same. ➤

(SG): *Can a person miss his or her vocation in life?*

(ER): As frightening as it is to admit it, it is truly possible to miss our vocation in life. Despite the insistent calling of God, we can drown out his voice in our preoccupations and the clutter of our lives. We can choose what we are willing to hear, and it happens that we choose not to hear what does not already match our preconceived notions and plans.

(SG): *Can a person be truly happy in life only if they are living out their vocation?*

(ER): I would answer this cautiously. If a person is not living out their vocation, they will still know experiences and moments of pleasure and happiness. What they will not find is lasting satisfaction. It is always possible to find ways to amuse ourselves and to dull the pain of empty living, but the price is high and the work of suppressing our misery is arduous. If we need to distract ourselves from the raw emptiness of our lives, then we must never stop finding new and more powerful forms of distractions, because the moment we stop to catch our breath, the yawning emptiness will be only too apparent. It is like singing at the top of our lungs to drown out a voice we do not want to hear. While singing can be a very pleasurable experience, once you stop the speaker still has the possibility of starting the conversation all over again. There is no true happiness if we refuse to let God have his way with us.

(SG): *What words of wisdom or advice would you like to share with senior high-school students on this area of life?*

(ER): Be open to something greater than your own expectation. We are usually very nervous about any thought of not getting our way, but that is because we cannot imagine that God would give us something better than that which we have already dreamed up for ourselves. God is not to be outdone in generosity. If he gives us a new direction and asks something totally different of us, then we will be surprised to discover that there are delights and blessings greater than the ones we would have settled for if left to our own devices. It is a hallmark of Jesus in the gospels. All kinds of people ask Jesus for healing. They want the bleeding to stop, the eyesight to return or the legs to move again. Yet Jesus offers them the forgiveness of sins as well. Why offer something they never even asked for? The reason is because they did not ask for enough and Jesus does not want them to walk away with less than they need and less than he is willing to give. Vocation is like that too. Jesus does not want us to move through life with less than we need, and certainly not with less than he is willing to bestow upon us.

Exploring vocation to the priesthood

The Bible on the sacrament of Holy Orders

The priesthood stems from the early Jewish tradition, but with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus it took on new meaning. All four gospels and the letters of Paul reveal that on the night of his arrest, "Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" (Matthew 26.26-28) In the Catholic Tradition, it was during the Last Supper that Jesus instituted the sacrament of Holy Orders, that is the priesthood. Both sacraments, Holy Eucharist and Holy Orders or Priesthood were instituted by Jesus during the Last Supper. For this reason, to this very day, Catholics have always gathered on Holy Thursday to celebrate the institution of both sacraments.

The following articles from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* outline the role of each and the relationship that exists within the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

1594* The bishop receives the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders, which integrates him into the episcopal college and makes him the visible head of the particular Church entrusted to him. As successors of the apostles and members of the college, the bishops share in the apostolic responsibility and mission of the whole Church under the authority of the Pope, successor of St. Peter.

*(All references are to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, unless stated otherwise.)

1595 Priests are united with the bishops in sacerdotal dignity and at the same time depend on them in the exercise of their pastoral functions; they are called to be the bishops' prudent co-workers. They form around their bishop the presbyterium which bears responsibility with him for the particular Church. They receive from the bishop the charge of a parish community or a determinate ecclesial office.

1596 Deacons are ministers ordained for tasks of service of the Church; they do not receive the ministerial priesthood, but ordination confers on them important functions in the ministry of the word, divine worship, pastoral governance, and the service of charity, tasks which they must carry out under the pastoral authority of their bishop.

The priest acts *in persona Christi*

"…Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:5)

The ministry conferred by the sacrament of Holy Orders, called the ministerial priesthood, has as its task, to serve in the name and in the person of Christ the Head in the midst of the community. (#1591, #1547) The sacrament of Holy Orders bestows upon the priest the power to speak in the name of the whole Body of Christ and bestows upon the ordained priest "the authority to act in the power and place of the person of Christ himself." (#1548) This is not a claim that the priest is in any way equal to Christ who is the one true priest; rather it is to say that through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he has been given the vocation to work in his ministry in a particular way. The priest therefore has three primary roles: to teach, to lead the Catholic community in the celebration of divine worship, and to provide pastoral guidance and care. Ordination confers on priests the grace to serve God's people in three primary areas of church life in a particular way and in particular circumstances:

The first task of the ordained priest is to preach the gospel – to teach. In the Sunday Eucharist, the reading of the Scriptures, the homily, and the prayers all serve to bring the Word of God to God's people. The homily given by the priest is the breaking open of the Word so that the teachings of Jesus can have true meaning for our lives today.

The ordained priest is the symbol of Christ in the world and a visible sign of the forgiving grace of God. As such, a primary role is that of mediator between God and sinner. Reconciliation is the primary ministry of the Church and is present to God's people through the actions and words of the priest, both through the sacrament of reconciliation and through the celebration of the Mass.

"The ministerial priesthood has the task not only of representing Christ – Head of the Church – before the assembly of the faithful, but also of acting in the name of the whole Church when presenting to God the prayer of the Church, and above all when offering the Eucharistic sacrifice." (1552) Ordination bestows on the priest the power to act on our behalf, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, to consecrate the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. The priest is the visible presence of Christ in our midst, acting on behalf

of God's people to bring us into communion with God and each other.

The ordination of priests

Through the sacrament of Holy Orders the Church hands on to the newly ordained priest the authority to celebrate the Eucharist and to preach the gospel. The Church teaches that this succession of ordination is unbroken from Christ unto the most recently ordained. The Bishop, who alone has the authority to ordain, lays his hands upon the head of the ordinand (the person being ordained). The solemn prayer of consecration asks God to grant the ordinand the grace of the Holy Spirit required for his ministry. "Ordination imprints an indelible sacramental character." (1597)

The sacrament of Holy Orders "confers a gift of the Holy Spirit that permits the exercise of a 'sacred power'…which can come only from Christ himself through his Church. Ordination is also called *consecratio*, for it is a setting apart and an investiture by Christ himself for his Church. The *laying on of hands* by the bishop, with the consecratory prayer, constitutes the visible sign of this ordination." (1538)

A liturgy of thanks and praise

Liturgy, alongside charity, spirituality, and vocation, is central to our response to God's generosity.

"The word 'liturgy' originally meant a 'public work' or a 'service in the name of/on behalf of the people.' In Christian tradition it means the participation of the People of God in the 'work of God.' Through the liturgy Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with and through his Church." (*CCC*, #1069) The liturgy is the highest exchange or interaction between the work of God and our work (*CCC*, #1074). We call the actions in which this encounter occurs sacramental or symbolic actions. "The liturgy is also a participation in Christ's own prayer addressed to the Father in the Holy Spirit. In the liturgy, all Christian prayer finds its source and goal." (*CCC*, #1073) What happens in these symbolic actions that are, at once, God's work and our work, Christ's prayer and our prayer? *(The following points can be found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1066 – 1074.)*

Church: from the Greek *kuriakon* meaning "those belonging to the Lord."

- ***God gathers us***

Even though liturgical encounters seem to take place through our initiative, Christians have always understood that the invitation to gather comes from God. It is God who desires to meet us.

- ***God and creation exchange gifts***

The invitation to gather at liturgy is to make possible an exchange of gifts. God shares with us the gift of creation and even more the gift of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Our part of the exchange is to receive these gifts, to offer God in return the gift of praise and thanksgiving, to allow ourselves to be transformed by the love of God, and so to be agents of transformation in the world. Liturgy does all these things.

• ***The mystery of God's love is made known through ritual, symbol, and word***

It is true that we do not see God directly. The interaction is not face to face. In liturgy it happens sacramentally. It uses language, rituals, and symbols. We encounter God in the proclamation of the Word of God. We encounter God's gift of the death and the resurrection of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit in the ritual bath of baptism and confirmation and in the words, "I baptize you …" and "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit." We encounter the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in the actions and words over the bread and the cup in the Eucharist, which transform these elements into the body and blood of Christ. The actions over the bread and the cup effect a real encounter with the saving power of God unleashed by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The material symbols of water, oil, bread, and wine, all gifts of creation, honour our bodily personhood. The exchange and encounter is physical as well as spiritual.

• ***The liturgy achieves our salvation***

If our greatest beatitude is to be in the presence of God or to see the face of God, liturgy enacts and makes real this being with God on earth. Church documents on liturgy say that our liturgy on earth is an anticipation of and participation in the heavenly liturgy. God's interaction with us in the liturgy is a foretaste of our interaction in the fullness of life, in the resurrection. For this reason, the Eastern Church makes use of incense, icons, and other visual symbols to help the congregation celebrate what they call the heavenly liturgy. The Roman rite as well has a rich tradition of symbols, music, architecture, vestments and the like to help worshipers get in touch with the divine. We consider liturgy to be part of the work whereby we become whole human beings. This salvation is not just for individuals and their personal relation to God; it is a salvation intended for the world. Liturgy is to make us agents of love and reconciliation for the world. The *Catechism* says for this reason that this "is a sacred action surpassing all others." (*CCC*, #1070)

• ***Liturgy promotes moral living***

In liturgy, ethics and morality are nourished and receive their highest motivation. Liturgy empowers us to act in accordance with the gifts of creation and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Ethical and moral actions become ways of giving thanks and praise, celebrations of the gift of God. We become generous in our moral life because God is generous.

The Eastern Church makes use of incense, icons, and other visual symbols to help the congregation celebrate what they call the heavenly liturgy.

Guiding questions

1. What does "liturgy" mean?
2. What happens to us through liturgy?

Address by the Holy Father, John Paul II, 17th World Youth Day

Dear Young People!

What we have just heard is the Magna Carta of Christianity: the Beatitudes. We have seen once more, with the eyes of our heart, what happened at that time. A crowd of people is gathered around Jesus …. All of them anxiously awaiting a word, a gesture that will give them comfort and hope.

We too are gathered here, this evening, to listen attentively to the Lord. He looks at you with affection …. I have heard your festive voices, your cries, your songs, and I have felt the deep longing that beats within your hearts: you want to be happy!

Dear young people, many and enticing are the voices that call out to you from all sides: many of these voices speak to you of a joy that can be had with money, with success, with power. Mostly they propose a joy that comes with the superficial and fleeting pleasure of the senses.

Dear friends, the aged Pope, full of years but still young at heart, answers your youthful desire for happiness with words that are not his own. They are words that rang out two thousand years ago. Words that we have heard again tonight: "Blessed are they ...." The key word in Jesus' teaching is a proclamation of joy: "Blessed are they ...."

People are made for happiness. Rightly, then, you thirst for happiness. Christ has the answer to this desire of yours. But he asks you to trust him. True joy is a victory, something which cannot be obtained without a long and difficult struggle. Christ holds the secret of this victory ….

The … Beatitudes are the road signs that show the way. It is an uphill path, but he has walked it before us. He said one day: "He who follows me will not walk in darkness." (John 8.12) And at another time he added: "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15.11)

It is by walking with Christ that we can achieve joy, true joy! Precisely for this reason he again repeats the proclamation of joy to you today: "Blessed are they ...."

The joy promised by the Beatitudes is the very joy of Jesus himself: a joy sought and found in obedience to the Father and in the gift of self to others ….

With your gaze set firmly on him, you will discover the path of forgiveness and reconciliation in a world often laid waste by violence and terror. Last year we saw with dramatic clarity the tragic face of human malice. We saw what happens when hatred, sin, and death take command.

But today Jesus' voice resounds in the midst of our gathering. His is a voice of life, of hope, of forgiveness; a voice of justice and of peace. Let us listen to this voice!

Dear friends, the Church today looks to you with confidence and expects you to be the people of the Beatitudes ….

Only Jesus is the true Master, only Jesus speaks the unchanging message that responds to the deepest longings of the human heart, because he alone knows "what is in each person." (cf. John 2.25) Today he calls you to be the salt and light of the world, to choose goodness, to live in justice, to become instruments of love and peace. His call has always demanded a choice between good and evil, between light and darkness, between life and death. He makes the same invitation today to you who are gathered here on the shores of Lake Ontario.

What call will those on early morning watch choose to follow? To believe in Jesus is to accept what he says, even when it runs contrary to what others are saying. It means rejecting the lure of sin, however attractive it may be, in order to set out on the difficult path of the Gospel virtues.

Young people listening to me, answer the Lord with strong and generous hearts! He is counting on you. Never forget: Christ needs you to carry out his plan of salvation! Christ needs your youth and your generous enthusiasm to make his proclamation of joy resound in the new millennium. Answer his call by placing your lives at his service in your brothers and sisters! Trust Christ, because he trusts you.

Lord Jesus Christ, proclaim once more
your Beatitudes in the presence of these young people,
gathered in Toronto for the World Youth Day.

Look upon them with love and listen to their young hearts,
ready to put their future on the line for you.

You have called them to be
the "salt of the earth and light of the world."

Continue to teach them the truth and beauty
of the vision that you proclaimed on the Mountain.

Make them men and women of the Beatitudes!
Let the light of your wisdom shine upon them,
so that in word and deed they may spread
in the world the light and salt of the Gospel.

Make their whole life a bright reflection of you,
who are the true light that came into this world
so that whoever believes in you will not die,
but will have eternal life! (cf. John 3.16)

Chapter review

Summary

- The Christian tradition is replete with the deep and abiding joy of God – a joy that continues long after other pleasures of life fade away.
- God placed happiness in our hearts as a reflection of God's own joy and happiness.
- In the beatitudes, Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of God *is* yours — now! God has come close to you. He addresses the poor, the hungry, those who mourn. In their weakness and exclusion these people are an appeal to God's goodness. And so, the poor, more than anyone else, are a sign that what Jesus proclaims can only come forth out of God's goodness.
- The beatitudes give us an orientation in life:
  - We are called to recognize that all is God's gift.
  - We are called to repent and believe the good news.
  - We are called to live a life of praise and thanksgiving.
  - We are called to live generously.
- Charity is first of all God's gift, the gift that Paul called "God's love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." (Romans 5.5) Charity means this selfless love – this outpouring of love without a desire for anything in return.
- We can say God's love is "my love." It is this love, this capacity to be loved and love, that is our greatest joy and happiness in life. This is the centrepiece of Christian spirituality.
- This spirituality of love must permeate all our moral decisions and our search for the good.
- Each of us is called by God to live a life of love in a unique and graced way. This vocation is itself a gift, and leads us to a life of generosity and ultimately happiness.
- In liturgy, ethics and morality are nourished and receive their highest motivation. Liturgy empowers us to act in accordance with the gifts of creation and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Ethical and moral actions become ways of giving thanks and praise, celebrations of the gift of God.

Glossary

beatitudes: Blessings found in both Matthew 5 and Luke 6 that summarize much of Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God. They have three parts: (1) the invocation or blessing word, (2) the group addressed, and (3) the conditions of the blessing.

charity: The power of God's love working through us. This love incorporates action on behalf of the needy.

liturgy: In Christian tradition it means the participation of the People of God in the 'work of God.' The liturgy is the highest exchange or interaction between the work of God and our work. We call the actions in which this encounter occurs sacramental. The official worship of the Church are the Mass, Sacraments, Liturgy of the Hours. Devotional prayer, such as the Stations of the Cross and the Rosary, also contribute to moral living, as they flow out of liturgy and lead into it.

spirituality: The pattern of how faith is translated in action.

vocation: A calling to a state of life: marriage, ordained ministry, consecrated life, single state. It is a calling by God to live a life of love in a unique and graced way.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain the relationship between the beatitudes and our vocation to happiness.
2. How are Christian spirituality and morality related in our everyday living?

Thinking and inquiry

3. Research and report on one religious order (men's or women's), and relate how the focus of their work reflects Jesus' teaching in the beatitudes.

Communication

4. Present in a creative manner of your choice how God is calling you, at this time in your life, to live in praise and thanksgiving.

Application

5. Name the various ways that we are called to respond to God's generosity.

Gifted with freedom

UNIT IV

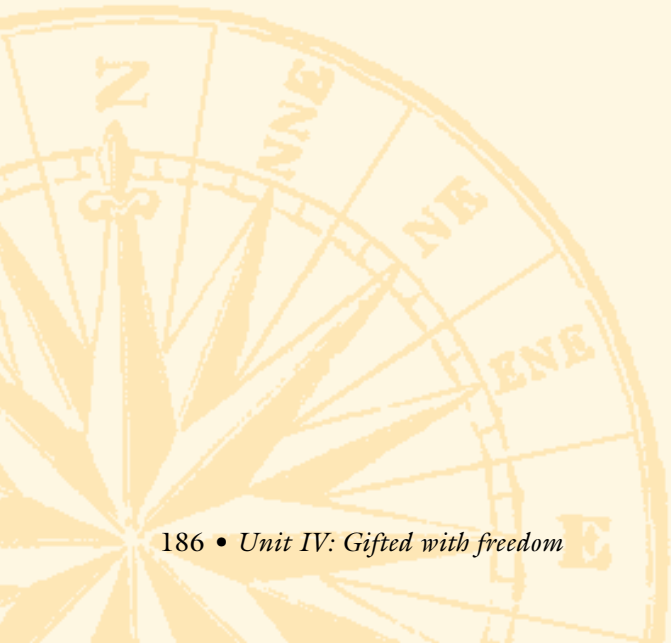
Introduction

Modern times began as a cry for freedom. The cry for freedom became a battle for freedom, a revolution against all the established authorities that governed human life, be it the monarchy, the Church or tradition. It ended up in a distrust and scepticism against anything that imposed itself without adequate reasonableness from the outside. The autonomous "I" became the new haven for freedom. The individual was the final arbiter. "Dare to know!" Kant preached. "Throw off all tutelage!" Do not accept anything on authority! Freedom in modern times has come to be understood as a freedom *from,* not a freedom *for*. This understanding isolates the individual from the community.

Against this cultural background the chapters in this unit examine the importance of freedom for the identity of the self. Chapter 10 outlines the momentous discovery of the self as free. It was a discovery fraught with dangers. It led to the greater and greater isolation of the "I" from community. Modern times are characterized by individualism.

This powerful notion of the individual self as free pervaded all levels of society. Chapter 11 shows how it affected the understanding of politics and the functioning of the state. The chapter presents a number of influential thinkers (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Rawls). This survey of thinkers helps to situate the current debate on freedom and human rights and political society.

Chapter 12 continues the exploration of freedom, this time from a scriptural framework. St. Paul's understanding of the freedom of the children of God has echoed through the centuries as a most radical proclamation. For Paul freedom is rooted in the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. It brings to the fore how, for a Christian, ethics is the religious conversion towards the love of God. For Paul the freedom of the Christian is grounded in the freeing love of God revealed in Jesus Christ: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Romans 5.5) It is a freedom not generated by our efforts but having its source in the depth of God's relationship with us. For Christians this freedom is at the heart of ethical and moral action.



Free to be fully alive

CHAPTER 10

For freedom Christ has set us free.
Stand firm, therefore,
and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.
Galatians 5.1

The wonder of freedom

Freedom is an awesome, incredible capacity. We all want it. It is something we treasure as one of the great goods of life. People have given their lives for it. Others have feared it. Some will surrender it to others because they wish not to carry the responsibility. The Persian poet Rumi shocks us into recognizing this:

> "Why, when God's world is so big,
> did you fall asleep in a prison
> of all places?"[1]

Freedom is a difficult gift. It is not easy to live freely. As Leonard Cohen sang in his *Bird on a Wire*: "Like a bird on a wire / Like a drunk in a midnight choir / I have tried in my way to be free…"[2] The gift of freedom at times feels more like a burden than a gift, more like "a drunk in a midnight choir": a gift too much for me to handle. For with freedom comes responsibility. Many think they are free, only to discover that, as Rumi says, they have been in a prison all along.

We cannot think of being a moral person without freedom. (*CCC*, #1749) Without freedom there is no morality. But what is freedom? Freedom has not always been understood in the same way. Here are some traits of freedom as they emerged in history. Afterwards, we will use this history in a nutshell to examine the challenges of freedom.

Freedom first discovered in our capacity to say no to God

St. Augustine uncovered the terrible grandeur of freedom in the experience of evil and sin (see Chapter 4). Freedom can deny its greatest good; it can subvert the very end of life. Our freedom has the terrifying capacity to turn away from God. Christians and Jews have always called this sin. This ability to sin shows that freedom involves the core of human existence. It is at the heart of our relationship with God. Through sin we can say no to the very One who gave us existence. It means that in our freedom we can turn against ourselves. Freedom can go contrary to its own source and thus destroy itself. Hence, freedom's reach is infinite. In the temptation of the woman in the Book of Genesis, the serpent entices the woman with the promise: "God knows that when you eat of it [the fruit] your eyes will be opened, and *you will be like God*, knowing good and evil." (3.5) Reaching out for God, freedom is tempted to overreach and insist that we are God. *(For a further reflection on the relation of freedom and God, see Chapter 12.)*

Focus your learning

Cognitive
What does it mean to say, "I am free"?

Practical
How do we grow in personal freedom?

Affective
How do we deal with our human limitations?

Key terms in this chapter

autonomism
capacity
crisis
freedom
object
stages of development
subject
will

Key thinkers

St. Augustine
René Descartes
Erik Erikson
Lawrence Kohlberg

God created man in his image and established him in his friendship. A spiritual creature, man can live this friendship only in free submission to God. The prohibition against eating "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" spells this out: "for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die." The "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" symbolically evokes the insurmountable limits that man, being a creature, must freely recognize and respect with trust. Man is dependent on his Creator, and subject to the laws of creation and to the moral norms that govern the use of freedom.

(CCC #396)

This illustration of a third-century AD wall painting in the Roman Catacomb of St. Peter and St. Marcellinus depicts Adam and Eve after the fall.

Freedom is a capacity of the human self

René Descartes in the seventeenth century (see Chapter 2, page 33) changed our understanding of freedom. Recall his famous doubting experiment where he put everything, even the results of mathematics, in doubt. He ended up with a deep awareness of his self as the source of all thinking and doubting. The self, he discovered, was a capacity that could think and doubt freely. I am free to think. It is a capacity of the *self* to be free. The danger with this discovery is that the "I" can see God as a competitor and assume that the "I" is infinite and can do without God.

Freedom is the hallmark of human nature

In Chapter 2 we asked whether we were more than our genes, and we concluded that we have a capacity that is not genetically controlled. This capacity is different from anything else we encounter in nature. It sets us apart from the animal kingdom. In Chapter 2 we said that freedom was our capacity to act. But freedom reveals itself only when I struggle against my limits. For example, consider Nelson Mandela's long fight against apartheid in South Africa. He wrote:

> I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not ended.[3]

Recognizing the self as free

The discovery of the self as a free agent is a momentous historical event. Above we noted that Descartes discovered himself as a thinking or doubting "I." This "I" is all that is left. Descartes called this "I" the "subject." If all that remains after doubting everything around us is the "I" of "I think" or "I doubt," the "I" must be what "lies under" – the literal meaning of "subject" – everything. This was a tremendous discovery. For the first time in history, thinkers isolated in humans what we now call the self.

The self is not a thing or an object; it is a power or an energy in us. The philosopher Spinoza called the self an effort to exist. In line with Spinoza, Ricoeur calls the self a "desire and effort to exist." In Chapter 2 we saw that this desire and effort to exist lies in our capacity to act. We located freedom there as a capacity of an agent. We said that this capacity was most evident when a person made a promise or a commitment. With my freedom I have a say in what the future looks like. I am free to become myself despite all the constraints around me. I have the capacity to take an initiative, to begin something that will have an impact on me for the rest of my life. That is the most sacred capacity of freedom. In Catholic moral theology it is often called basic, or core, freedom.[4] In the *Catechism* this freedom is called "a force for growth and

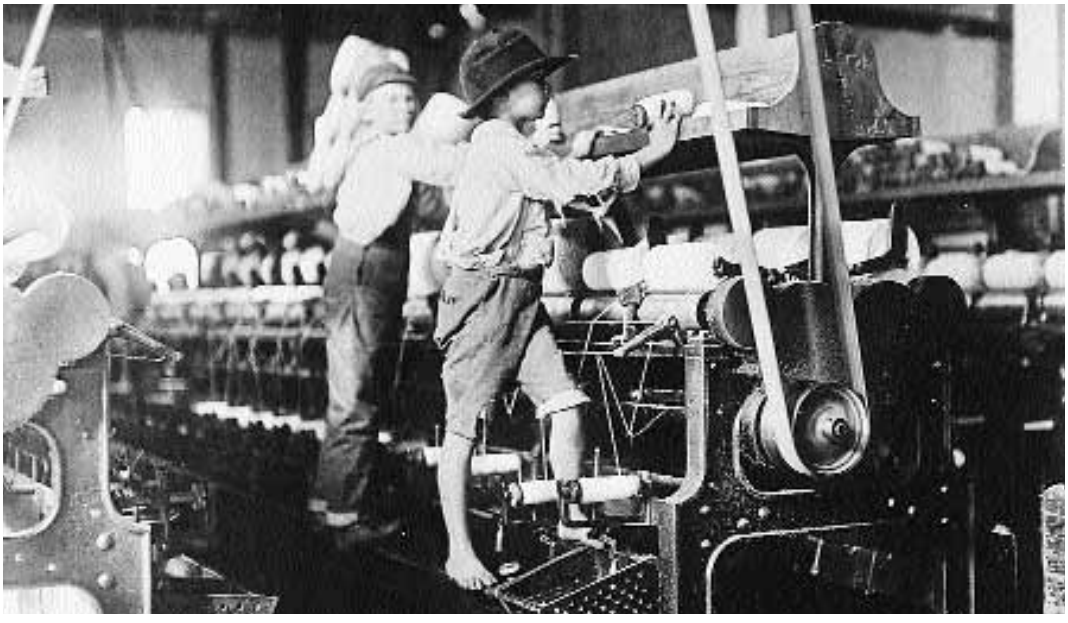
maturity in truth and goodness." Then it adds, "It attains its perfection when directed toward God." (#1731)

The recognition of the self as free has been both a blessing and, at times, a curse. We have been blessed in the West with the discovery of freedoms that previously had gone undetected. We have begun to understand ourselves as individuals who have a right to dignity and respect. This discovery has protected individuals from authoritarian governments who assumed that they governed by divine right. It helped societies to recognize intolerable conditions – such as slavery, child labour (at least in most countries), the subjugation of women (again, at least in part), torture, persecution for practising religion, etc. – and began the process of liberation. This discovery of the self as free also at times has been a curse. The very movements that recognized these rights and freedoms of the individual are so based on self-interest that they cannot give the same impetus to responsibility as they have to freedom. Individualism has isolated people from one another and from the bonds of traditional communities, spawning cultural icons such as the entrepreneur who through sheer willpower forges his or her way ahead, heedless of what happens to others – particularly those who cannot defend themselves. Think, for example, of the successful multinational corporation that exploits workers in countries without labour codes in order to cut costs. In cases such as this, individuals and societies have claimed the rights and freedoms of the individual without assuming the corresponding responsibilities for others. On a different level, individualism can isolate the pregnant woman from her own child; she might consider the child in her womb as nothing more than a part of her own body with which she can deal as she pleases, thereby failing to recognize the human right of the unborn child who is so dependent on her.

Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility. By free will one shapes one's own life. Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness; it attains its perfection when directed toward God, our beatitude.

***CCC* #173**

The Old English root for freedom is *freo*. It meant "to love, to delight, to endear … not to be in bondage to another."



Guiding questions

1. What is the freedom that emerges in the West in the seventeenth century?
2. What are the benefits of this freedom? What are its dangers, disadvantages, drawbacks?
3. Does the description above connect with your experience of freedom? In what way?

Freedom means the opportunity to be what we never thought we would be.

Daniel Boorstin

Positive developments from the discovery of the self as free

Much could be said about this modern notion of freedom. It has had an enormous impact on how we understand ourselves. It has also affected how we organize our political society (see the next chapter). This section will explore two aspects of how we look at freedom: First, it will look at how, from a psychological and sociological perspective, freedom grows over a person's life. Second, it will look at the human rights and freedoms tradition.

1. Theories of how freedom and morality develop over one's lifetime

With Descartes's recognition of the "I" as separate from the world, making everything else into objects, modern science found its origin. Objects could be studied, dissected and analyzed. Out of this new-found ability also came scientific studies of the human psyche and human communities in psychology and sociology. One of the branches of psychology – developmental psychology – studied the pattern of growth of the human personality and identity. For the study of freedom this is important because developmental psychology shows how, over a lifetime, our personal freedom can either mature or decline depending on how we respond to the different challenges of life. One of the foremost authorities on personality development is American psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1902–1994).

Erikson's psychosocial stage theory suggests that personality development occurs as we develop physically and cognitively. This development takes place as a result of socialization by parents, teachers and influential members of society. Our personal growth is bound up at every level with our relationships to those around us. Erikson discovered a pattern to this psychological and social growth.

Erikson proposed that this process occurs in eight stages and spans the whole of one's lifetime. Each stage of life, he says, presents us with a unique and specific challenge. We must face and overcome this challenge in order to move forward successfully to the next developmental stage. At the infant stage the challenge is to let go of the mother and to trust in the world. At the preschool stage children are challenged to develop a confidence that they can have an impact on their environment. It creates in them a sense of determination. At the elementary school stage the challenge is to develop a sense of competence. And at the teen stage the challenge is to develop a sense of identity and fidelity to the person I perceive myself to be. Armed with this strong sense of identity, the next stage challenges me as an adult to form intimate relationships with friends and perhaps a spouse; the challenge is to become other-centred and to act out of love, not only toward friends and intimates, but for the whole world. In the last stage of life the challenge is to remain generative and to adopt the stance of a shepherd who cares for the earth and all within it. We become stewards of God's creation.

For Erikson each of these stages is precipitated by a crisis in one's life. These crises are important for human growth. The crises generally put in question what we thought and experienced about life until that point. We are confronted with a new experience: a death, an accident, falling in love, new knowledge, a moral crisis, a religious crisis. If we face the crisis, we must take on the challenge of restructuring our understanding to make this new learning or experience fit with previous learning. For Erikson, how we resolve each of the crises within each stage can either enhance or undermine our potential for healthy personality formation. The more successful we are at resolving the crisis at each stage, the healthier our personality development, and the greater our capacity for freedom. For Erikson, these crises and their successful resolutions are what move us from one developmental stage to the next. Unsuccessful resolutions of a crisis at any stage prevent the full integration of personality traits that are needed for a productive and happy life. Freedom at each stage of development assumes a different capacity. An adult with a developed and integrated personality has a greater capacity for freedom than a child. An adult who has not progressed through these psychosocial stages successfully will have a limited capacity for freedom.

Crisis (from the Greek *krisis*) means "a time of decision; a turning point"; a crucial or decisive point in a situation that can signify either a change for the better or a change for the worse. "*Kairos*" is another Greek word meaning "the right moment." *Kairos* is defined as "the right or opportune time to do something." It is a time or a season that marks an opportunity which may not recur. A *crisis*, therefore, may also be a *kairos*, a grace or blessing in disguise. See Ecclesiastes 3.1-8 for an example of crisis as *kairos*.

Erik Erikson's cognitive developmental stage theory

Trust versus mistrust

In the *first year of life*, a child faces its first crisis. The child must learn through its relationship with his or her caregivers whether or not to trust others. Successful resolution of this crisis occurs if a child develops a sense of trust rather then mistrust. For this to occur, the child must sense that all his or her physical needs are met within an acceptable time with a minimum amount of anxiety or fear about the future. Because of this trust, the child is able to form relationships that express a healthy dependence on others.

Autonomy versus shame and doubt

During the *next two years of life*, children begin to develop a sense of themselves as independent from others, principally from their primary parent or caregiver. The two- or three-year-old learns the power of saying no. This healthy need for independence or autonomy is experienced as a crisis because it becomes a conflict between two wills: the child's and the adult's. If the child is not allowed to experiment with this need for independence, he or she will most likely develop feelings of shame or doubt. Too much liberty, on the other hand, may be detrimental because the child does not develop healthy boundaries. Successful attempts at independence can create a sense of confidence in a child's ability to think and to act. Erikson believed that the development of independence during this stage was extremely important if teens and young adults were to be independent thinkers who could make personal choices about present challenges and who could shape their lives for the future.

Initiative versus guilt

As children approach their *first years of school*, their world changes. They are expected to assume more responsibility for their behaviour, their appearance, school work and peer interactions. Teachers and parents, principals and peers all have expectations about what the child should do or how the child should behave. The sphere of influence has widened. As this sense of responsibility develops in the child, so does a sense of initiative. Failure to develop responsibility can easily lead to a sense of guilt. It is important at this stage that the child experiences the belief that "I can do this!"

Industry versus inferiority

The fourth stage of personality development normally occurs during the *years in elementary school*. As the cognitive abilities of the child advance, she or he acquires a great love and excitement for learning. At no time in life is imagination more active or powerful. At this stage, children's energy is focused primarily on discovering all they can about the world in which they live, how things work, what they can do to make things happen. Limitations are challenges and new horizons excite the learner. For Erikson, the teacher has a significant role in forming in the child a sense of industry; that is, an acknowledgment of the ability to learn how to accomplish tasks as they arise.

➤

Identity versus identity confusion

During *adolescence* teenagers begin to develop the ability to explore different alternatives to questions of concern. It is during this time of life that young people seek to define an identity for themselves. What directions should I take in my life? Who am I? How would I like to contribute to society? What vocations or what career attracts me, and what are my goals in life? Parents and teachers are important at this stage. They can help to form a positive identity by providing opportunities and encouragement as adolescents explore the various options of life. On the negative side they can also hinder the adolescent's exploration of an identity if they try to mould too much or undermine the confidence of the adolescent. This may lead to a failure to find direction in life and confusion about identity. This could have serious repercussions for the further pursuit of life.

Intimacy versus isolation

As individuals enter the *early adult years* they are faced with the challenge or "crisis" of forming intimate relationships with others. For Erikson, a healthy relationship is one in which one is capable to give of oneself for the good of the other. Without this ability, a person cannot develop feelings of intimacy. Without it an individual faces a life of isolation.

Generativity versus stagnation

As individuals enter into their *mid-life years*, they become aware of a need to make a productive contribution to the younger generation. They desire to help the next generation develop and live productive lives. This sense of contribution Erikson called generativity. The failure to make this contribution to the lives of the next generation often evokes feelings of stagnation. These individuals are often paralyzed by the realization that their life to this point will mean nothing to those who come after them.

Integrity versus despair

As individuals approach the *last years of life*, they begin to take stock of what they have accomplished over their lifetime. They evaluate the choices they have made and attempt to see the worth of their life. If they have managed to successfully resolve the crises of each of the developmental stages that preceded this last stage, they will feel a sense of integrity. As they look back over their life, they will acknowledge a life well spent, a life rich in friendships and contributions to others, and a life given freely to what they came to value and love. Without this successful resolution of each crisis, a sense of despair arises, fed by feelings of doubt and sorrow.

Kohlberg's theory of moral development

Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987) was a cognitive psychologist who applied developmental psychology specifically to moral development. He identified three primary stages of moral development and two sub-stages within each. Because we are particularly interested in moral development we present a brief outline of the three primary stages.

cognition: the mental process of coming to know; includes awareness and judgment. (From the Latin, *cognitio*: to become acquainted with, to know.)

cognitive: involving cognition, having to do with factual knowledge and understanding.

Pre-conventional moral thinking

Kohlberg proposed that infants and preschool children make moral decisions based on the fear of being punished and the need to fulfill their own desires. For example, a child will stop trying to take a sibling's toy in order to avoid being sent to his room and to gain or maintain his mother's love. Kohlberg called this fear of punishment as motive for action *pre-conventional moral thinking*.

Conventional moral thinking

The next stage of cognitive personality development Kohlberg called *conventional moral thinking*. Here trust, caring and loyalty to others become more and more central. These values begin to influence moral judgment. Rules are followed out of respect for others and obedience to authority. Moral judgment is based on an understanding of social order, law, justice and duty.

Post-conventional moral thinking

This stage is generally reached only in our adult years. Kohlberg calls this stage the *post-conventional level of moral reasoning*. Here our moral choices are based on principles of justice and a concern for the common good. At this stage, laws and obligation become less important. One is more able to see that laws and values are shaped by society and traditions and require our discernment. Laws can be wrong and in need of change. In this post-conventional stage, a person is able to recognize the universal nature of ethical principles. One develops a moral standard based on moral principles or universal human rights. For example, at this stage, when faced with a conflict between an unjust law and your conscience, you would follow your conscience, even at the cost of personal harm.

What conclusions can we draw from these theories? Despite the fact that life may not always follow such a neat progression of stages as are proposed by Erikson and Kohlberg, we can see that moral development is a process. An adult may on occasion apply a very child-like reasoning to a moral situation, even though they are intellectually perfectly able to reason at a much higher level. We make progress but sometimes we also regress. We drift in and out of stages influenced by many situations and people. In general, to develop as an ethical person one needs:

- to trust in the integrity of others
- to feel capable of acting morally
- to believe in objective truth and principles
- to believe that, despite one's limitations, one can overcome whatever threatens to diminish one's worth, one's dignity
- a sense of one's own identity

- a compassionate understanding of one's limitations so that one can forgive and be forgiven
- a sense of one's own autonomy so that one can follow one's conscience
- to pursue a life that is meaningful, not just for oneself, but also for others.

Today most psychologists affirm the significant role that both cognitive development and socialization play in the formation of morality. *Parents, it is clear, have a great influence on the moral development of their children.* They model moral behaviour. They can help their children realize the effect their behaviour has on other people. They can give their children opportunity to recognize and practise moral action, to take into consideration the view points of others, to be involved in decision-making processes, and to develop the skills needed to reason about what is the moral thing to do when confronted with a moral problem. As we grow older, we begin to accept responsibility for our own actions. We realize more and more that as human beings we are powerful agents, both for our individual moral development, and for the moral development of others.[5] As we grow morally we grow in freedom. As the *Catechism* says, "The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes." (#1733)

Guiding questions

1. What role does cognitive development play in Erikson's theory of personality development?
2. What role do others play in the development of a child's personality according to Erikson?
3. What connections do you see between the theories of Erickson and Kohlberg?
4. Describe situations in which lack of a proper upbringing might prevent an individual from acting in a moral manner.
5. How do you understand the statement, "As we grow morally, we grow in freedom"?

Andrew and Joan Simone

There are some people in the world who stand out as people of exceptional generosity and purpose. They provide a glimpse of God's unconditional love.

Dr. Simone with an African child

Dr. Andrew Simone and his wife, Joan, in all their humility, are such people. Dr. Simone, a Toronto physician, and his wife, Joan, are the parents of thirteen children, one of whom they adopted. Despite a lucrative medical practice, he and his family have chosen to live a very modest lifestyle inspired by the life and charity of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Sensing that there was more to life than a medical practice provided, they decided to give away all their worldly possessions, including their car, to live a life of moderation and charity. The only real possession they kept was the family home, which serves also as an office for Dr. Simone's medical practice. The money from his practice – that portion not used to feed and clothe his family – is used to support their charitable work.

They began shipping donations of food to hungry children living in developing countries all around the world. The food they collect from across Canada is sorted for distribution in his warehouse in Mississauga. Once the food has arrived in the developing countries, it is distributed by missionaries. Providing money to the poor would not be an effective way to feed them since food supplies are scarce in developing countries. If they receive financial support for their charity, they use the money

Some of the children who have been helpd by CFC: Left – A 12-year-old African boy with his mother and Fr. Robert Hudson, CSSP; Below – poor children in front of the dump where their parents sort through the garbage.

to ship goods and to buy food directly from Canada's western farmers at cost.

In a letter, Mother Teresa affirmed this process of sending goods rather than money and thanked them for their generosity. In 1985, encouraged by her words, they founded Canadian Food for Children. His wife, Joan, worked alongside him and today is the assistant director of CFC. Today the CFC continues its practice of charity toward poor children around the world begun years ago. Not only food, but clothes, kitchen utensils, tools, medicine, toiletries, toys, bicycles, religious articles, books – just about any of the basics of living are collected and shipped where needed. Several times a year, he and his wife travel to developing countries where they oversee the distribution of the goods from their warehouse, and where, out of his great love for the needy, Dr. Simone sees patients who may not have seen a doctor for years. One would think that this was enough for any one family, but for Andrew and Joan there is still more to give. Advocates for the unborn child, their lives are an example of those who live to bring the kingdom of God to us here and now. They work with secondary schools, encouraging today's youth to become actively involved in caring for the poor. For all these acts of love, this selfless couple have received the Papal Cross, an international award for charitable work within the Catholic Church, and the Order of Canada. In all their work they exemplify a preferential option for life and the poor children of this world.[6]

- What practice sustains Joan and Andrew Simone in their quest for justice?
- How is it possible for one family to do so much?
- How might others support these very dedicated people in their mission of love?
- How do their lives reflect a deep sense of freedom?

2. The development of the human rights tradition

A second positive development came out of the discovery of the self as a free agent: the recognition that a person has inalienable rights and freedoms. These rights, such as the right of assembly, the right of free speech, the right to the integrity of one's person, the right to life, began to be proclaimed by nations as being "natural rights." The classic early expressions of these natural rights are the English Bill of Rights (1689), the American Declaration of Independence (1776), the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789), and the first ten amendments to the Constitution of the United States (known as the Bill of Rights, 1791). Some of these rights, such as the dignity of the human person, are acknowledged in the Bible (for example, Genesis 1.26 declares that humans are created in the image and likeness of God). However, the Bible does not present them as rights. In the Bible they are a gift of God. Calling them rights began to happen only in modern times from the seventeenth century onwards and even more so after 1945.

The reason for this development is telling. After the Second World War certain political leaders realized that the atrocities perpetrated by some states were so abhorrent that they needed to be considered crimes. The world had witnessed such crimes as genocide, the carpet bombing of cities, torture, disappearances, human experimentation, state policies of starvation, slavery, racism, mass rape, racial discrimination, etc. Instead of devising a moral code, the United Nations developed a declaration, known as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

What is significant about this declaration – and the many that followed, among them the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) – is that it is a declaration. It declares

certain rights and freedoms as being inalienably human or fundamental. These rights and freedoms inhere in every person. No one, not even the state, may revoke them, except in extraordinary circumstances. These rights and freedoms have a long history and often reflect the Christian moral tradition. They belong to each person as an individual and they apply wherever the individual lives or works. Because they inhere in an individual, some have argued that each one *must* lay a claim to these rights and freedoms, especially to the so-called inalienable rights.[7] By being declared and often ratified by governments, these human rights become legal or civil rights.

These human rights and freedoms are quickly entering into every aspect of professional, ethical and social responsibility in all fields of research, study, teaching and work.[8] There has been a growing consensus that with these declarations of human rights and freedoms we are developing the tools for a global human rights code. For example, with the development of a World Court in The Hague – still in its first phase – it has become possible to charge legally perpetrators of crimes against humanity.

Although the human rights movement is secular in origin, it does not mean that the Catholic Church has remained on the sidelines. It recognizes many of the rights and freedoms as being in harmony with its faith tradition and uses the declarations in its moral teaching. In the social teachings of the Church many of these rights are affirmed. (Keep in mind the distinction between human rights and legal rights. They are not the same. Although they can and often do overlap, they sometimes stand at opposite poles. For example, human beings have the right to life. This human right stands in opposition to the legal right to an abortion. The Church supports human rights, but also challenges legal rights when they contravene basic human rights.)

At the Second Vatican Council the Church accepted a Declaration on Religious Liberty (1965), which in its introductory paragraph welcomes the newly found consciousness of the dignity of the human person. The Declaration urges everyone to respect the freedom of religion in civil society: "The *right to the exercise of freedom*, especially in moral and religious matters, is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person. This right must be recognized and protected by civil authority within the limits of the common good and public order."[9] Some of the obligations and rights of Catholics are outlined in *The Code of Canon Law*. They include such rights as the right to worship God, to be assisted by their pastors, to establish associations for charitable and pious purposes, to receive a Christian education, to conduct research, to be immune from coercion in choosing a state of life, to uphold one's reputation, to protect one's privacy, etc. (See Canons 208-223.)[10]

A right is an entitlement or a claim. A human right is an entitlement or claim that is based solely on the dignity of being human. A person's dignity, in other words, inherently claims or is entitled to certain necessities such as food, shelter, employment. In some countries rights are legislated by the government into law. For example, in the United States of America, the citizens have the right to bear arms. This is a legal right and not a human right. Its citizens therefore have a legal entitlement or a legal claim to carry weapons, not a human right.

Legal or civil rights are claims or entitlements that have arisen from the need to set up parameters that allow people to live cooperatively and without harm in a community or state. They are rights acknowledged by governments which permit each citizen to participate in government, to a varying degree and with certain obligations. These rights form the content of government constitutions and charters of freedom. (See Chapter 11.)

The United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is a good example of the intent of the human rights movement. It set a pattern for many of the subsequent declarations and charters of human rights and freedoms. Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) is one of them. The UN's *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948. Following this historic act, the Assembly called upon all member countries to publicize the text of the Declaration and "to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories." Here is the Preamble of the declaration:

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

PREAMBLE

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, therefore, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Access to clean water is a human right

In 2004, one in six people in the world, 95 percent of whom live in Asia, Africa and Latin America, do not have access to safe water. Because it is essential to life, clean water must be considered a basic human right.

As United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan himself has said: "Access to safe water is a fundamental human need, and therefore, a basic human right. Contaminated water jeopardizes both the physical and social health of all people. It is an affront to human dignity."[11]

Clean fresh water is a collective responsibility, a legacy each generation leaves to future generations. As such, it deserves nothing less than transparent and accountable stewardship, which can best be achieved through democratic, public control of water resources.

To further this end, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, the official international solidarity agency of the Canadian Catholic Church, has adopted the theme of universal access to water as its education campaign for the period 2003–2006. It has worked relentlessly over the years not only to provide the poorest members of our global society with the necessities of life, but also to change unjust structures and human ignorance that deprive people of their basic rights.

(For further information on this issue, visit the Development and Peace Web site [www.devp.org] and see Chapter 14 of this text.)

Guiding questions

1. What is your understanding of "human rights"?
2. Name twenty rights and freedoms as described in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (available on the Internet).
3. Create a charter of rights and freedoms and a corresponding charter of responsibilities for your school.
4. How is access to water a human right? Why do you think that the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace chose this issue as its focus for a three-year campaign?

Harmful effects from the discovery of the self as free agent

There has also been a downside to this discovery of the self as the ground of freedom. The more harmful side effects are:

- growing atheism
- the isolation of the individual
- autonomism.

We examine each in turn.

1. The atheism of modern times

In one of the memorable visions of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche entitled *The Madman,* he tells of a man who in full daylight goes into the market with a lantern crying at the top of his voice: "I seek God! I seek God!" The people in the marketplace, who do not believe

in God, all begin to laugh and shower the madman with insulting questions, asking whether God is lost, or is hiding like a child. The madman springs into their midst and with piercing eyes shouts, "Where did God go? I'll tell you. We have killed him – you and I! We are all his murderers."[12]

In this account, Nietzsche realized that without God humanity is rudderless, without a horizon. He said it was like loosening the earth from the sun. Nietzsche realized that without God there would be a tremendous emptiness in life. What is perhaps the most damning part of his vision is his accusation that "murdering" God was a deed perpetrated by Western civilization. He asked how we dared to do it. But we did it. As so many visionaries of the West have testified, while God's name is still remembered, God seems to have died in our culture.

This atheism is one of the consequences of self-discovery as free. I can indeed free myself of anything that is not me. I can doubt not only mathematical truths; I can be equally skeptical about God. Nietzsche predicted that it would become emptier and colder in the world without God. He also realized that, in our headstrong rush forward, without God we would lose our firm footing. We would be pulled and pushed, lose our orientation, not knowing where to stand.

Nietzsche's prediction has come true. The West feels itself pulled and pushed in every direction. In the public sphere in the West we are expected to be agnostic. God is not to be mentioned: God has been ciphered out of public language and projects, even though in private life 85 percent of Canadians say that they still believe in God.

> It is not true that atheism is growing in the world. From the militant and organized atheism of other times, we now have a situation of practical indifference, of a loss of the relevance of the question of God, of abandonment of religious practice, above all, in the western world. But not an abandonment of belief in God.
>
> *– from a global survey on unbelief and religious indifference, Pontifical Council for Culture, 2004*

Guiding questions

1. On the Statistics Canada Web site, find the most recent statistics regarding religious belief in Canada.
2. What role does belief in God play in the day-to-day life of Canadians? What difference does it make? What difference might belief in God make?
3. Explain the connection between the discovery of the free self and the growth of atheism in our culture.

2. The isolation of the individual

In experiencing the self as a subject in modern times, we tend to see ourselves as different from and isolated from everything else. Whatever is not "I," or the subject, becomes an object. It is as if our sense of freedom that came with Descartes's doubting experiment set the "I" apart. This new-found freedom placed such a high value on our capacity to think and to will that everything else in God's creation was suddenly reduced in value. People began to think that the only value that animals, plants, the oceans, the soil, minerals had was "for us." These "things" had no value in themselves. They were objects for our use without our being responsible for them. This dramatic change in how people viewed themselves and the world can be seen in a number of developments.

- *The rapid development of science and technology*

The idea of reducing creation outside of the "I" into objects opened the way for scientific study. Science reduces reality to what is measurable. Nature is separated from the spiritual. It is considered on its own as an independent reality. Nature is seen less and less as a reflection of the glory of God. It is an object to be manipulated by the "I." The scientific and technological revolution of the past four centuries has been so successful that we tend to see the world through its eyes. So much has fallen under the spell of science that it is considered one of the highest values today. It is hard to imagine our world without science and technology. But with this viewpoint so dominant, it is difficult to appreciate other viewpoints.

- *The impact of science and technology on freedom*

The scientific and technological revolution has had an impact on our freedom, but not necessarily as we envisaged it. It was hoped that science and technology would free us from the domination of nature, leaving us in control of our lives. We would have to work less and be freer to develop ourselves. Science and technology would make us less dependent. That clearly has not taken place. What has happened instead is an ever-increasing focus on our capacity to do more in our work. The introduction of science and technology – and in our time, computers and robots – has not made us freer; we work harder and longer hours than ever before. Even our "free time" is understood as time "free from work." We hardly know the value of rest. The workweek no longer includes a day of rest – the Sabbath – as insisted upon by biblical tradition. The earth is no longer a gift to be appreciated, but an object to be exploited.

- *My body as object*

By isolating the "I" from everything else, the West created a new set of dualisms. For the individual as imagined by Descartes, the "I" was located in my thinking capacity. This isolated the "I" from my body. It meant that even my body can be reduced to an object, forgetting that it is *my* body. It opened up the possibility for reducing the body to a biological object open to experimentation and surgical operations. This has led to positive medical advancements. But at the same time, the human body has lost its sacredness and is now an object of experimentation.

- *Rise of individualism*

One further repercussion of the isolation of the "I" is the rise of individualism. There is only one perspective from which to view the world: the isolated "I." The "I" is where everything begins. The community, the family, and as we shall see in the next chapter, the state is made up of these isolated individuals. Communities have come to be seen as voluntary associations where individuals decide to belong and participate only when it serves their individual interests.

Guiding questions

1. What are some of the repercussions of individualism?
2. What is the basic position of individualism?
3. How would you counteract the bad effects of individualism?

Picasso's Girl with a Mandolin

Picasso's painting, *Girl with a Mandolin (1910),* illustrates how many people today perceive their freedom in relation to things around them. The painting is in the genre known as Cubism, which appeared in the beginning of the twentieth century. For some time already painters had been experimenting with new ways of relating to nature. The avant-garde had moved away from pure representation of nature, cityscapes or people toward the impression that the scene or person left upon the painter. We see this in the works of Monet and van Gogh. In 1910 Picasso and Brague – influenced by Cézanne – went a step further. In Cubism, objects (in this case the girl with her mandolin) lose their relationship to the viewer. The girl and the mandolin are hardly recognizable. They are broken down into geometric forms. As a pattern of geometric forms, the woman in the painting is still recognizable, but she is hardly a person. This breaking down of objects into parts shows a new relationship to things. The painter is taking new freedoms with regard to the object of his painting. He can arrange the mandolin or the girl without any regard for their physical appearance or their human relation to the viewer. The girl is constructed into an object.

This painting shows Cubism's fascination and experimentation with perspective. At times Cubist paintings show the same object from a number of angles and perspectives in the same painting. Nature and persons do not have only one perspective. We can paint – as did Monet – a haystack in different seasons, at different times of the day. In relationship to nature we are free to stand in different places and look at it from different angles. Each perspective is true. In my freedom I remain an outsider. I am so disengaged from nature that I feel free to do with it what I will – rearrange it, destroy it, pollute it. The freedom of the Cubist reflects well the freedom that we have come to feel over and against nature.[13]

3. The rise of autonomy: freedom and power

One of the most detrimental outcomes of the discovery of the self as free is what is known as *autonomism,* literally, "a law unto myself" (*auto:* self and *nomos:* law). Up to this point we have insisted that human moral action must also be reasonable. In determining what to do we have called upon our ability to reason and make judgments. We have insisted that our freedom needs reason in order to be authentic.

The discovery of the self as free led to questions about this link between freedom and reason. Freedom came to be seen as a power on its own. The rule of reason became secondary. The emphasis began to be placed on the will on its own – on doing whatever one pleases. Freedom in this sense is looking after one's own well-being and interest. This freedom as a will to power is known as autonomy, where I alone am the moral law.

One of the greatest desires of modern time is for autonomy. We want not only to set the

direction, but also the extent of our freedom, guided only by our desires. We do not want to be told what to do. Literally, autonomy has come to mean: I wish to be a law unto myself. Human beings have always had an inclination to do what they want to do. What is different in modern times is that in the name of reason the pure will to power becomes justified.

The rise of autonomy was justified through a theological argument. It went like this: God is absolutely free. This freedom means there is nothing to make it necessary for God to will one thing over the other. God cannot be constrained even by reason. And so when God created the world, God did so with absolute freedom. Creation is not determined by God's intelligence, but by God's freedom. If the world was created through divine will, then the world mirrors the absolute freedom of God. This notion of an unregulated freedom became the model for many philosophers since Descartes. Our freedom is like God's freedom: a freedom of the will but not of reason. We read a description of this approach in the following quote from Descartes:

> It is only the will or freedom of choice, which I experience with me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp; so much so that it is above all in virtue of the will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God. For although God's will is incomparably greater than mine, … nevertheless it does not seem any greater than mine when considered as will in the essential and strict sense.[14]

In the final analysis, what is this notion of autonomy? It is the freedom "to be like God," (which was the first temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden: Genesis 3.5). This is freedom as a power: a power to do what *I* will! This freedom does not want to consider any constraints. Any constraint is a limitation of my freedom. This kind of freedom demands that there are no rules. For what would hold back this freedom, if I am like God in my freedom? This understanding of freedom has had enormous repercussions. In the next chapter we will see how autonomism has influenced the workings of government. Most Western governments are built on what is known as liberalism, an ideology based on autonomy. In this chapter we will remain at the level of individual freedom.

At the individual level autonomous freedom is a power governed by my will alone. It follows the guidance not of reason but of our basic instincts, desires and passions. This is a freedom in which I assert myself. The more able I am to assert myself, the freer I am. The freest person is the one for whom there are no obstacles, no constraints. Women have rightly complained that in some arenas, this notion of freedom favours men since they have a greater physical power to assert themselves. This is the freedom of the powerful and ultimately the freedom of the bully. In the end, it is a freedom without morality, having little concern for the other.

An example of this can also be found in current claims for freedom in scientific research. In the debates on stem cell research a number of scientists argued "not from the value of medical benefits but on the basis of freedom to conduct research, which they believe is the principle by which federal policy ought to be governed. They regard government restraints on scientific research as inherently offensive and generally unjustifiable. The cherished ideals of freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, and – specifically in this context – freedom of inquiry, trump concerns over the moral status of human embryos…" [15]

God created man in his image and established him in his friendship. A spiritual creature, man can live this friendship only in free submission to God. The prohibition against eating "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" spells this out: "for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die." The "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" symbolically evokes the insurmountable limits that man, being a creature, must freely recognize and respect with trust. Man is dependent on his Creator, and subject to the laws of creation and to the moral norms that govern the use of freedom.

***CCC* #396**

Guiding questions

1. In 2002 an Italian fertility specialist, Severino Altinori, announced that he had begun to experiment with the cloning of human beings. Using this announcement as an example of autonomism, identify other types of research which might claim their freedom as autonomous.
2. What do you understand by autonomism?

Freedom and nature: The limits of freedom

In this final section we look at the limits of freedom.

Social limits to freedom

We become most aware of freedom when we experience constraints. Some limits are imposed by individuals in authority (parents, teachers); other limits are imposed by society (social rules or laws of school, church or state). We push the limits when parents or school rules present us with curfews or behaviour and dress codes. Testing these limits is the manifestation of freedom in us. It is our capacity for freedom showing itself. We test limits because freedom is a power that when engaged can overcome imposed limits. In the social area this testing takes the form of protest, pitting one freedom against another, or a freedom against the perceived common good of an institution or state.

Moral limits to freedom

The limits of our freedom can also be moral or ethical. Acts are moral or ethical because they come from our freedom, but this freedom is not without obligation. Freedom must take account of the moral norms, rules, proverbs, commandments, laws and principles that we discussed in Chapter 8. Even though all of these norms have come about through the moral deliberations of others in the past and through our religious tradition, they are experienced at first as an imposed obligation. Only when we reflect on them do we realize how these laws and rules are not a denial of freedom but a guidance or an education of our freedom. They are presented as the road to freedom. With them we become morally, or ethically, free.

Freedom in the face of nature

Nature and necessity are the areas of life that our freedom cannot budge. Our freedom needs to work with the limits set by our bodies, our nature, our genetic code, and by our physical environment – the climate, the earth. That is, our freedom operates within the "laws of nature." Let us examine these limits and the task of freedom in a number of cases:

Bridget is sitting in the guidance counselor's office. For more than a year she has been trying to decide what she will do after graduation. She has options. In fact, she has too many options. She wants help in deciding between engineering, teaching and perhaps even medicine. At one point, she had even thought of getting training so that she could work for a development agency in Malawi where her uncle worked.

1. What are the constraints of freedom for Bridget?
2. How is it that Bridget's freedom lies not in the options but in her choice of one of these options?
3. How can one be free, if you *must* do something?

Paulo was involved in a car accident which left him paralyzed. He had been one of the school's star athletes, so much so that he had been courted by a number of universities with football scholarships. His future was full of promise until the day he got into the car and lost control on some black ice. Paulo is now confined to a wheelchair and needs constant care.

Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.

Pope John Paul II

1. What are the constraints of freedom for Paulo?
2. How is it that Paulo's freedom is not taken away with his paralysis?
3. Where is Paulo's freedom now?
4. Give examples of people who are free despite their disabilities.

Danya and Ken are geneticists working in a large laboratory. Recently married, they want to start a family. At their laboratory there is a research group studying human genetic engineering. Danya and Ken have both talked to members of the research team and have become intrigued with the notion of "designer babies." They would like to have a girl with a happy disposition, and a number of bodily "enhancements" (Ken wants to be sure their girl will not inherit his large ears or a number of possible diseases that run in his family).

1. What constraints are Danya and Ken trying to overcome?
2. What sort of freedom do Danya and Ken seek?
3. What are the moral or ethical implications of this type of bioengineering?

Tony Melendez: redefining limits

Never Be the Same was an appropriate song for those few moments when he played before the Holy Father that changed Tony Melendez' life and brought his unrestrained abilities as a guitarist into national attention. It seems to be a fitting place for a man who has spent his life putting personal confidence above his handicap.

A "thalidomide baby," Tony was born without arms because his mother was prescribed thalidomide, a drug used to help calm morning sickness during her pregnancy. He was brought to the Los Angeles area from Nicaragua to be fitted with artificial arms. He wore them until he was ten, when he disposed of them. "I didn't feel comfortable," he explains. "I could use my feet so much more." His proficiency with his feet extended to more areas than just day-to-day care. He remembers that "at first, I started playing push-button organ. Then in high school I began playing around with the guitar and harmonica." He also began writing his own songs. Whether it was "playing around" with music or merely adjusting to a normal high school routine, Tony never let his handicap get in his way. "I was pretty secure in what I could do," he says.

It was also in high school that he became deeply involved in the Catholic Church. "I went when I was a kid because my parents took me. I drifted away as I got a little older. When I was in high school, my brother kept saying 'come on, you've gotta go. It's great!' So I went again and made a lot of friends, and wound up changing my life in the process."

During this time, he considered becoming a priest but couldn't, because priests were required to have an index finger and thumb. The news disappointed him but he persevered in his church activities, using his talents as a guitarist and composer for masses and church-related events. Demand for him increased to the point where he was directing and singing in music groups at up to five masses on a given Sunday. It caught people's attention, including someone with the group organizing activities for the monumental visit of Pope John Paul II in 1987.

"Someone pulled my name out of somewhere and asked me to go to a meeting," Tony recalls. "I wasn't sure what it was." It turned out to be an audition and Tony was accepted. "I was really excited when I heard." Excitement became nervousness and then jubilation when the Pope responded to Tony's playing, with a kiss. He notes now that he wasn't sure how to react. "I was told not to move or the security might take me out, so I was very surprised when the Pope leaped off the four-foot stage to greet me."

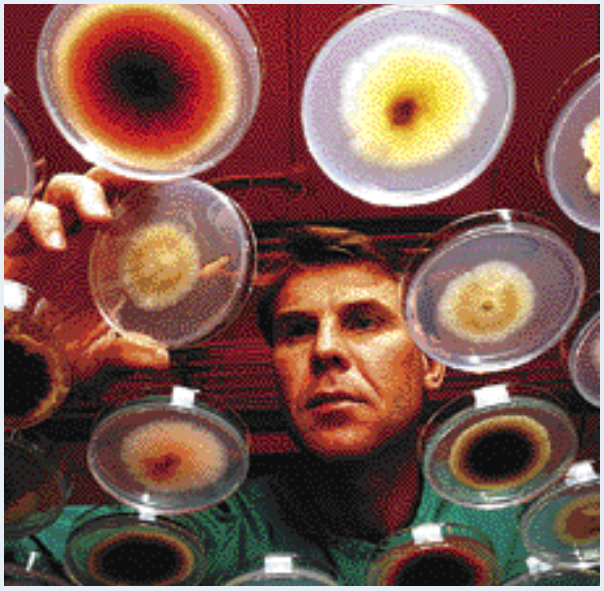
Since then Tony has traveled and performed in many countries. He's a composer, musician, and very successful recording artist. His autobiography, *A Gift of Hope*, was published in 1989 by Harper & Row.

Tony lives in Branson, Missouri, with his wife and children. "Lynn and I love each other deeply and music brought us together. So, one day we'll share all of these memories with our children. Music has opened the door to my dreams and I will keep singing, continue to share my life, and keep making music for all who will listen."[16]

Reflections on bioengineering

A report from the President's Council on Bioethics entitled *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness* (2003) gives the following description of the age-long desire to overcome the limits imposed on us by "nature" and our dreams to overcome them:

> The healthy body declines and its parts wear out. The sound mind slows down and has trouble remembering things. The soul has aspirations beyond what even a healthy body can realize, and it becomes weary from frustration. Even at its fittest, the fatigable and limited human body rarely carries out flawlessly even the ordinary desires of the soul. For this reason (among others), the desires of many human beings – for more, for better, for the unlimited, or even for the merely different – will not be satisfied with the average, nor will they take their bearings from the distinction between normal and abnormal, or even between the healthy and the better-than-healthy.
>
> Joining aspirations to overcome common human limitations are comparable aspirations to overcome individual shortfalls in native endowment. For there is wide variation in the natural gifts with which each of us is endowed: some are born with perfect pitch, others are born tone-deaf; some have flypaper memories, others forget immediately what they have just learned. And as with talents, so too with desires and temperaments: some crave immortal fame, others merely comfortable preservation. Some are sanguine, others phlegmatic, still others bilious or melancholic. When nature dispenses her gifts, some receive only at the end of the line. Yet, one should remember that it is often the most gifted and ambitious who most resent their human limitations: Achilles was willing to destroy everything around him, so little could he stomach that he was but a heel short of immortality.[17]



The ethical debate on biotechnology is vigorous. We present two reflections, one by Margaret Atwood, the other by the Pontifical Academy for Life. ➤

Margaret Atwood presents a doomsday vision of a bio-engineered world gone awry in *Oryx and Crake*. In a review of *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age* by Bill McKibben, Atwood writes:

> Gene splicing depends on cloning … but is not the same. It involves inserting selected genes – of those other than the parents – into an egg, which is then implanted in the usual way (or will be until the bottled babies of *Brave New World* make their appearance, and we can do away with the womb altogether). If we become genetically enhanced in this way – enhanced by our parents before we're born – the joy and mystery will go out of life, says McKibben, because we won't have to strive for mastery. Our achievements won't be "ours" but will have been programmed into us; we'll never know whether we are really feeling "our" emotions, or whether they – like the false memories embedded in the replicants in the film *Blade Runner* – are off the shelf. We won't be our unique selves, we'll just be the sum totals of market whims. We truly will be the "meat machines" that some scientists already term us. Right now about all our parents can pick for us are our names, but what if they could pick everything about us? (And you thought your mother had bad taste in sofas!)[18]

In a Communiqué of the Pontifical Academy for Life on February 26, 2003, on the "Ethics of Biomedical Research: For a Christian Vision" we read the following:

> Obviously, the acquisition of a growing technical possibility of intervention on human beings, on other living beings and on the environment, and the attainment of ever more decisive and permanent effects, demands that scientists and society as a whole assume an ever greater responsibility in proportion to the power of intervention. It follows that the experimental sciences, and biomedicine itself, as "instruments" in human hands, are not complete in themselves, but must be directed to defined ends and put in dialogue with the world of values.
>
> The primary agent of this continuous process of "ethical orientation" is, unmistakably, the human person. Indivisible unity of body and soul, the human being is characterized by his capacity to choose in freedom and responsibility the goal of his own actions and the means to achieve it. His burning desire to seek the truth, that belongs to his nature and his specific vocation, finds an indispensable help in the Truth itself, God, who comes to meet the needs of the human being and reveals to him his Face through creation, and more directly, through Revelation. Thus God favours and supports the efforts of human reason, and enables the human being to recognize so many "seeds of truth" present in reality, and finally, to enter into communion with the Truth itself which He is.
>
> In principle, therefore, there are no ethical limits to the knowledge of the truth, that is, there are no "barriers" beyond which the human person is forbidden to apply his cognitive energy: the Holy Father has wisely defined the human being as *"the one who seeks the truth"*[19]; but, on the other hand, precise ethical limits are set out for the manner the human being in search of the truth should act, since *"what is technically possible is not for that very reason morally admissible"*[20]. It is therefore the ethical dimension of the human person, which he applies concretely though the judgments of his moral conscience, that connotes the existential goodness of his life.[21]

In the end, the struggle for human freedom cannot be denied. This struggle is manifest in the lives of people like Nelson Mandela in South Africa and Martin Luther King in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech has never lost its power. Here is a brief extract:

> When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

Chapter review

Summary

- Freedom is a difficult gift. It is not easy to live freely, for with freedom comes responsibility.
- Without freedom there is no morality.
- St. Augustine uncovered the terrible grandeur of freedom in the experience of evil and sin. Our freedom has the terrifying capacity to turn us away from God. This ability to sin shows that the abuse of freedom does violence to the core of human existence.
- René Descartes in the seventeenth century changed our understanding of freedom. The self, he discovered, was a capacity that could think and doubt freely. I am free to think.
- Freedom is the hallmark of human nature, and sets us apart from anything else that we encounter in nature.
- The recognition of the self as free has been both a blessing and, at times, a curse. We have begun to understand ourselves as individuals who have a right to dignity and respect. On the other hand, the very movements that recognized these rights and freedoms of the individual are so based on self-interest that they cannot give the same impetus to responsibility as they have to freedom.
- Developmental psychology shows how, over a lifetime, our personal freedom can either mature or decline depending on how we respond to the different challenges of life.
- Erik Erikson's psychosocial stage theory suggests that personality development occurs as we develop physically and cognitively. This development takes place as a result of socialization by parents, teachers and influential members of society.
- Lawrence Kohlberg was a cognitive psychologist who applied developmental psychology specifically to moral development.
- As we grow morally we grow in freedom. "The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes." (*CCC*, #1733)
- One other positive development that came out of the discovery of the self as a free agent is the recognition that a person has inalienable rights and freedoms.
- There has also been a downside to this discovery of the self as the ground of freedom. The more harmful side effects are:
  - growing atheism
  - the isolation of the individual
  - autonomism
- We also experience limits to our freedom: social, moral, and limits of nature.

Glossary

capacity: power or ability to act, to know, to hold, etc. Aptitude. Ability.

crisis: opportunity or occasion for an important decision. A crucial or decisive point in a situation that can signify either a change for the better or a change for the worse.

licence: disregard for norms governing behaviour; irresponsible action. "Anything goes" – sometimes mistaken for freedom.

object: a physical or mental reality toward which thoughts, feelings and actions can be directed.

right: an entitlement or a claim.

- A human right is an entitlement or claim that is based solely on the dignity of being human.
- Legal or civil rights are claims or entitlements that have arisen from the need to set up parameters that allow people to live cooperatively and without harm in a community or state.

subject: the "self" that thinks, feels, acts.

will: the freedom and power of the self to choose, decide, act. Deliberate control over thought and action.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Describe how Descartes's notion of the individual as free has impacted Western society, giving some examples.
2. Explain what is meant by "inalienable human right," and what that has to do with moral living.

Thinking and inquiry

3. Explain how a person's level of freedom is dependent on his or her development. Use Erikson, Kohlberg, or Fowler to support your answer.
4. Do you think access to water is a human right? Why or why not? Do you think that the UN should declare access to water a human right? Why or why not? What position does the Catholic Church in Canada take on the issue of water as a human right? What are its philosophical reasons? What are its theological reasons? (Visit the Web site of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops for more sources on this issue: www.cccb.ca.)

Communication

5. Picasso's artwork, *Girl with a Mandolin*, is a visual expression of how the artist relates to the world. Choose an artwork and develop your own analysis of how the artist relates to his subject matter. Based on the artwork, what can you surmise about the artist's notion of personal freedom?
6. Using the medium of your choice, express what you have learned in this chapter about the meaning of personal freedom. Be prepared to explain and defend your presentation.

Application

7. Log on to the Development and Peace Web site (www.devp.org) and find out what their current campaign is about. The site will recommend concrete actions that people can take to carry forward the work of promoting people's rights and freedoms. Prepare a report to the class on the issue that they are addressing, and how students can become involved.
8. Develop a declaration of rights and freedoms of a high school student in Canada. What responsibilities go along with these rights and freedoms?

Freedom in a political and cultural context

CHAPTER 11

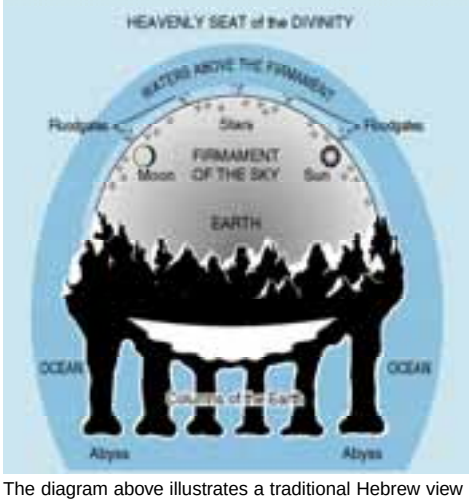
Say among the nations, "The LORD is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity."
Psalm 96.10

The making of modern society

We are accustomed to living in what most people consider to be a free society. We take for granted that we have the right to choose for ourselves where we live and how we live. We have the right to choose our own convictions and our religion. We have the freedom of speech and the freedom of association. We have the right to choose our occupation. We have learned to appreciate the freedoms that this type of society accords us and we tend to think of societies who do not promote the same freedoms as being undeveloped.

In the last chapter we looked at a host of rights we assume will protect us. Our legal system is set up to defend these rights and prevent others from infringing on them. But it was not always this way. Try to imagine living in another, very different, order of society prior to our current one. In the words of Charles Taylor:

> People used to see themselves as part of a larger order. In some cases, this was a cosmic order … in which humans figured in their proper place along with angels, heavenly bodies, and our fellow earthly creatures. This hierarchical order in the universe was reflected in the hierarchies of human society. People were often locked into a given place, a role and station that was properly theirs and from which it was almost unthinkable to deviate. Modern freedom came about through the discrediting of such orders.[1]



The diagram above illustrates a traditional Hebrew view of the cosmos.

Replacing this society structured around a sacred cosmic order was the modern liberal democratic society. What brought about this dramatic shift? The establishment of the liberal democratic society goes back to the same period in history that we now identify as the beginning of modern time: the seventeenth century. From this time period, five beliefs began to emerge that today shape Western society's view of the world:

- The belief in unlimited progress
- The belief in the exclusive supremacy of reason
- The belief in the supreme autonomy of the individual

Focus your learning

Cognitive

Describe how individualism has affected the notion of freedom in Western society.

Practical

Identify the pitfalls of individualism and utilitarianism.

Affective

You are never too busy to eat; neither are you too busy to feed your soul. Busy though your life may be, you will deprive it of its fruitfulness if you starve your soul. How do you feed your soul in the busyness of your life?

Key terms in this chapter

capitalism
commodity
consumerism
democracy
individualism
instrumental reason
liberalism
market
private property
relativism
social contract
utilitarianism

Key thinkers

Thomas Hobbes
John Locke
Jean-Jacques Rousseau
John Rawls
Charles Taylor

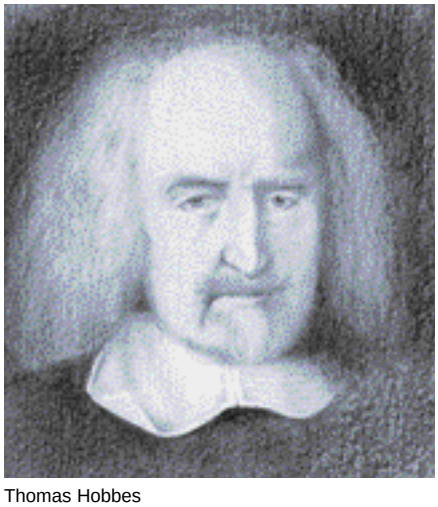
- The belief in the ever-increasing domination and control of nature by human beings
- The belief that success and efficiency are the two principle criteria for judging the worth of human beings and their activities

In this chapter, we will explore in particular the belief in the supreme autonomy of the individual. In the previous chapter we explored personal freedom. In this chapter, we move to an exploration of human freedom within a political and social context. In order to understand the current functioning of our political society it is helpful to see how some philosophers articulated the shift and contributed to its development. We will examine the political theories of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), John Locke (1632–1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) as they emerged from the surge of individual freedoms.

Why do we select these particular thinkers? They are primarily political philosophers rather than moral philosophers. Their point of departure is the self-interest of an individual, and that individual's rights and freedoms. Their political theories have had a tremendous impact on our way of life; our liberal democracies have their origin in the thinking that came out of the seventeenth century. So too many of the difficulties that we are experiencing today lie in the basic principles of liberal democracy. We will also look at the influential work of a recent thinker, John Rawls (1921–2002), to show how the theories of the seventeenth century have persisted. We will examine both the positive and the more troubling aspects of modern liberal democracy as they touch on freedom in a political and cultural context.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)

Thomas Hobbes, scientist, philosopher and political theorist, was born in London in 1588. When he was only 15 years old, he began his study of the classics at Oxford University. For most of his life Hobbes made his living as a tutor for children of wealthy families, including, for a period, the future King Charles II. Most interesting about Hobbes is his political theory. He developed his political theory against the backdrop of the barbarous civil wars and the endless struggles in parliament that plagued England during his lifetime. Hobbes's position will hardly seem to us to be liberal and democratic, but he set the tone for how political obligation and rights might be deduced from the interest and will of individuals.


Thomas Hobbes

We begin with Hobbes's pessimistic description of human nature. He arrived at this picture by imagining what humans would be like if there were no rulers or law enforcement. Even *with* law enforcement, he says, an "uncivilized" person can never let down his guard: "When taking a journey, he armes himselfe, and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his dores; when even in his house he locks his chests."[2] For Hobbes this "natural" (as opposed to "civilized") individual would be in constant struggle with others. Everybody would seek to have power over others for fear of being overpowered themselves. There could be no peaceful living – no secure property, no industry, commerce, sciences, arts, or literature – and everyone would live in constant danger of violent death. As he says in *Leviathan*, his most famous book, the life of each one would be "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."[3] Or as he said in *De cive*, "Humans are wolves toward each other."

According to Hobbes, it is to avoid such an insecure, anti-social life – war of each with all – that people accept the sovereignty of an individual who has by violence taken power over them or to whom people have agreed to transfer their power to rule over them.

For Hobbes a human being is like a beast, a leviathan, that is set in motion by selfish desires and appetites. The highest of these appetites is the human will. Every human being is moved by these appetites to seek out that good which best serves his or her own self-interest. One human being differs from another by the degree of their drive for personal power. For Hobbes it is each person for him or herself, always in competition with the passion for power of another. Each has a "restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death."[4]

For Hobbes this power of each individual is translated into market terms: I own this power and therefore I can negotiate with others over how I will use this power. Power is a commodity that I can trade with others. My power has value, worth, honour, and esteem in the eyes of others and I can barter with it just as the market barters with money.

Here we see an individual's gifts beginning to be translated into market, or commodity language. Everything has a price. In the seventeenth century, this commodification of talents and skills was only in its first stage. Commodification of talents suggests that as owners of our personal gifts and talents we have the right to put a market price on them. I can put them at the service of the market. To put it in modern terms, singer x can charge $125.00 per ticket while singer y can demand only $50.00 because the fame or esteem associated with each one's singing talent is evaluated as a commodity on an open market.

What Hobbes realized and articulated for the first time in history is that work is such a commodity. I can translate work into a value, a market price: in exchange for my work I contract a wage in accordance with the value that others (the market) give my work. This novelty of contracting out one's capacity to work was highly instrumental in creating the market or capitalist society that we know today. Hobbes was convinced that all human beings possess something that they can offer in the market. Furthermore, whereas land had been communally owned and was not bought or sold on the market, in Hobbes's time land was increasingly owned as "private property." It too could be bought and sold.

For Hobbes a human being is like a beast, a leviathan, that is set in motion by selfish desires and appetites.

What would bind individuals who *possess* their skills, work, and talents together to form a society? What self-interest would be served? Hobbes is quite clear: it is fear of death. The basis of society therefore is a tacit contract where individuals give up some of their appetite for power in exchange for the security of using their powers without fear of extreme violence. A government is needed to protect the competition between the different appetites for power from deteriorating into murder. So society is really a transfer of rights and therefore an acceptance to limit one's power to a ruler, such as the king, in exchange for protection. From this need for protection comes the obligation to obey the ruler. Entering this contract is a free decision, according to Hobbes: I accept the obligation to obey. I limit my freedom in order to safeguard my freedom. It is a freedom based on self-interest.[5]

Guiding questions

1. How does Hobbes understand the human person outside of the constraints of law and authorities?
2. Why, according to Hobbes, do we need a ruler?
3. Explore the meaning of "Everything has a price."

John Locke (1632–1704)

John Locke is the most quoted philosopher when people seek to articulate the basic principles underlying the liberal democracies. In his writings we find the first stirrings of such deeply held beliefs as government by consent, majority rule, minority rights, moral supremacy of the individual and the sanctity of private property. They are all there in his writings as reflecting the first tentative steps of modern society. John Locke was born in 1632 of a country lawyer father. Both parents died when John was still very young.

John Locke

Like Hobbes, John Locke studied at Oxford University. He never received his medical degree although he did practise medicine. This was to be his ticket to a comfortable and protected life. He successfully removed an abscess in the chest of the first Earl of Shaftsbury, a Lord of the realm and, from 1672 to his death in 1683, Lord Chancellor of England. Locke, under his grateful sponsorship, was able to experience government from up close. That close relationship also got him into hot water – so much so that as soon as Shaftesbury died Locke found it wise to spend five years in France and Holland. He wrote his most famous works, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Two Treatises of Government*, in 1690 upon his return to England.

Locke's theory of civil government begins with the protection of property. He writes, "He is willing to join in society with others for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name, property."[6] Locke also begins his reasoning by considering a *hypothetical* state of nature, where persons are equal and are free to act as they will without interference from each other. While Hobbes argued that people in such a state of nature are "nasty and brutish," Locke believed that individuals share in the faculty of reason, and that through reason persons would for the most part act according to the self-evident laws of nature. Each person, then, by nature has the right and responsibility to enforce this natural law. When, in the course of events, reason is left to the side, human behaviour degenerates into conflict.[7]

Furthermore, in this hypothetical state of nature, Locke reasoned that the earth and its riches belong to all people in common. All people being equal, they have equal right to use what they find, so long as they respect each other's physical presence and activities. A person's labour imparts upon the goods of nature property rights to that individual. For example, a field in its natural state belongs to all, but if this field is plowed, by virtue of the person's work added to the field, the field becomes the property of the plower. In this hypothetical state of nature, this can go on as long as there is enough for everybody, for those who have the will and fortitude to work. Individuals are free to pursue their own life, health, liberty and possessions. The theory becomes more complex with the introduction of money, since money makes it possible to store value in excess of what a person could responsibly enjoy in this hypothetical state of nature. While labour remains the ultimate source of all economic value, a monetary system requires agreement among individuals as to the value of money. When there is agreement as to the value of money, property can be valued in monetary terms, and accumulated at will.[8]

The formation of a civil society requires that all individuals voluntarily surrender their individual right to uphold the natural law in defence of property interests to the community. Locke says that we enter into a "social contract" with one another; we invest powers that we ourselves had into government institutions that declare and enforce fixed rules for conduct, that is, laws, to protect property.[9] It follows, then, that only those who possess property would have a say in the running of civil society.

Locke's notion of freedom is the pursuit of one's own life, liberty and property, freed from the "uncertainty as it was in the state of Nature,"[10] secured by the "social contract" that we have with one another by virtue of living within society. The reason for government, then, is the protection of private property. Individual liberties are handed over to the government with the understanding that the common good is served when individuals' rights to private property are protected.

Guiding questions

1. What is the relationship between property and the freedom of the individual in Locke's thinking?
2. What was the task of government for Locke? How do people oblige themselves to obey the government?
3. How can people be free and equal with unequal possession of property?

Catholic perspective on private ownership of goods

In the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labour, and enjoy their fruits. The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race. However, the earth is divided up among men to assure the security of their lives, endangered by poverty and threatened by violence. The appropriation of property is legitimate for guaranteeing the freedom and dignity of persons and for helping each of them to meet his basic needs and the needs of those in his charge. It should allow for a natural solidarity to develop between men.

The right to private property, acquired by work or received from others by inheritance or gift, does not do away with the original gift of the earth to the whole of mankind. The universal destination of goods remains primordial, even if the promotion of the common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise.

"In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself." (*Gaudium et spes* 69#1) The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence, with the task of making it fruitful and communicating its benefits to others, first of all his family.

Goods of production – material or immaterial – such as land, factories, practical or artistic skills, oblige their possessors to employ them in ways that will benefit the greatest number. Those who hold goods for use and consumption should use them with moderation, reserving the better part for guests, for the sick and the poor.

Political authority has the right and duty to regulate the legitimate exercise of the right to ownership for the sake of the common good.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2402 – 2406

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a brilliant, unconventional musician, novelist, political and educational thinker, was born in Geneva in 1712. His mother died at his birth and his father, a very difficult man, fled Geneva because of a fight when Jean-Jacques was only ten. His father died shortly thereafter. Rousseau left home at age sixteen to work as a tutor and musician. Only in his forties did he begin his literary career and to write as a political philosopher. In his turbulent life Rousseau never lived long in any one place, generally leaving because of his suspicious and volatile character. He spent the last years of his life in Paris. He died in 1778.

What interests us is how Rousseau tried to connect an individual's freedom with the obligations that come from society.

In 1762 Rousseau produced *The Social Contract*, one of his most influential works on political theory. It begins: "Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains." If by nature, thought Rousseau, as an individual I am self-sufficient and autonomous, why would I accept to be part of a society which would make me dependent and which restricts my liberty? Rousseau, contrary to Hobbes, maintained that human beings were good by nature, and inclined toward compassion for one another. However, within society this natural goodness eventually degenerates into competition of wills with fellow human beings, while at the same time individuals become increasingly interdependent. Rousseau saw this competition and interdependence as threatening both the individual's survival and freedom. However, by coming together through what Rousseau called a "social contract," individuals can both preserve themselves and remain free by submitting to the "general will" of the people. This concept of the "general will" guarantees individuals against being subordinated to the wills of others and also ensures that they obey themselves because they are, collectively, the authors of the law.

Rousseau argued that within this society that is established through "social contract," the people themselves are sovereign, and they themselves should make the laws under which they agree to live. The government is charged with implementing these laws and enforcing the general will of the people. These ideas influenced much of the thinking and actions of the French and American revolutions that overthrew the rule of the monarchy – the Reign of Louis XVI in 1789 and King George III in 1776 – and the people themselves laid claim to the right of self-government. But Rousseau also questioned whether the will of the majority of the people in society is always correct. He argued that the goal of government implemented by the people should be to secure freedom, equality, and justice for all within the state, regardless of the will of the majority. When a government fails to act in a moral fashion while upholding the "general will" and the freedom of individuals, it ceases to function properly and loses its authority.

> People's participation in society must be consistent with their existence as free and rational human beings. Society is therefore unthinkable without a freedom which expresses humanity's most fundamental attribute. "To give up freedom is to give up one's human quality: to remove freedom from one's will is to remove all morality from one's actions." Moreover, it is with the emergence of society that human beings come into posses-

> sion of their freedom and thus attain the status of moral beings. The institution of any genuine political society must be the result of a social pact, or free association of intelligent human beings who deliberately choose to form the type of society to which they will owe allegiance; this is the only valid basis for a community that wishes to live in accordance with the requirements of human freedom. [11]

Rousseau suggested that the individual would accept society only if society has something to offer that the person could not have as an individual. For Rousseau these benefits were language, property, life, freedom. As long as the individual adheres to the order of the general will, society guarantees these rights and freedoms. Hence it is in one's own interest to obey, and it is a government's first duty to protect these rights. Before the law and the constitution everyone is equal, and all citizens are bound to uphold this social contract. A government also was bound to maintain this contract. If it did not, the government should be replaced. For Rousseau, to live in accordance with the general will is a way of "forcing people to be free."[12]

Guiding questions

1. How does Rousseau bring together individual freedom and social obligation?
2. Why did Rousseau think that the power conflicts have their origin in society? How did he try to overcome the competition for power?
3. What is meant by the "social contract"?

Utilitarianism

In modern societies what sort of principles are invoked to justify going after one good rather than another? Let us start with an example. A federal health agency approves an antidepressant drug for children knowing that for a small percentage of children there may be adverse and even serious side effects. In approving such drugs, the agency makes use of what has become known as a utilitarian principle: a product or an action is admissible if it provides "the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people." Utilitarianism measures a good by calculating the happiness or pleasure this good provides to the greater number of people. Utilitarianism claims it is justifiable and right to allow damage to the few if the greater number of people benefit.

According to utilitarianism, the measure of the good is not reason, but whatever maximizes pleasure for the greatest number. The health agency in the example evaluated the antidepressant drug by the happiness it will provide to the greater number of the users. The principle was made popular by British philosopher and economist Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) who said, "An action may be said to be conformable to the principle of utility … when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it." Bentham used pleasure as an indicator of the usefulness of an action: "How long will the pleasure last? How intense is it? How many aspects of life does it cover? Is the pleasure free from

➤

pain or does it entail a little pain? Is the pleasure immediate or does it lie a long way in the future?"[13] Bentham thought you could quantify pleasure and use this as a measure for judging utility. Used as a yardstick it leads to some mistaken conclusions: watching television is a higher good than doing homework; reading a tabloid is better than reading a good newspaper; marijuana should be legalized. John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) insisted that the good must be measured not quantitatively but qualitatively. What stimulates the mind is a higher good than what stimulates the body. The happiness of a human is a higher good than the happiness of an animal (hence the admissibility of animal testing).

Utilitarianism is highly popular but filled with danger. A government may decide that for the peace and harmony of a country it is better to jail dissidents; that is, any thought or discussion contrary to the current political regime is criminal. The country will avoid unrest and conflict: the happiness of the majority could justify the painful incarceration of a few. Or again, a program of enforced sterilization in a heavily populated country might be justified by the promise of a higher standard of living. Or, government may order groups or individuals to provide DNA samples and to carry identity cards to protect society against threats of terrorism. One can view the utilitarian approach in the counsel given by the High Priest Caiaphas to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem: "You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11.49). A utilitarian measures an action not on the basis of morality but on a calculation of the benefits of pleasure and deficits of pain. Under the influence of utilitarian thinking, I tell the truth, not because it is intrinsically good to do so, but because experience tells me that in the long run I will have more satisfaction from telling the truth than from lying.

Guiding questions

1. How would you define utilitarianism?
2. Give examples of utilitarian thinking from your experience.
3. Who would be the big losers under a utilitarian ideology? In the long run, how would this affect society?

liberalism: a philosophy based on the goodness of the human being, autonomy of the individual, and standing for the protection of economic, political and civil rights and freedoms.

John Rawls (1921–2002)

John Rawls

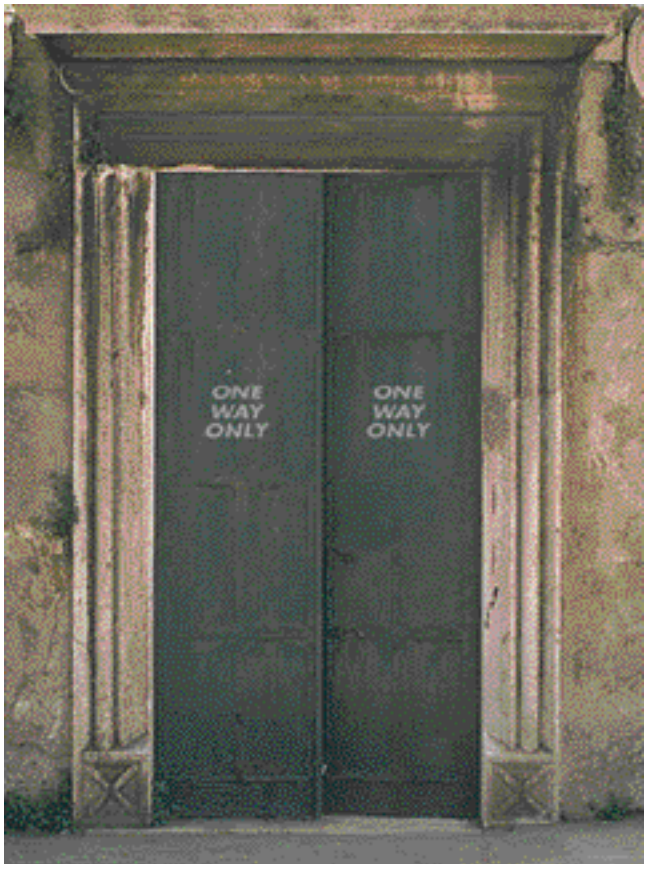
John Rawls links the thinking of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau with our time. He was a very influential thinker who was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1921. He served in the Second World War and witnessed the destruction of Hiroshima with the dropping of the atom bomb. This convinced him to leave the army. While studying in Oxford on a Fulbright scholarship he met the liberal political theorist and historian of ideas, Isaiah Berlin, a staunch defender of philosophical liberalism. Berlin's thought inspired Rawls for the rest of his life. Rawls worked at Harvard University for forty years. While there he published his most famous work, *A Theory of Justice* (1972).

With *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls was trying to provide an alternative to utilitarianism, which allows the rights of some people to be sacrificed for the greater benefit of others, as long as the total happiness is increased. Rawls saw this as unacceptable. He struggled to articulate the foundations of the modern state. His political

theory starts with the individual and the individual's freedom. Rawls wondered how to reconcile individual freedom with the constraint of society. Others before him (like Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau) had assumed some type of contract between free individuals and the state. Individuals, to remain free, must consent to give up some of these freedoms in exchange for the security of their property by the state. Rawls realized that individuals will only accept what is just (actually, Rawls says, what is "fair") in this contract. And so he set out to figure out what would be fair.

Imagine a person standing at a door that opens up into society. This person has no idea what awaits him or her on the other side of the door (Rawls called this condition of ignorance the "original position.") Stepping through the door would commit this person to this society's "social contract." But this person has no idea as to what his or her financial position would be, his or her state of health, race or religion, and so on. Before this person steps through the door, what guarantees would he or she expect in terms of rights and freedoms? To address this person's concern, Rawls suggested two principles of justice that govern the society on the other side of that door:

- The first principle of justice states that "each person would have the most extensive system of rights and freedoms which can be accorded equally to everyone. These include freedoms of speech, conscience, peaceful assembly, as well as democratic rights…. The first principle is absolute, and may never be violated, even for the sake of the second principle. However, various basic rights may be traded off against each other for the sake of obtaining the largest possible system of rights…" For example, a person's right to privacy could be limited to the degree necessary to ensure security for all members of society. This would include things like criminal background checks for teachers to ensure the security of students.
- The second principle of justice states that "economic and social inequalities are justified only if they benefit all of society, especially its most disadvantaged members. Furthermore, all economically and socially privileged positions must be open to all people equally." For example, it is justifiable for a physician to earn more and to be held in greater social esteem than an assembly-line worker or retail service worker. The reason for this is that the physician must undergo years of expensive and intensive education, at considerable personal sacrifice, and in the end is held responsible for life and death decisions. If there were no economic or social compensation, fewer people would undergo the expense and effort of becoming a physician, and society would suffer due to a shortage of physicians. This particular economic and social inequality benefits all of society, and leaves all its members better off. Of course, economic and social inequalities that do not leave all of society's members better off are not justifiable.[14]



In *A Theory of Justice* Rawls sets forth the proposition that "Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the

welfare of society as a whole cannot override. Therefore, in a just society the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests." In other words, the rights and freedoms of the individual supersede whatever notion of the common good may be discerned by society, and must be protected.[15]

Guiding questions

1. How does Rawls describe the relationship between the individual and society?
2. How do you think Rawls would evaluate the notion of the common good?
3. According to his theory, which health care system would Rawls support: one funded by the government such as in Canada, or a privately owned, for profit, health care system such as in the United States?
4. In a situation of grave danger, such as imminent threat of terrorist attack on a civilian population, would Rawls be in favour of or against the detention and interrogation of innocent members of a community that is suspected of harbouring the terrorist? Explain.

Freedom under challenge

Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Rawls all struggled with the question of human freedom within the political context. What are the rights and freedoms of individuals? Within society, where do these rights and freedoms begin and end? Their writings about rights and freedoms uncovered for Western society the ideology of individualism. Liberal democracies and capitalist economies as we experience them today had their beginnings in the seventeenth century. With the discovery of the rights and freedoms of the individual there developed a culture of individualism that was supported by thinkers such as Rawls. At the outset we said that these ideas have had a tremendous positive influence in the development of free societies and democratic principles. They have also had a negative influence. In this section, with the help of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor and the teaching of the Catholic Church, we explore this negative side of individualism in the political context.

Charles Taylor in *The Malaise of Modernity* points out three areas of concern for the status of freedom in modern Western society. Without denying the positive gains created by the freedom of the individual, he signals some detrimental side effects in the exercise of freedom in the West. He captures them under the headings of (1) individualism, (2) instrumental reason and (3) the lessening of freedom in the modern state. Let us look at each in turn.

Individualism

The positive gain to freedom from individualism has been the capacity and the right to choose for ourselves what direction to give to our lives. We are not prevented from deciding what convictions to espouse, what religion to follow, what profession to enter. These are freedoms we need to protect. The search of the authentic self – the underlying ideal of our time – is an ideal to be honoured and appreciated.

Unfortunately, it often has become mired in ideas and theories that reduce the meaning of ethics and morality.

- Individualism draws people into themselves. "I'll take care of myself and I expect others to do the same." "I should not be expected to take on the burdens of others as well as my own." This centering on ourselves, according to Taylor, "flattens and narrows our lives, makes our lives poorer in meaning."[16]
- With individualism values tend to become relative. We sense that we may not challenge the values of another. We tend to think: "That is their concern, their life choice, and it ought to be respected."[17] We hold this because we believe that everyone has the right to develop what they consider right for themselves. Others have no right to interfere. "My life is for me to determine and others should mind their own business." "I must be true to myself." "I must go along with my feeling, my inclination." There is a real danger that with relativism one will never go beyond a narcissistic self-indulgence.
- A deeper moral, ethical discussion of the kind that this program has been proposing is almost out of the question. Ethical conflicts such as on abortion are resolved through legislation and legal procedures. The discussion of what is the better or higher thing to do according to virtue or principles and norms rarely takes place. Legislation tends to formulate new laws on a utilitarian basis. We tend to speak of what we ought to do in terms of "rights" and "freedoms" or procedures. The role of the ethics counsellor for the government or for a corporation is to outline procedures as to how one is to act in particular circumstances. Rarely is there a debate on what might be the over-all ethical aim of a government or a corporation – or of an individual. That discussion, Taylor says, is "off-limits."[18] (Although, to be fair, carefully prescribed procedures can also assure accountability and allow public scrutiny and ethical debate to take place.)

> We are hesitant to admit reason into the moral debate as if reason is powerless. We demand that governments and individuals remain neutral or impartial in their judgments of values of others. We are not to take sides, wanting to be "politically correct." (Ironically, a "politically correct" position is rarely, if ever, neutral. It is taking a position without taking responsibility for holding that position.) We are not to make a stand on what constitutes the good life.[19]

On all these points the Catholic Church has a very clear position:

- "Freedom is exercised in relationships between human beings" (*CCC* #1738). The great fallacy of individualism is that it begins to ask the questions about individual freedom from the assumption that a person begins as an isolated atom that has the choice of when and where to step into relationship, into society. In fact, we all wake up in the midst of community. It is impossible to imagine a person outside of relationship. I cannot name myself without reference to others. The second great commandment, Jesus says, is "Love your neighbour as yourself"(Luke 10.25-28). The ideal of personal authenticity and self-fulfillment is honoured, but this authenticity is not focused on oneself to the exclusion of the other. In fact, it is in relationship with others that I have being.
- The Church also urges one to see through the confusion of relativism. There are, as we saw in Chapter 8, norms and standards for human action which make certain

actions such as perjury, blasphemy, murder and adultery to be always wrong. (*CCC* #1755) In other words, some options we choose in life are more important than others. Not everything has the same value. For example, the inviolability of life is higher than the freedom of choice. This is key when considering the many important issues facing our society today, such as stem cell research – using living embryos for the purpose of other people's health. The inviolability of life, present in the embryo, supersedes the value of improving another's health.

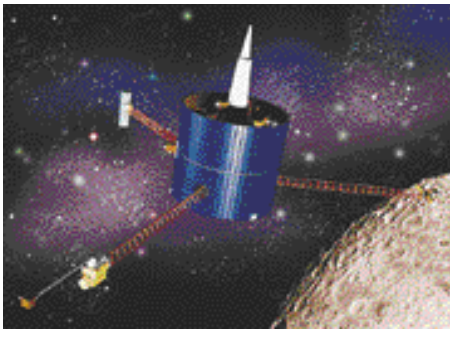
- The Catholic Church has generally shown a preference for teleological ethics proposed by thinkers such as Aristotle and Aquinas. It places moral questions in the context of the end and purpose of human life. It has a high regard for the power of reason in ethical deliberation. (*CCC* #1767) Actions are not right because they are chosen but because they are rightfully chosen. In our time we correctly expect these reasons to resonate with what is deepest within us: the Spirit of Truth, the Word of life and love that guides our conscience and our authentic self. Reason does not clash with our search for authenticity. Reason and freedom are not mutually exclusive. They are indispensable partners of ethics and moral living.[20]

Guiding questions

1. What are the positive values of individualism?
2. What are some of the dangers of individualism?
3. How can individualism stifle a person's moral growth?

Instrumental reason: A society of commodities and consumers

When Descartes discovered the self as a thinking self, he achieved this by isolating the act of thinking from its content. The self becomes isolated from its environment. The direct bond with things was lost. What replaced it was instrumental reason. Instrumental reason is our ability to select and develop effective means for arriving at desired ends, whatever they may be. Through instrumental reason, we concern ourselves with how to accomplish something in an effective manner. It is the type of reasoning that drives headlong technological development, without necessarily considering where it is heading. The development of information technology is a good example. Our relationships with one another are more and more mediated by writing, telephone, television, fax, e-mail, Internet-based forums, and less by face-to-face conversations and encounters. The space Descartes created between the thinking "I" and reality is now filled with an incredible array of technology. In the terms of Charles Taylor, we live in a society almost totally dominated by instrumental reason. We realize that we can never go back to the pre-technological age.



On the one hand, while instrumental reason increases our capacities in medicine, information, agriculture, high technology, and space research, on the other hand it also creates

dependence and lessens freedom. Let us look at some examples:

- Instrumental reason dismisses faith as an illusion. The current fashion in thinking is much more naturalist. (See Chapter 2.) A relationship to God through faith is non-tangible, and therefore whatever goods may be said to result from this relationship are illusionary.
- There is a great belief and much trust in science and technology. Their influence is such that we tend to rely almost solely on technical solutions. In medicine this has come to mean a great reliance on technology for healing. We have a great trust in the "sciences" of therapy (psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology). For every aspect of life we call in the "experts." It can mean, as Taylor says, that we no longer dare to trust "our own instincts about happiness, fulfilment, and how to bring up our children."[21] The "helping professions" can so dominate our lives that our personal freedom is much diminished.
- Through research, development and advanced modes of production, a huge amount of goods has been created, along with the ability of the middle class to purchase these goods. This has resulted in the creation of a consumer society. The consumer society is not just a society that buys many goods; it buys beyond what it needs. The glut of goods purchased in the pre- and post-Christmas period is a good example of such buying beyond our needs. This excess shows another side to the life-style of consumers: the buying of identity.

The buying of identity

Consumer goods are not just goods that we need and use – they have also become symbols. A consumer society attaches symbolic value to the possession and exchange of goods. Goods such as clothing, shoes, cars, jewellery, hair styles, music, beverages are not just possessions but are statements about who I am, what group I identify with, how I am different from others.

This may explain the popularity of brand-name buying. Certain brand-names have become symbolic of a status or lifestyle. The preference and popularity of these brands is not determined by quality but by their social capital, that is, the social identity that these brands convey. That so much of our identity has become attached to these material, yet symbolic, goods may explain how insatiable our accumulation of goods has become. Part of that identity is our need to be "with the times." We do not wish to be left behind in the mad rush to buy the latest new gadget. This search for identity through material acquisitions shows the poverty and banality of our possessive culture.[22]

capitalism: an economic system based on private or corporate ownership and control of resources. Goods and services are exchanged in a free market. Capitalism is the economic face of liberal democracy, and also has its roots in the discovery of individualism in the seventeenth century.

Products are made in the factory, but brands are created in the mind.

Walter Landor

When people have lost their authentic personal taste, they lose their personality and become instruments of other people's wills.

Robert Graves

- How is that we so easily buy into this shallow and often unsatisfactory search for identity? The commodification of all aspects of life – everything has a price – could not have taken place without the power of mass media and the science of advertising. One of the best-known attacks on the power of advertising was made by Vance Packard in his *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957). He recognized the power of advertising to make ordinary consumers into objects that can be manipulated. Advertisers see consumers as bundles of daydreams with hidden yearnings, guilt complexes and irrational emotions. If one is able to reach the unconscious, one could mass-produce consumers in the same way that businesses mass-produced products.

The sociologist C. Wright Mills recognized how carefully designed mass media formulas can tell people who they are, what they should be, how they will succeed, and how their success was measured in material possessions. Driven by the market, one does not look to the deeper human needs and goods. Mills realized how people were becoming increasingly lonely and how the happiness and healing promised by the advertising formulas obscured the real pain and suffering of daily living. The threat of modern consumerism is alienation. One comes to live in such a make-believe world shaped by the constant barrage of media messages that the real world and real, authentic relationships recede into an impossible dream.[23]

Advertising presents itself as providing information and choice. It creates the illusion that the consumer is free and in charge and that it is to his or her needs that the producer is responding. Packard realized that the consumer's need was being created by the advertisers As the economist Keynes had indicated already in 1935: "The total effect of modern advertising is to shift the preference of consumers in favour of luxury goods rather than necessities, in favour of consumption rather than saving, and in favour of employment rather than leisure."[24] As John Kenneth Galbraith – a Canadian-born economist – wrote in *The New Industrial State*, the corporations were creating new positions in their firms whose task it was to "manage" the demands of consumers. More and more it seems that Max Weber (1864–1920; German sociologist) was right when he said that we are living in an "iron cage," managed by hidden persuaders. As Richard Robbins writes: "In 1880, only $30 million was invested in advertising in the United States; by 1910, new businesses, such as oil, food, electricity and rubber, were spending $600 million, or 4 percent of the national income, on advertising. Today that figure has climbed to well over $120 billion in the United States and to over $250 billion worldwide."[25] In this context freedom is highly compromised.

Guiding questions

1. What is the meaning of "instrumental reason?"
2. Describe how Canada is a consumer society.
3. How does advertising affect our freedom?

The lessening of freedom in modern societies

Many current social analysts are pessimistic about the chances to recapture freedom in modern society. Authors like Allan Bloom (1930–1992; American professor of social thought and educational critic) in *The Closing of the American Mind*[26] or Robert Bellah (born 1927; American sociologist, educator and social commentator) in *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* [27] and others like them have been sounding the alarm bells. They see little hope that modern society can retrieve freedom. They argue that the only freedom left is a freedom of trivial choices within the "iron cage." We have lost, they say, the freedom to dismantle the "iron cage" itself. The "system" and "the market forces" are just too powerful. The bureaucracy of government, the privilege of wealth, the structures of the economy, the power of corporations are so pervasive that individual freedom and our capacity to change them are no match.

Our Christian hope, as we will see in the next chapter, runs counter to these negative powers. Christian hope holds out the expectation of liberation from any powers of oppression. None can withstand the freedom-giving power of God that is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is from this same religious source that Charles Taylor argues for a retrieval of moral sources to set us free. The outlook on political society grounded in individualism, he says, came about at a certain point in history. If it is an historical event, history could have taken – and still can take – another route. It is true that individualism has taken hold of our lives and our imagination, but we can also resist its power. Capitalism, and its current offshoot, neo-liberalism, when left unchecked in the nineteenth century was so cruel to workers that workers rose up and forced governments to institute labour laws and to allow labour unions. The effect that many corporations have had on the environment – leaving society to clean up massive tar ponds and lakes laced with acid, or massive deforestation – led to the ecological movement and the legislation regarding emissions and environmental assessments. There are ways of regaining freedom, to resist the pressures of the "iron cage."

Taylor urges that this retrieval – as we will see in the next chapter – be a retrieval of our Christian heritage. But such a retrieval will not be a going back to a history prior to the changes that came about in the seventeenth century, which we explored at the beginning of this chapter. The discovery of the self as an agent and as an individual must find a place within the retrieval.[28]

The Catholic Church entered the debate on the effects of liberalism and capitalism in the nineteenth century when she began to issue the social encyclicals that have appeared regularly since 1891. The teaching of the Church in matters of social justice is clearly presented in the *Catechism*. The following is a small sample:

> "The social doctrine of the Church developed in the nineteenth century when the Gospel encountered modern industrial society with its new structures for the production of consumer goods, its new concept of society, the state and authority, and its new forms of labour and ownership…" (# 2421)
>
> "Any system in which social relationships are determined entirely by economic factors is contrary to the nature of the human person and his acts." (#2423)
>
> "A theory that makes profit the exclusive norm and ultimate end of economic activity is morally unacceptable. The disordered desire for money cannot but

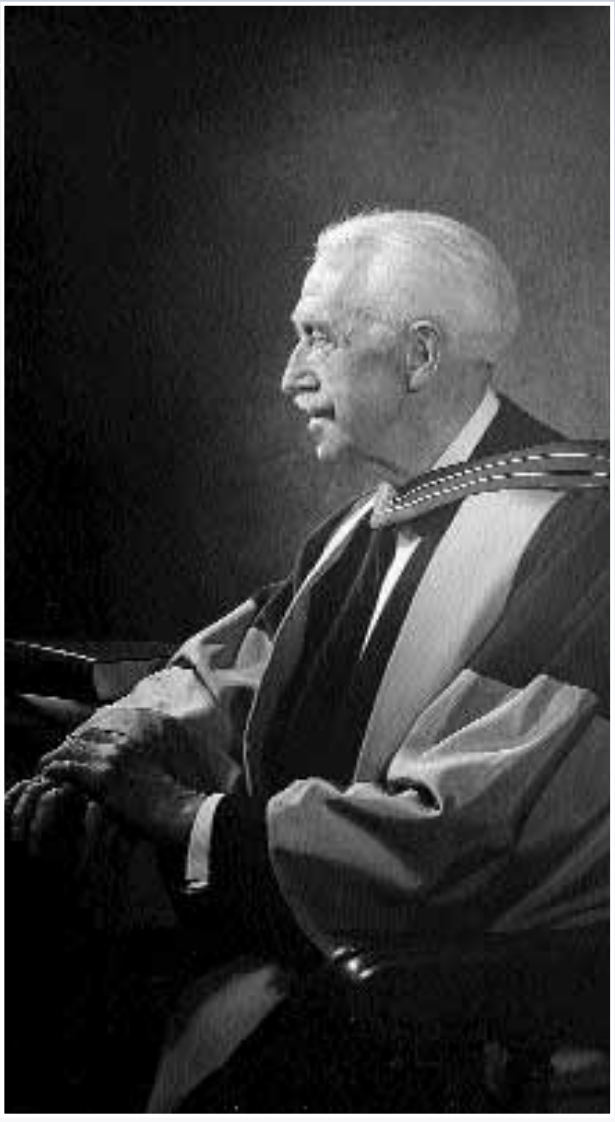
produce perverse effects. It is one of the causes of the many conflicts which disturb the social order. A system that 'subordinates the basic rights of individuals and of groups to the collective organization of production' (Marxism or Communism) is contrary to human dignity. Every practice that reduces persons to nothing more than a means of profit enslaves man, leads to idolizing money and contributes to the spread of atheism. 'You cannot serve God and mammon' (Matthew 6.24)" (#2424)

"The Church has rejected the totalitarian and atheistic ideologies associated in modern times with 'communism' or 'socialism.' She has likewise refused to accept, in the practice of 'capitalism', individualism and the absolute primacy of the law of the marketplace over human labour. Regulating the economy solely by centralized planning (that is, communism) perverts the basis of social bonds; regulating it solely by the law of the marketplace (capitalism) fails social justice, for 'there are many human needs which cannot be satisfied by the market.' (29) Reasonable regulation of the marketplace and economic initiatives, in keeping with a just hierarchy of values and a view to the common good, is to be recommended." (#2425)

Conclusion

We all know that modern society is complex. Politics. Economics. Free Trade. Protectionism. Terrorism. Ethnic cleansing. Free elections. Rigged elections. Peacekeeping. War. We are exposed to these realities in the daily news. Was Hobbes right when he wrote, "humans are wolves toward each other"? Was Locke right when he argued that governments must protect the individual's right to accumulate property? Was Rousseau right in saying that governments must follow the "general will"? Was Rawls right to uphold individual rights as inviolable? Answers to such complex questions are not easily found. What stands out clearly for us is that human freedom has been the central issue in the development of Western civilization. The theories of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Rawls have contributed to our understanding of freedom and the understanding we have inherited has had a social impact on our lives. Charles Taylor helped us to value the freedom that we have, and therefore to be critical of the path that individualism is taking us. The teaching of the Catholic Church and Christian faith guide our discernment of both our freedom and our responsibility to the social fabric of society. Georges Vanier, who held the top governmental post in Canada, is a model for us of one who was able to put into perspective the social and political issues of his time.

Georges Vanier (1881–1967)



Between 1959 and 1967 Georges Vanier was the Governor General of Canada. He was a truly remarkable man who brought a deep faith and spiritual life to this office. Three months after his death, his son Jean Vanier spoke at a National Prayer Breakfast held in the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa. At the beginning of his speech he spoke about his father. It is a touching tribute to the power and freedom which his father derived from his faith.

To begin with, I would like to try and show some of the more secret and rather unknown aspects of his life, and which perhaps give us a key to why he was so loved.

As a man of 79, he remained young – young in heart, young in spirit. He was never old and I would like to try to show where he found the inspiration for his youthfulness, his force and his courage in facing difficult problems.

In reading the books that were beside his bed at the time of his death, and noting the passages that he had lined and underlined and the notes he had made in the margins, I found a clue to some of these qualities. In one of the books the following passage was underlined heavily: "There is no use arguing about it, you are going to be asked to give daily to the combination of these three exercises: prayer, reflection and spiritual reading. No matter how busy you are, no man is too busy to eat; neither is any man too busy to feed his soul. And if we starve our souls, we will deprive our lives, busy though they may be, of their fruitfulness." I think Dad with extraordinary fidelity maintained that attitude throughout his life. You know that at Rideau Hall he installed a chapel where he attended mass every day. But do you know that every day above that, with strict regularity, he spent half an hour in the chapel, just thinking, and reflecting before his much-loved God. This is where he found his inspiration. He used to remain there even if he had been through difficult periods, even if he was very tired. I remember sometimes going into his room at 10 or 11 o'clock at night after he had had a busy day and he would be sitting in a chair quietly, his hands crossed and with a small sign of his hand he would make me understand that I could come back later because he was having his half-hour rendezvous with his God.[30]

Chapter review

Summary

- The modern liberal democratic society replaced a society that was structured around a sacred and cosmic order. The establishment of the liberal democratic society goes back to the same period in history that we now identify as the beginning of modern time: the seventeenth century.
- For Hobbes, the basis of society is a tacit contract where individuals give up some of their appetite for power in exchange for the security of using their powers without fear of extreme violence. One accepts the obligation to obey a ruler in order to safeguard one's freedom. It is a freedom based on self-interest.
- For Locke, the starting point is the protection of property. "He is willing to join in society with others for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name, property." The formation of civil society requires that all individuals voluntarily surrender their individual right to uphold the natural law in defence of property interests to the community.
- According to Rousseau, the institution of any genuine political society must be the result of a social pact, or free association of intelligent human beings who deliberately choose to form the type of society to which they will owe allegiance; this is the only valid basis for a community that wishes to live in accordance with the requirements of human freedom.
- According to utilitarianism, the measure of the good is not reason, but whatever maximizes pleasure for the greatest number.
- Rawls sets forth the proposition that "Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. Therefore, in a just society the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests."
- With the discovery of the rights and freedoms of the individual there developed a culture of individualism; these ideas have had a tremendous positive influence in the development of free societies and democratic principles. They have also had a negative influence:
  - Individualism draws people into themselves, making their lives poorer in meaning.
  - With individualism, values tend to become relative.
  - With individualism, debate tends to centre on procedures rather than substance.
- The Catholic Church has a clear position:
  - "Freedom is exercised in relationships between human beings." (*CCC* #1738) The great fallacy of individualism is that its starting point is the person in isolation. In fact, persons exist only in relationship.
  - There is a hierarchy of values. Values are not relative.
  - Teleological ethics places moral questions in the context of the end and purpose of human life.
- While instrumental reason increases our capacities in things like medicine and technology, it also creates dependence and lessens freedom.
- Many current social analysts argue that the bureaucracy of government, the privilege of wealth, the structures of the economy, the power of corporations are so pervasive that individual freedom and our capacity to change them are no match.
- Christian hope holds out the expectation of liberation from any powers of oppression. None can withstand the freedom-giving power of God that is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is from this same religious source that Charles Taylor argues for a retrieval of moral sources to set us free.

Glossary

capitalism: An economic system based on private or corporate ownership and control of resources and means of production and distribution. Goods and services are exchanged in a free market.

commodity: Something that carries an economic value within the marketplace; something that can be bought, sold and traded.

consumerism: A world view whereby one attributes meaningfulness to life through one's capacity and ability to purchase and consume economic goods.

democracy: Government by the will of all the people, a will that is expressed directly or through freely elected representation. To protect all people within the society from tyranny of the majority, democracies must recognize and guarantee the rights of the minority. A democracy that is ruled strictly by majority without protecting the rights of the minority would quickly degenerate into a system of class or privilege that no longer reflects the will of the governed.

individualism: A world view that favours the free action of individuals within society; a philosophical stance that began to develop in the seventeenth century with the thinking of Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, that places personal rights and freedoms above other considerations. A social theory that favours personal autonomy.

instrumental reason: Human ability to select and develop effective means for achieving desired ends; ability to develop technologies.

liberalism: A philosophy based on the goodness of the human being, autonomy of the individual, and standing for the protection of economic, political and civil rights and freedoms.

market: Where buyers and sellers meet to exchange, sell, trade goods. The value of goods is determined in the market, largely as a factor of supply and demand. However, the market is rarely allowed to function in an entirely free manner when one takes into consideration government restrictions, duties and tariffs, collusion among suppliers to limit supply in order to drive up the price, fierce advertising practices, and so on.

private property: Something that is owned for one's exclusive use, or for one's exclusive control.

relativism: A doctrine that knowledge is not absolute, but is conditioned by relation to another. Everything stands in relationship to everything else, and is judged based on these relationships rather than on any absolute principle or truth.

social contract: A term used by philosophers to describe the tacit agreement of individuals to live in community. It is a means of discussing in hypothetical terms the conditions that govern human society.

utilitarianism: A philosophy or world view that measures the value of all things according to the principle of usefulness – that which provides for the greatest pleasure or well being for the greatest number.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Describe the key ideas pertaining to the individual and freedom in society as developed by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Rawls.
2. Explain how the Catholic Church views the positive and negative influences of individualism on society.

Thinking and inquiry

3. Analyze the threats to human freedom in today's society.
4. Charles Taylor urges the retrieval of human freedom through a retrieval of our Christian heritage. Explain.

Communication

5. Write a five-paragraph essay critiquing utilitarianism as a basis for government.
6. Folk music has a great tradition of songs about freedom in society. Collect and present songs about freedom in society, and provide an analysis. Or, write your own song or poem about freedom in society.

Application

7. You have reached, or are close to reaching, voting age. Find out how to register to vote. Become informed as to elections taking place. What are the issues? What do they have to do with what you have been studying in this chapter?
8. Research the policies of the various political parties. Where to do they stand with regard to the protection of human freedom and dignity? Do their policies indicate a utilitarian approach to our life together in society? How can you influence political party policies?

The freedom of the children of God

CHAPTER 12

My strength and my failing are you.
My inheritance and my poverty,
My war and my peace,
The judge of my poor tears,
The cause of my hope.

Pedro Casaldaliga, *The Mysticism of Liberation*

For freedom Christ has set us free

Freedom goes by many names: liberation, salvation, deliverance, redemption, reconciliation, and righteousness. Each of these in its own way says freedom. Faith adds a new layer to what we mean by freedom. In contrast to the individual freedom that underlies so much of our culture, Christian freedom is relational. It is grounded in our relationship with God or – more accurately – God's relationship with us. We have said in previous chapters that this God-relationship is the most important aspect of our identity. In this chapter we propose that it is also the highest expression of our freedom.

Ben Shaw story

A few years ago, I lay desperately ill on a motel floor in a southern city. I learned later that within a few hours, if left unattended, I would have gone into alcoholic convulsions and might have died. At that point in time I did not know I was an alcoholic.

I crawled to the telephone, but was shaking and quivering so badly that I could not dial. Finally, I managed one digit and got the operator. "Please help me," I pleaded. "Call Alcoholics Anonymous." She took my name and address. Within ten minutes a man walked in the door. I had never seen him before, and he had no idea who I was. But he had the breath of the Father on his face and an immense reverence for my life. He scooped me up in his arms and raced me to a detox centre. There began the agony of withdrawal. Anyone who has been down both sides of the street can tell you that withdrawal from alcohol can be no less severe than withdrawal from heroin.

To avoid bursting into tears, I will spare the reader that odyssey of shame and pain, unbearable guilt, remorse, and humiliation. But the stranger brought me back to life. His words might sound corny to you, like tired old clichés. But they were words of life to me. This fallen-away Catholic, who had not been to the Eucharistic

Focus your learning

Cognitive

Explain St. Paul's concept of freedom as described in his letter to the Romans, Chapter 8.

Practical

Describe the role of grace in moral living.

Affective

Explain how living a moral life is an act of thanksgiving to God for the gifts of mercy and love.

Key terms in this chapter

conversion
freedom
grace
legalism
Pelagianism
righteous
truth

Key thinkers

St. Paul

table in years, told me that the Father loved me, that he had not abandoned me, that he would draw good from what had happened. He told me that right now the name of the game wasn't guilt and fear and shame but survival. He told me to forget about what I had lost and focus on what I had left.

Later I learned that my benefactor was an itinerant labourer who showed up daily at Manpower, a local employment agency. He put cardboard in his work shoes to cover the holes. Yet, when I was able to eat, he bought me my first dinner at McDonald's. For seven days and seven nights, he breathed life into me physically and spiritually and asked nothing in return.

Later I learned that he had lost his family and fortune through drinking. In his loneliness he turns on his little TV at midnight and talks to John Wayne, hoping he will talk back. Every night before bed he spends fifteen minutes reading a meditation book, praises God for his mercy, thanks him for what he has left, prays for all alcoholics, then goes to his window, raises the shade, and blesses the world.

Two years later I returned to the same southern city. My friend still lived there but I had no address or telephone number. So I called A.A. In one of life's tragic ironies, I learned that he was on Skid Row.… As I drove through Skid Row, I spotted a man in a doorway whom I thought was my friend. He wasn't. Just another wino who was neither sober nor drunk. Just dry. He hadn't had a drink in twenty-four hours, and his hands trembled violently. He reached out and asked, "Hey man, can you gimme a dollar to get some wine?" I knelt down before him and took his hands in mine. I looked into his eyes. They filled with tears. I leaned over and kissed his hands. He began to cry. He didn't want a dollar. He wanted what I had wanted two years earlier lying on the motel floor – to be accepted in his brokenness, to be affirmed in his worthlessness, to be loved in his loneliness. He wanted to be relieved of what Mother Teresa of Calcutta, with her vast personal experience of human misery, says is the worst suffering of all – the feeling of not being accepted or wanted.

I never located my friend that day. But several days later I was celebrating Eucharist for a group of recovering alcoholics. Midway through the homily, my friend walked in the door. My heart skipped. But he disappeared during the distribution of communion and did not return.

Two days later, I received a letter from him which read in part: "Two nights ago in my own clumsy way I prayed for the right to belong, just to belong among you at the holy Mass of Jesus. You will never know what you did for me last week on Skid Row. You didn't see me, but I saw you. I was standing just a few feet away in a storefront window. When I saw you kneel down and kiss that wino's hands, you wiped away from my eyes the blank stare of the breathing dead. When I saw that you really cared, my heart began to grow wings, small wings, feeble wings, but wings. I threw my bottle of wine down the sewer. Your tenderness and understanding breathed life into me, and I want you to know that. You released me from my shadow world of panic, fear, and self-hatred. God, what a lonely prison I was living in. Father Brennan, if you should ever wonder who Ben Shaw is, remember I am someone you know very well. I am every man you meet and every woman you meet.... Am I also you?"

His letter ends, "Wherever I go, sober by the grace of God one day at a time, I will thank God for you."

Brennan Manning [1]

Guiding questions

1. What brought Father Manning back to freedom?
2. What sort of freedom is it? Give traits of this freedom.

St. Paul's understanding of freedom

Father Brennan Manning's story is a paradoxical story of freedom. Out of the depths of addiction comes freedom – a freedom unleashed by love, by another. Father Manning's story is one that has been told throughout Christianity. It reflects what St. Paul learned from his conversion to Christ and what Christianity has reflected on for 2000 years: a new experience of freedom. It says that my highest freedom is not first of all a solitary achievement. Freedom does not start with me. It is a gift. St. Paul helped us to see the mystery of this gift. For him the gift of freedom implied two things. On the one hand it was a freedom *from* something; on the other hand it was a *freedom for* something. The *freedom from*, he called by many names: law, death, sin, life according to the flesh, slavery.

As to the *freedom for*, St Paul has a lot to say about what he has been set free *for*. His conversion is all about a new freedom that arises from his encounter with Christ. And in this new freedom he looks back at his previous life and sees how unfree he had been. Christ is the pivotal point for Paul's understanding of freedom. He experiences his new freedom as a *freedom for* fullness of life in Christ. To have Christ becomes his greatest hope. In Christ he knows himself to be free. To demonstrate this we look at his Letter to the Romans, Chapter 8.

Paul's Letter to the Romans: Chapter 8

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law – indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

For Paul a dramatic historical change has taken place in the world because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus: God sent his own Son (Jesus) to engage the areas in which people experience a lack of freedom. By sending Jesus into the world God shows a desire to make things right. God enters into the fray of human life to set us free. We see God's power and love in Jesus.

Those who believe in what God did in Jesus are – in Paul's words – "in Christ Jesus." They are set free, or set right. Whatever was enslaving them has lost its hold on them. What has taken its place is the Spirit of Jesus: the Holy Spirit.

"Flesh" means the human person in his or her weakness and loss of freedom.

"Spirit" means the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and acting in us. It is the Spirit who tackles in us and with us the powers of slavery. The Spirit makes our bodies – us – fully alive. It is the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. Hence, the Spirit is the Spirit of freedom.

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Paul's Letter to the Romans: Chapter 8 (continued)

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

So if the Spirit leads us in life, we are children of God and enjoy the freedom of God. We are no longer slaves but we are adopted into the very life of God. The Spirit gives us a share in the life of Christ. He gives us freedom to pray and the freedom to inherit whatever Christ accomplished. At this point nothing controls us any longer except our faith and trust in God's action in us.

The Spirit's action in us will help to overcome our distrust, fear and inability to go beyond our ego.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation awaits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Paul says, this freedom for which Christ died is what all of creation has thirsted for. If we are free then creation will also be free. If we are free, creation will not suffer the ravages of our greed and our lack of freedom. All creation groans for this to happen. We can't see this yet. But it is here as hope. This hope in us we wait patiently to see fulfilled.

For Paul this freedom is not yet complete in the present – its fullness is yet to come.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

What then do we make of our present experience where suffering and death still have their power? Paul finds in the death and resurrection of Jesus an expression of God's desire for people. The same power with which Jesus rose from the dead is now operative in our lives. In faith and in hope we call upon this power. The Spirit helps us in our weakness and allows us to live in hope.

The Spirit is presented as an advocate or defender who pleads our cause to God. We are not left to our own resources. We have one who takes up our cause.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Paul's Letter to the Romans: Chapter 8 (continued)

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? … No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The love of God for us is the ultimate basis for our confidence in life. God is a God who is for us, not against us.

On the front gable of the basilica of St. Paul's-outside-the-walls in Rome, Christ is flanked by St. Peter and St. Paul. According to tradition, St. Paul was beheaded and buried at the site of the basilica.

Guiding questions

1. What is it according to Paul that has changed the human situation?
2. How does Paul propose that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit changes the reality of freedom?

God's initiative in our freedom

As we saw in Chapter 6, Paul was a strict Shammaite Pharisee. He was convinced that the keeping of Torah was at the core of Jewish identity. Keeping Torah was also seen as a guarantee of freedom. It was God's instruction and guidance. Keeping the law was *the* way for things to be right with God. It was because Saul (Paul's name before his conversion to Christ) saw Jesus' followers turning away from the law and towards Jesus that he considered them a serious threat to Israel. Saul thought that the law must be kept at all costs, and that Jesus and his followers were only leading the people astray. When Saul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, he discovered something that radically changed his view of life. What set him right with God was not the law, the Torah, but God revealed in Jesus. It was nothing Paul did that set him free. It was God's doing. This had far-reaching repercussions for Paul's view of life.

1. Freedom from the law

At first Paul did not draw too many conclusions from the fact that it was not the Torah but faith in Christ that set him free. But by the time he wrote the Letter to the Romans and the Letter to the Galatians, he did – to the consternation of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. In these letters he began to insist that since it was not the keeping of the Torah that led him to Christ, the Romans and the Galatians did not have to keep Torah. It was quite a shock for those Jewish Christians who wanted to retain the Jewish piety towards the Torah together with their faith in Christ. For Paul, the observance of the law could not be made obligatory to non-Jews. To the Romans and Galatians he preached therefore a freedom from the law. When some of the Galatians are persuaded to return to the keeping of Torah and circumcision, Paul responds vehemently: "You foolish Galatians! Who has

bewitched you? … Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? … Did you experience so much for nothing?" (3.1-4)

What to do then with all the do's and don'ts of the law? The Torah contained 613 precepts (248 positive and 365 negative). For the Jews and for Saul these had been the lifeline for fidelity to God's covenant. Is St. Paul now pushing these aside as worthless, as unable to set free? Was not the Torah God's guidance? Was this guidance really ineffectual for a good life? Was there to be no morality at all? To these questions Paul is quite clear. **It was not the law that made people free.** Even before Moses and the Torah, Abraham and Sarah were righteous before God. It was not the law that made them free; it was their faith. Even more so now, St. Paul argues. It is not the Torah but obedient faith in Jesus Christ that sets things right.

The ***Galatians*** lived in what today is central Turkey. By the time Paul preached in Galatia, he had become convinced that these non-Jewish people needed only to convert to the gospel of Christ. He could see no reason for them to become Jewish and take on the whole Law of Moses as well.

The ***Roman*** community that St. Paul addressed was made up of two major groups: Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. In his letter, Paul tries to encourage each group to respect the other. Jewish and Gentile Christians were different, but there didn't need to be deep divisions between them. One group had centuries of tradition and the memory of the prophets, but the other was a new example of the creative power of God's love.

2. "The freedom we have in Christ Jesus" **(Galatians 2.4)**

Of his conversion experience St. Paul says, "God … was pleased to reveal his Son to me." (Galatians 1.15-16) As we saw in Chapter 6, Saul became Paul because he had an experience of Jesus that overturned his life. He says that Jesus appeared to him. He saw Jesus as the glory of God. The significance of this experience for him was huge. It suddenly hit him that with Jesus, God had entered the fray of human existence in person. In a beautiful hymn which biblical scholars say goes back to within the first decade after the death of Jesus, this is expressed as follows:

Let the same mind be in you that was in
    Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
    as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born of human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death –
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend
in heaven and on earth and
    under the earth,
and every tongue confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord
to the glory of God the Father.

(Philippians 2.5-11)

For Paul, Jesus was now the Lord of life. He was not a lord who dominated and controlled people. He is the Lord who humbled himself, the God who emptied himself. As the humble and emptied-out God, Jesus showed what an "exalted," a God-like life, is all about. It is a life of faith – here called obedience, the attentive listening to God. For Paul, Christ revealed that the origin of life and freedom lay in God's self-emptying love. God did not hesitate to empty himself to take on our existence of "slavery," even if it meant dying. As we read in Romans 8.3: "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." **What is needed then, according to Paul, is not the law, but faith: faith in the love of God.** After all, it is God who set us free. We must jealously guard this freedom. But this is not yet the full story of our freedom.

3. The indwelling Spirit

This freedom is primarily and exclusively due to the action of the Spirit. St. Paul writes, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead

dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you" (Romans 8.11). We are not "free" in word only. We are made free in our very being by the Holy Spirit. Again it is not the law or anything that we might have done. The freedom is a work of the Spirit in us and with us. Hence, it is fully a gifted freedom, a freedom set free from anything outside of us. The Spirit works only with our freedom – to make us free. **This is the whole task of our spiritual life: to become free with the freedom of God.** That is why our groaning in life to be released from our addictions, our slaveries, is really the groaning of the Holy Spirit in us. Our desire for freedom is the Spirit's desire in us that we be free.

4. What to do then with the laws, precepts, moral norms, rules and principles?

Paul explains that the Law of Moses functioned as a teacher – identifying what was sinful, and revealing the truth about what God demanded – but basically the law was powerless. It did not give the people the power to be righteous. In part, the law taught the various behaviours that could separate people from one another and from God. Paul had realized that it was not the Mosaic Law that made us right before God, but faith. The faith of Abraham prepared us for faith in Jesus Christ who is himself the power of God. Jesus frees us from sin, saves us from destruction, and empowers us with his Spirit, giving us the fullness of life and love.

Jesus himself said that he had not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5.17). This means that in Christ, God has taken the initiative and given us the gift of salvation. He has acted to justify us to make us righteous. He is the divine life poured into our humanity to make us right before God. All of this is gift; that is to say, God's grace. In other words, we do not earn God's love and eternal life by moral living. Rather, God gives us his life, his love, and everlasting happiness simply because God loves us. Moral living – living in right relationship with one another and with God – is the way we offer our thanksgiving to God for the gifts of mercy and grace. To live according to the gift of God's grace is to be in love with God, with self and with others in this world. The law of love fulfills the Mosaic Law.

The illustration above shows a painting from the Middle Ages in which St. Paul is witnessing to his faith in Christ.

Put differently, all the laws and commandments and our striving for the good are powerless without God's grace living within us. But with God's grace we have the power of God within our hearts and souls to live ethical lives. The love of God calls us to union with him and one another forever. All the principles and laws presented in the previous chapters of this text must be approached out of the love given to us by God in Christ. Moral living, the ethical life and search for the good, must flow freely from God's love abiding in our hearts and souls – a love which we discover is simply a grace, a gift.

For St. Paul the Mosaic Law could never make us right with God because only God could make us right. And God did this by sending us his Son, Jesus. St. Paul discovered, and to this day invites us to discover, that moral living is not performed merely out of obligation, but out of the freedom of Christ Jesus, our brother, whose life we share, whose power to love infinitely abides in us as a grace, a gift.

Faith refers to a *right relationship* with God. It is a relationship of trust that God loves humanity and desires totally that it be. Nothing can come between us and God except sin.

Guiding questions

1. Describe Paul's experience of freedom in Christ.
2. What does Paul mean by freedom from the law or freedom from sin?
3. How does Paul's experience of freedom affect our understanding of morality?

Pelagianism

In the year 530 Pope Boniface II (pictured above) condemned the teaching of Pelagius.

Our freedom does not come from our efforts to be free. This truth does not sit well in our culture. In fact, it did not sit well with many people as early as the fifth century. A very pious and ascetical man named Pelagius, a spiritual leader from the Roman aristocracy, proposed a teaching about human freedom that in the end the Church had to reject. His theory was so popular that many churches in the East and the West supported it. Even popes were hesitant to say anything against him. Up to that point no one had seriously considered the point that Pelagius was making.

Pelagius maintained that God gives everyone an equal chance in life. All of us have to decide about our lives, and we are able to do so. For Pelagius, this meant that **we** must make the first move in our spiritual life. He did not recognize or accept that the first move comes from God. For him, God assists us with grace, but we have to initiate our conversion to God. The beginning and end of our life is our responsibility. In the year 530 Pope Boniface II condemned this position. Why? Because it does not recognize or honour *God's* initiative and *God's* grace. If Pelagius were correct, our ultimate happiness would be due to **our** efforts – **our** good works – and not due to God's graciousness. But God's free gift of grace far exceeds what we can accomplish with our works. It was to safeguard what Paul taught – that we were set right not by keeping the law, but by faith in Christ – that the Church condemned the teaching of Pelagius. We need only respond with trust and love and hope to Christ's gift of himself.

Guiding questions

1. Why is the position of Pelagius unacceptable for Christians?
2. How is the indwelling Spirit the source of our freedom?

5. Legalism or literalism

Thomas Aquinas understood legalism or literalism to mean "each law which imposes itself on humans from without. This includes even the prescriptions of the Gospel." (II-IIae, q.106, art. 1 and 2) Legalism, theologian Timothy O'Connell says, is a counterfeit approach to morality. It asserts that what is central to morality is blind obedience to the law. It leads to the attitude that if someone in authority commands something or if the law says it is legal, it is therefore also moral. There are clear situations today where what is legal in some countries is not moral – capital punishment, abortion, racial profiling, active euthanasia being good examples. Philosophers of law have long argued whether something is right because it is commanded, or whether something is commanded because it is right. St. Thomas Aquinas and Catholic tradition have maintained the latter. Obedience is never to be blind, because the hallmark of human dignity is intelligence and freedom. Legalism is a moral approach which does not give reasons. Like any "ism," it excludes any other considerations about what is true and real. Thus legal*ism* excludes any consideration of faith or truth or reason other than the law. **Ethical and moral value does not come from mere obedience, but from something being right or wrong**.[3]

We find this same teaching of Paul concerning the freedom of the Christian already foreshadowed in the writings of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jeremiah speaks of a law not written on stone tablets – imposed from outside – but written on human hearts. He

speaks of a time when this inner law will be given. When this will happen, he promises, everyone will know God (Jeremiah 31.31-34). Ezekiel talks about a new heart that God will place in people at the time of their liberation from exile: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you" (36.26). God wants us to have an internal law: the word and truth that came to us in Christ. With Christ, God instructs us from within. It is God's Spirit who keeps Christ's word and truth alive in us. As we read in John: "The Holy Spirit … will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (14.26). What God desires from each one of us is our heart. Our heart has been given to us so that we can give it back. Through the indwelling of the Spirit in us we have become sons and daughters of God. We are no longer strangers; we are children of God. That is our freedom. We act out of this conviction, out of this love. Only love gives the full guarantee of our freedom. It is no wonder that Aquinas concluded from this that laws imposed from the outside are only for those who are not free. For those who are free, the law comes from within.[4]

Guiding questions

1. What is meant by legalism? Give some examples from your own experience.
2. What do the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel mean by a law written on the heart?
3. What would be an appropriate Christian attitude toward obeying laws?

6. "The Truth will set you free" John 8.32

The grace of God that is connected to the experience of conversion and to the new freedom that it brings is also connected to the truth. We cannot experience conversion or the freedom it brings truly to be ourselves unless we confront the truth about ourselves first. The Gospel of St. John, which was written approximately twenty or thirty years after Paul's letter to the Romans, has much to say about understanding the grace of truth.

In the book *Dead Man Walking* and the movie based on the book, a convicted murderer/rapist mocks the effort of the prison pastoral worker, Sister Helen Prejean, who tries to discuss his pending execution and the importance of preparing for death and facing God. The murderer laughingly tells her that he knows Jesus will save him because he believes in Jesus. That is what he was taught by his mother. Sister Helen Prejean directly challenges him. She argues that he does not know Jesus because Jesus is the Truth. If he knew Jesus he would admit the truth about himself – that he was a rapist and murderer. Then, argues Sister Helen, he would be free to ask the victim's family for forgiveness. Sister Helen was showing him how the grace of God moves us towards the truth and how the truth will set us free.

Before he dies, he confesses the truth and asks the family and God to forgive him. He has repented. His conversion, like all experiences of real freedom, was based on the truth about himself and others. He could no longer point the finger of blame at anyone except himself. He had been the agent of violation and death. This was the truth about himself. But to make things right, he had to accept the truth. He was accountable for what he had done; no one else.

There was another man 2000 years ago who tried to get at the truth and save an innocent man. But when the weight of political correctness was threatening his own safety and security he decided to wash his hands of the decision to have this innocent man executed. This man, of course, was Pontius Pilate. After questioning Jesus and finding no crime, after offering the crowd another convict for execution, and after accepting Jesus' answer that he would have no authority if it had not been given from above (John 18.11), he washed his hands of an innocent man. In order to be politically correct, he failed to defend the truth. There is irony in the way John depicts the encounter between Pontius Pilate and Jesus. Jesus, the man whom his followers knew to be "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14.6) is questioned by Pilate:

Pilate asked him, "So you are a King?"

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"
(John 18.37-38)

The Truth was an accused man who was innocent, Jesus, standing in front of Pilate; Pilate chose to ignore the truth, to give in to the pressure to be politically correct and to save his own position.

For the murderer/rapist in *Dead Man Walking*, Sister Helen Prejean helped him to see the truth. The Truth dwelt in his heart. When he recognized the truth he chose to accept it. He wept and no doubt his encounter with the truth brought him freedom and new life.

Grace

Grace – the gift of God's love at the centre of our existence through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – touches the heart of Christian life. Here are three pivotal statements from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

Through his own baptism, Jesus heralds the sanctifying nature of the sacrament. The illustration above shows the baptism of Jesus as depicted a fifth-century baptistry in Ravenna. Jesus is surrounded by John the Baptist (right), the human form of the River Jordan and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove.

1972: "The New Law is called a *law of love* because it makes us act out of the love infused by the Holy Spirit, rather than from fear; a *law of grace*, because it confers the strength of grace to act, by means of faith and the sacraments; a *law of freedom*, because it sets us free from the ritual and juridical observances of the Old Law, inclines us to act spontaneously by the prompting of charity and, finally, lets us pass from the condition of servant who 'does not know what his master is doing' to that of a friend of Christ."

1999: "The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. It is the *sanctifying* or *deifying* grace received in Baptism. It is in us the source of the work of sanctification."

2022: "The divine initiative in the work of grace precedes, prepares, and elicits the free response of man. Grace responds to the deepest yearnings of human freedom, calls freedom to cooperate with it, and perfects freedom."

The bishop's candlesticks

A touching example of the freedom of the children of God is given by Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables*. Here is the story of the bishop's candlesticks in an abridged version:

Les Misérables tells the story of Jean Valjean, a man who had been imprisoned for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his sister's hungry family. Bitter and resentful, Jean never accepted the sentence. Repeatedly he tried to escape. Consequently, his jail term for stealing a loaf of bread lasted nineteen years. Finally released and burdened with the stigma of being a convict, Jean wandered through France. Cold and hungry, already rejected by a number of innkeepers in the town of Digne, he finally knocked on the door of the bishop. He is welcomed in, served a meal at the bishop's table with costly wine, and offered a bed with clean sheets for the night. The bishop's kindness knew no limits. For the first time in nineteen years Jean felt that he was treated as a

human being. Having fallen asleep for the first time in a bed with clean sheets, Jean woke up with the church bells ringing at two in the morning. Obsessed by the silver cutlery of the meal, he could not get back to sleep. Finally, tossing and turning for an hour and a half, he went into the bishop's bedroom, stole the silver cutlery from his cupboard and escaped into the night.

The next morning three gendarmes appeared at the door of the bishop holding Jean Valjean by his arms and neck. Before the gendarmes could say anything, the bishop walks toward Jean and cries, "So here you are! I'm delighted to see you. Had you forgotten that I gave you the candlesticks as well? They're silver like the rest… Did you forget to take them?" Jean's eyes widened. He stared at the bishop with an expression no words can convey. Hearing the response of the bishop, the gendarmes let Jean go. When they left, Jean was left alone with the bishop. He seemed to be on the verge of collapse. The bishop said to him in a low voice: "Do not forget, do not ever forget, that you have promised me to use the money to make yourself an honest man." Then he added solemnly: "Jean Valjean, my brother, you belong no longer to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you. I am withdrawing it from dark thoughts and from the spirit of perdition, and I am giving it to God!"

Because Jean Valjean accepted the bishop's gift, his life became an act of love. He devoted himself to raising Cosette, the orphaned child of a prostitute. Later he faced danger to save the man who loved Cosette, knowing that this man would eventually take Cosette away with him, leaving Valjean to face his remaining years alone.

Opposed to Jean Valjean is a man committed to the law. Javert, convinced of his own righteousness, becomes obsessed with seeking to recapture Jean Valjean. Javert is so duty-bound that he becomes blind to goodness. In the end it is Valjean, the convict, who learns the lesson of love. He comes to see what is expressed so beautifully in the musical *Les Misérables*: "To love another person is to see the face of God."[5]

Guiding questions

1. How is the bishop a witness of grace?
2. What brought Valjean back to life?

The rich young man (Mark 10.17-22)

The gospels tell a powerful story about a rich person who encounters the goodness of Jesus and wants to enter the depths of this goodness, until he runs into an obstacle. He comes to Jesus looking for an answer to a moral question, but receives much more.

> As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Following this story, Jesus looks around and in sadness says to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" (v.23) Why is it so hard? Why is it so bad to have the security of wealth so that you don't have to worry about money? In the story of the rich man it becomes clear. It is above all a story about goodness. That's how it starts off. The man calls Jesus "good Teacher." Jesus asks him why he calls him ➤

good. Goodness is the trademark of God. If you seek to find the good, search for it in God. God alone is good in the full sense of the term. Then Jesus recounts all the ways that we share in this goodness. Be good to your neighbour in the way the commandments point out to us. When the man says that he has kept these all his life, the account says, "Jesus, looking at him, loved him." But the goodness of God has more ways of showing itself than in the keeping of the commandments. Jesus does not say to him, "Congratulations. You already have the fullness of life. Go home and keep it up." Goodness – God's goodness – does not end at some "enough" point. Goodness never ends. And so Jesus turns to the young man and says, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

Jesus challenged the rich young man's ego about being a good person. He also challenged his attachment to material possessions. The man "went away grieving." His search for the good had found a stumbling block, and the stumbling block was himself! His attachment to wealth got in the way of living a fuller life. Jesus did not condemn him. He felt sad for him. In the final analysis, the man was unable to imagine that there could be something more valuable than his wealth. His wealth kept him captive. It kept him from following Jesus.

Guiding questions

1. What are some of the obstacles to your freedom that this story reveals?
2. What is your security? What could you not do without?
3. What encourages you to follow Christ, or prevents you from following Christ?

Grace: God's gift

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit or the mission of the Holy Spirit to guide us in love has traditionally been called *grace*. Grace is, in other words, the love with which God loves us. And since this love is God himself, we say that grace is the Holy Spirit in us. Grace is the participation in the inner life of God. That is why tradition has called us children of God or *adopted* sons and daughters. Jesus is "the only Son" and we are the adopted sons and daughters through the action of the Spirit in us. The Eastern Church has called grace *divinisation* or *deification*. Grace is the fire of God's love in us. The Spirit makes this fire of love to become our love: the love with which we love.

Grace is the gift of the Holy Spirit that makes us gracious and right before God. The Spirit's gift of love is not a thing, but is rather God's very life – his Son – dwelling in us! God and people are not competitors. The most perfect image of grace is the Son of God becoming human in Jesus of Nazareth. His humanity was *the* gift of God – the incarnation of God's love or grace. In his life and actions we witness the noblest of human beings. In the same way this happens to us when we are baptized into Christ. We are given a share in Christ's own life, not as something attached to us from the outside but from within. Christ is the very source of our life. We become more intensely human, free and capable to love.

Gertrude the Great (1256–1302)

We know very little about Gertrude. We do not know her last name or the place where she was born. Her mother died when she was only five years old. Gertrude had no memory of ever being held in her mother's arms. She was brought to a monastery of Benedictine sisters in Helfta, in what is now Germany. It became her home. She lived there for the rest of her life. We learn little about her even in her writings. As a child she was – according to herself – serious, lovable, always wanting to please. As an adult she says she was temperamental and difficult to live with. But she was a gifted woman. She studied first the classical curriculum of the time, the seven fine arts and sciences, and later theology. She studied all the books of the Bible and could quote scripture for every occasion. But these studies did not satisfy her heart. Near the end of her studies, she went through a terrible crisis. She says, "It began in the period of Advent … the year I completed my 25th year. I entered a period of confusion, in which my heart became so distraught, that all my youthful exuberance became distasteful… At the same time you [she refers to Christ] began from that time onward to act in me in a wondrous and mysterious manner."

Gertrude the Great

In 1281 Gertrude sees Jesus for the first time as a beautiful young man. The Lord tells her, "I will save you; do not be afraid!" From that time until the end of her life Gertrude had an incredible experience of the nearness of her Lord. This proximity of Jesus and her trust that he would save her took away all her fear and allowed her to take up all burdens and misery. Gertrude was frequently seriously ill. She speaks of sleeplessness and of feelings of complete loneliness and abandonment. But in such moments Gertrude "fled to the Lord, as she was accustomed." Slowly she was transformed into someone who was faithful even in her suffering. She was deeply attached to Christ, born out of a love for her Lord. The Lord became her "only true friend."[6]

Gertrude was someone who deeply lived out of the love that God had for her. In a prayer she gave a glimpse of her deepest self: "Woe, woe is me! How long will my exile last?… When, oh when will you show yourself to me, so that I may see you and draw from you, my God, you source of my life? Then I shall drink, and I shall be drunk from the abundance of sweetness of this living well… You source of eternal light, bring me home, back to you, where I came from, you deepest source of all that is. So that I may know as I am known, so that I may love as I am loved. I shall see you, you my God, as you are. I shall see you and be full of joy and possess you and through you be happy for ever. Amen." Gertrude's life is not filled with memorable deeds. We only know her from her writings. Yet she was a lover, someone who despite her suffering knew herself to be in a most intimate love of Christ and make her suffering fruitful: "If someone in suffering still has so much power to raise her spirit in praise and thanksgiving to God, then she can add in full joy: 'And as a bride he has crowned me with a garland.'" She truly deserves to be known as "the Great."[7]

Reflections on grace

John 15.4-7 *"Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."*

St. Paul: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8)*

***The* Catechism of the Catholic Church:**
Grace is a participation in the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by Baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ, the Head of his Body. As an "adopted son" he can henceforth call God "Father," in union with the only Son. He receives the life of the Spirit who breathes charity into him and who forms the Church. (#1997)

Thomas Merton: *Grace is not a strange, magic substance which is subtly filtered into our souls to act as a kind of spiritual penicillin. Grace is unity, oneness within ourselves, oneness with God.*[8]

St. Thomas Aquinas: *Grace is nothing else but a certain beginning of glory in us. Grace renders us like God and a partaker of the divine nature.*[9]

St. Augustine: *Once and for all, a short rule is laid down for you: Love, and do what you will. If you keep silence, do it out of love. If you cry out, do it out of love. If you refrain from punishing, do it out of love. Let the root of love be within. From such a root nothing but good can come.*[10]

St. Augustine:
Late have I loved You, O Beauty ever ancient,
ever new, Late have I loved You!
You were within me, but I was outside,
and it was there that I searched for You.
In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely
things which You created.
You were within me, but I was not with You.
Created things kept me from You;
yet if they had not been in You they would not have
been at all.
You called, You shouted and You broke through my
deafness.
You flashed, You shone and You dispelled my blindness.
You breathed Your fragrance on me;
I drew in breath and now I pant for You.
I have tasted You,
now I hunger and thirst for more.
You touched me
and I burned for Your peace.[11]

Ronald Rolheiser O.M.I.: *God's love isn't a reward for being good, doing our duty, resisting temptation, bearing the heat of the day in fidelity, saying our prayers, remaining pure, or offering worship, good and important though these are. God loves us because God is love and God cannot not love and cannot be discriminating in love. God's love, as scripture says, shines on the good and bad alike. That's nice to know when we need forgiveness and unmerited love, but it's hard to accept when that forgiveness and love is given to those whom we deem less worthy of it, to those who didn't seem to do their duty. It's not easy to accept that God's love does not discriminate, especially when God's blessings go out lavishly to those who don't seem to deserve them.*[12]

Ernesto Cardenal: *Picasso was right when he said that we do not know what a tree or a window really is. All things are very mysterious and strange (like Picasso's paintings), and we overlook their strangeness and their mystery only because we are so used to them. Only dimly do we understand the nature of things. What are things? They are God's love become things.*

God also communicates with us by way of all things. They are messages of love. When I read a book, God is speaking to me through this book. I raise my eyes to look at the countryside: God created it for me to see. The picture I look at today was inspired by God in the painter, for me to see. Everything I enjoy was given lovingly by God for me to enjoy, and even my pain is God's loving gift.[13]

Elizabeth Barrett Browning:
Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
And only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.[14]

Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.:
Pied Beauty
Glory *be to God for dappled things –*
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.
All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

William Blake:
To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.[15]

Chapter review

Summary

- The gift of faith expands the breadth and depth of the meaning of freedom. Christian freedom is grounded in our relationship with God or – more accurately – God's relationship with us.
- St. Paul helped us to see the mystery of the gift of freedom. It was not our keeping the Law that made us free, but faith in Jesus Christ.
- This freedom is due primarily and exclusively to the action of the Holy Spirit. The love of God and the life of Christ dwell in us through the Spirit. The desire for freedom is the Spirit's desire in us that we be free. Nothing can separate us from this love or from this desire for freedom that lies deep within us.
- We do not earn God's love and eternal life by moral living; rather, God gives us his life, love and everlasting happiness simply because God loves us.
- Moral living is the way we offer thanks for God's gifts of mercy and love.
- Legalism is an approach to morality that asserts blind obedience to the law. It excludes any consideration of faith or truth or reason other than the law. It is a counterfeit approach to morality.
- Laws imposed from the outside are only for those who are not free. For those who are free, the law comes from within.
- The truth sets us free. Jesus is the Truth.
- Grace is the gift of God's love at the centre of our existence through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It responds to the deepest human yearnings for freedom, perfects freedom, and calls the freedom it perfects to cooperate with it.

Glossary

conversion: A radical transformation of the person, a turning around. At the intellectual level, it takes place as an awareness and openness to truth and true knowing. At the moral level, it takes place when I recognize myself as free and responsible. At the religious level, it takes place where my pre-occupation with myself is taken over with the love of God and love for others.

freedom: St. Paul helps us to understand freedom as the love of God and the life of Christ dwelling in us through the Spirit. The desire for freedom is the Spirit's desire in us that we be free. This freedom is life lived in the love of God.

grace: The gift of God's life and love at the centre of our existence through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the source of our life, through whom we become free and capable to love.

legalism: Literal interpretation of the law, and attitude that something is right because it is commanded to be so.

Pelagianism: An erroneous teaching that proposed that our ultimate happiness is due to our own efforts and good works, and not due to God's graciousness.

righteousness: Our right relationship with each other and before God. Jesus revealed that we do not earn God's love and eternal life by moral living. Rather, God gives us his life, love and everlasting happiness simply because God loves us. Moral living is our response to this free gift.

truth: Simply put, Jesus is the Truth. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus dwells within us. The grace of God moves us toward the truth and the truth sets us free.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain St. Paul's understanding of righteousness as coming from faith in Christ.
2. If, as St. Paul asserts, the Mosaic Law does not set us free, of what value is the Law in our moral life?

Thinking and inquiry

3. How is the gift of freedom an invitation to give generously of ourselves?
4. Identify and explain how many people in our culture are "Pelagians" in their approach to life.

Communication

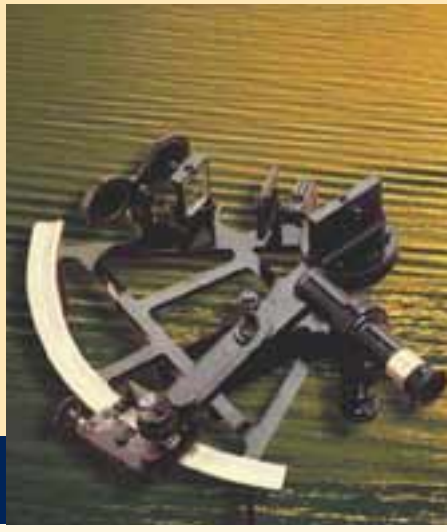
5. Using as an inspiration the reflections on grace in the last section of this chapter, create your own reflection on the meaning of grace in poetic or artistic form.
6. In the vein of the "Ben Shaw story" at the beginning of this chapter, search for similar stories in current publications or film, or write your own, and present them to the class.

Application

7. Explain how the law of love that St. Paul writes about applies in today's society. Is this a utopian vision from another place and time, or are we, as Christians, called to embody our faith in daily life today? How are we to accomplish this?

Proclaiming justice and mercy

UNIT V



Introduction

Pope Paul VI said that "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world" is a "constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel" (Synod on Justice, 1971, # 6). Doing justice is essential for the gospel to take root and to set humanity free. Justice is a key virtue for an ordered society. It regulates the distribution of goods. It reckons the healing of the social order when it has been jeopardized by criminal offences. It measures what is owed to each. It is the essential social virtue. Without it no human society can live well.

Chapter 13 examines mainly distributive justice. Distributive justice explores how a society can value each one equally with an unequal distribution of its wealth. What makes such an unequal distribution of wealth ethical or moral? Philosophers and politicians struggle with this issue constantly. Justice is a foundational virtue for life together. In the Bible justice is fundamental to our covenant with God. The Sermon on the Mount insists on relationships based on love – even love of enemies – yet it does not relegate justice to a lower order. The law of love is incomprehensible without a clear sense of justice. Love presupposes justice and rests on it. Love and justice meet in the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Matthew 7.12)

Today we speak of ecological justice – the earth and its well-being are owed their due. The devastating effects of chemical technology, for example, on plant life and insects and birds have revealed the vulnerability of the ecosystem and made imperative a new sensitivity to human life within the whole cosmic evolution. Chapter 14 examines this new area of justice.

Any reflection on ethics and morality must deal with the disorder that humans create. Within the religious tradition of Judeo-Christianity this disorder is understood as a breach of relationship between God and humanity. It is called sin. Chapter 15 is an examination of sin, both personal and social. At the same time, the chapter focuses on the promise of pardon, reconciliation and forgiveness. Can what we do ever be undone? Must we forever remain a prisoner of our own past? The Christian hope in the resurrection proclaims pardon and reconciliation. It remembers how after his death Jesus appeared to his followers and offered them peace: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven." (John 20.23) Do we not pray in the Our Father: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us"? Reconciliation and forgiveness are the great gifts of the resurrection.

"I the LORD love justice" (Isaiah 61.8)

CHAPTER 13

For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly
and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in,
and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say,
"Have a seat here, please,"
while to the one who is poor you say,
"Stand there," or "Sit at my feet,"
have you not made distinctions among yourselves,
and become judges with evil thoughts?
Listen my beloved brothers and sisters.
Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith
and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?

Letter of James 2.2-5

Smell the kingdom

At 32, Barbara lived in a wonderful world. Her husband was loving, her children healthy, her home happy. Rarely did a dark thought cross her optimistic mind.

It was a friend who first invited Barbara to volunteer at the soup kitchen. The invitation was added to many others she received these days… the garden club, the parent group at school, the Cancer Society and, it seemed, a hundred others. One bright morning in early December off she drove in her new Taurus to work a few hours preparing and serving a hot meal for the city's poor. She felt deliciously unselfish.

As she drove to the kitchen, Barbara entered a part of her own city she had never seen before. The buildings were dilapidated, the streets and sidewalks dirty and unkempt. People in dull, tattered clothing seemed to wander aimlessly about.

As she entered the soup kitchen, the first sensation that struck her was the SMELL… a heavy mixture of cabbage, sweat and unchanged babies. Barbara wanted to vomit. She looked around and saw about fifty people sitting passively at the tables, waiting. Few spoke to one another. Most stared listlessly into space. The men had not shaved. The women were either too fat or frighteningly thin.

Focus your learning

Cognitive
Identify the key principles of Christian justice.

Practical
Explain the relationship between justice and love as reflected in our faith tradition.

Affective
Become familiar with stories of people who live justly.

Key terms in this chapter

common good
economics
Golden Rule
justice:
  commutative
  legal
  distributive
private property
righteous
solidarity

The whole room reverberated with constant coughing. Barbara wanted to run back to her new Taurus and escape to the cleanliness and order of her home in the suburbs.

Just then, an old woman reached out and touched her arm. Barbara was afraid until she looked into the woman's face and saw eyes glistening with love and the beginnings of a smile on her lips. "Don't be afraid, Sweetie," the old woman began. "We're just like you. We had a little bad luck or a problem we couldn't beat. Look at John over there. He has been in a mental hospital for seven years, just out and no place to go. Look at Joni, from a rich family. Had a nice husband, too, until he left her with five kids. We aren't bad folks, just poor."

Barbara blushed and felt her knees shaking. She eased into a chair next to the old woman and tried to smile. The old woman picked up the conversation, "All you need to do is just sit here and talk to me. The folks understand how you feel. They'll help you get adjusted and maybe become your friends if you will let them."

Barbara smiled. She had come to give something and here she was receiving. She was learning about a new reality, the reality of the poor. Suddenly she remembered the words from the Gospel she had never understood, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God." She was in the kingdom and it smelled like cabbage, sweat and unchanged babies.[1]

Guiding questions

1. This was how Barbara awakened to God's kingdom in her life. How is God's kingdom, or presence, breaking into your life?
2. Something happened when Barbara looked into the face of the old woman. How would Levinas (Chapter 1) explain this encounter in terms of morality and ethics?
3. Do you think this story has any lesson in it about justice? Explain your answer.

Who is the just person?

The Old Testament points out a number of people whom it calls just, or righteous. In the story of Moses, we are told how one day, while the Hebrew people were lost in the desert, they found themselves longing for the meat, fish, cucumbers, leeks, onions and garlic they had grown accustomed to eating as slaves in Egypt. So they complained about the miraculous food – the *manna* – the Lord sent them each day as they wandered in the desert. They complained that they were tired of the same thing every day, pining for the variety of food that was theirs as slaves. It must have been a trying time for Moses. Moses complained to the Lord by saying, "Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all these people on me? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child,' to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? … I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me" (Numbers 11.10-14). In the Jewish tradition, Moses was a just and a righteous person because he was someone who carried the burdens of others, who endangered his own life so that others were made free, who stood up for the rights of the voiceless, and who interceded for the powerless.

In the biblical tradition, a just person is sensitive and faithful to the demands of others because that was the basis of the old covenant: to be just with others. Hence, justice under the old covenant is about persons relating consciously to the needs of others in terms of their human dignity as created, loved and prized by God. Justice is about relating rightly with others. For Moses, being just was an exhausting experience of the disproportion between the demands of his people and his capacity to help them. Becoming a just person is often like that.

In the New Testament, God reveals the just and righteous one to be Jesus Christ. He bore the burdens of others. His whole ministry was to the poor, the sick, the overburdened. He bore their illness and their sin. He even went so far as to seek God's forgiveness for what others did to him: "Father, forgive them," he prayed, "for they do not know what they are doing" (Matthew 23.34). He is a model of how we are to live with and for others. Luke calls Jesus the Righteous One as if it were his proper name. With him justice came to mean an excess of generosity. "Though he was sinless, he suffered willingly for sinners. Though innocent, he accepted death to save the guilty."[2] Offering one's innocent life in order to save the guilty seems like excessive generosity, but not in the tradition of those who follow Christ.

By accepting responsibility for the other, including the poor, the guilty and the sinful other, we serve as the hands and feet, eyes and ears of God in this world. This is what our Catholic faith tradition presents as our calling to be just and to bring justice into our relationships. In this chapter we examine our call to justice.[3]

Different types of justice

Our Catholic tradition is closely tied to justice. The connection is found first in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ. In the first years after his death and resurrection, Jesus' followers sought to live justly despite an often hostile and violent environment. At that time, Christians celebrated their call to justice by sharing in the one cup and the one bread. The Eucharist, which celebrates the new covenant, continues to this day to unite us with the "Just One" and with one another. Justice is integral to the gospel and, likewise, to the act of receiving Holy Communion (the body and blood of Jesus). It is also a communion of love and justice with others.

There are three types of relationships that undergird the notion of justice:

- Commutative justice: the relationship of one individual to another individual
- Legal justice: the relationship of the individual to society or the state
- Distributive justice: the relationship of society or the government to the individual

Commutative justice pertains to contractual relationships between individuals and between institutions that have the legal status of a person. Institutions with this status are called corporations. Corporations may include associations, retail stores, schools, sports clubs, law firms, religious communities, and dioceses. The contracts and agreements that make up the basis of relationships at this level are subject to commutative justice.

Commutative justice, in a certain sense, is not personal. Consider, for example, what happens when you are clothes shopping. A pair of jeans in a store costs the same whether you are a wealthy person or poor person. The retailer does not make distinctions. The pair of jeans forms the basis of your legal or contractual relationship to the retailer. Contracts and agreements of this nature are impersonal and blind. Take another example: You are seeking a bank loan. The laws that govern banks and their clients form the basis of your relationship when the bank approves your loan. The bank loan is therefore a contractual, rather than a personal, relationship. It is a business/client relationship, just as the relationship at the clothing store is a retailer/customer relationship.

Commutative justice is important because of the fiduciary nature of all agreements and contracts (that is, agreements based on trust and confidence that the other person will respect the agreement). Society is built on trust in the word that is given to another. Without it, society quickly slides into anarchy and mistrust, which take such forms as shoplifting, shoddy workmanship, stealing tools on the job, absenteeism, inflated invoices, theft, robbery, etc.

Guiding questions

1. Give examples of incidences of commutative justice in your life.
2. What is the importance of a signature on a contract?

Legal justice refers to the relationship of the individual to society. It is also known as *contributive* justice. In the past legal justice concerned itself primarily with the individual's obedience to the laws of society or the state. A citizen's relationship to society or the state was straightforward: You obeyed the laws or you paid the penalty for lawlessness. During the last decades, legal justice has come to be understood more in terms of what the individual in society can contribute beyond the keeping of the law.

We are expected not only to obey but also to participate in creating laws that benefit the good of society. Legal justice today means that we *contribute* to the life of society. That is why some call this justice contributive justice. We accept not only the right to vote but also the obligation to vote. We enter into the dialogue of contemporary society by writing letters to the editor, contributing to Internet blogs and community meetings, participating in neighbourhood watch and recycling programs, conserving energy, etc. Perhaps the most celebrated expression of contributive justice is captured in the inaugural address of President John F. Kennedy, who on January 20, 1961, said, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." (See Chapter 18 for more on contributive justice.)

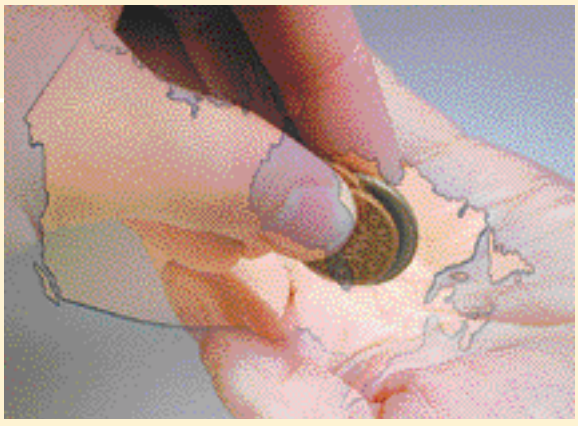
Guiding questions

3. What are some programs of legal (contributive) justice in your community?
4. What is the importance of legal justice for society or the state?

Distributive justice pertains to the relationship of the government or society to the individual. In Chapter 11 we saw how the unequal distribution of goods, in a society where everyone is in principle equal, showed itself to be the burning issue of modern liberal democratic societies. What is the obligation of the government towards its citizens? Whatever program of distribution of the burdens and benefits the government adopts, it is subject to distributive justice. What are the goods of distributive justice? Distributive justice deals with all sorts of goods that are not economic. In order to discuss the dilemma of unequal distribution and basic equality, we must begin by recognizing that there is a variety of goods, and that justice operates differently in each sphere:

- *The good of citizenship*, which deals with the conditions of becoming a citizen; how citizenship is lost; the rights of residents,

The distribution of wealth in Canada in 2000



Data from Statistics Canada on financial security gives the following picture of the distribution of wealth in Canada.

- The wealthiest 10 percent of family units held 53 percent of the wealth in 1999. The wealthiest 50 percent of family units controlled an almost unbelievable 94.4 percent of the wealth, leaving only 5.6 percent for the bottom 50 percent.
- The poorest 10 percent of family units have negative average wealth or more debts than assets. Average wealth adjusted for inflation for the poorest ten percent actually declined by 28 percent from -$8,031 in 1970 to -$10,656 in 1999.
- The average wealth adjusted for inflation for the richest 10 percent of family units increased from $442,468 in 1970 to $980,903 in 1999 – an increase of 122 percent.
- The poorest 20 percent of family units had financial assets of only $1,974 on average in 1999, and their average income in 1998 was only $18,698. If their current income suddenly disappeared, their financial assets alone would be enough to keep the family going for barely five weeks.
- About 60 percent of family units were homeowners, and the other 40 percent were renters. The median wealth of homeowners with mortgages was $111,807 in 1999, and the median wealth of homeowners without mortgages was $259,200. The median wealth of renters was only $8,000.[5]

Given the statistics above, one might ask, who is being taxed the most? the least? Have governments been effective in fortifying safety net programs for the poor? Have governments weakened social safety nets? What are the ethical principles to critique government action in this area?

strangers, immigrants, refugees, and political exiles; the right to vote and participate; freedom of expression. How does the state distribute these goods, for instance, to determine a just immigration policy? What is a just policy regarding the acceptance of refugees? Is it just to have an unequal distribution of the rights of citizenship among Native Canadians, those who are born in Canada, those who are naturalized Canadians, and recent immigrants to Canada?

- *The good of security and public assistance* (welfare), which responds to the needs of those who have the right to public protection and help. What is a just system of welfare for the psychologically, physically and socially disadvantaged? What sort of health care is just? Within a universal health care system is it just to give those who can afford it a quicker access or preferential access to health care? Is it part of distributive justice to provide assistance to those who are unemployed? Are there limits to the law that protects the individual's right to privacy?
- *The economic good*, which regulates the area of money and merchandise. This area of goods touches on salaries and wages for work, the economic benefit of the stock market and banking, the availability of consumer goods, the right to private property. There are, however, limits. Persons have a value but not a price. If persons are not to be measured by a price, the question arises whether it is permissible to patent life forms or the genetic code of DNA, even of genetically modified plant seeds and stem cells.
- *The good of offices and positions*, where the distribution is not to be based on heredity or wealth, but on qualifications set by public procedures. Everyone must be, in principle, eligible. No one may be excluded for reasons of age, sex, or religion.[4]

Guiding questions

5. Select one of the goods and study its distribution in Canada. (For example, research the welfare rates in your province or territory and compare them to the cost of living.)
6. Calculate the annual income of someone working for the minimum wage. Make a budget based on this income.

Social justice and the Catholic Church

The Church has sought to live and act within different forms of government, voicing its dissent whenever important values were threatened. The Catholic Church does not identify with any one type of government: whether liberal democratic, communist, tribal or monarchical. History has seen many attempts to find a just method to govern people. With the demise of the communist approach to governing, and the rise of theocratic fundamentalist governments in some Muslim countries, there appears to be no easy alternatives to liberal democracy. For example, the *Magisterium* must guide the Catholic faithful who live in China, where the political system is communist. At the same time, the Church's teaching on justice must guide the Catholic community in Iraq, where tribal, democratic and theocratic political ideologies are in conflict. And the Catholic Church's teaching on justice must assist the Catholic faithful in the many countries of Africa and South America, where liberal democracy is often a new and relatively untried system.

The Catholic Church brings the gospel perspective of justice to bear on all political and economic systems. When it comes to social justice there can be no neutral point of view. A reflection on social justice in Canada must take account of the situation created by our liberal democracy. It must consider the influences of governments and transnational corporations on the economic situation. Catholic social teaching stretching back to the nineteenth century provides us with principles of social justice to ground our reflection on this reality. Most of the social encyclicals of the recent popes, from 1891 (*Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII) to the present, can be understood as a response to Western democracies. The Church's teaching offers several bases for re-thinking social questions in terms of justice.

Ownership of property

Many traditional societies accept common ownership of property. In modern developed societies this common ownership would probably lead to conflict. For quite some time in the West, particularly because of the emphasis placed on private property by the political theorists Hobbes and Locke, the emphasis was placed on the right to own property. Property and the ownership of property came to be seen as an extension of owning a body. Today in our much more complex and technological society, you may no longer need a piece of property to survive, but you do need material goods. In an economy no longer based on agriculture and fisheries, you need special skills to make a living; you gain wealth through creativity and entrepreneurship. Today the question is not so

The social doctrine of the Church

In her social teaching, the Church addresses these and other issues. References are provided to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

- The meaning of work has a religious and moral value (2427)
- The right to economic activity (2429, 2430)
- The responsibility of the state (2431)
- The responsibility of the business world (2432)
- Access to employment (2433)
- A just wage (2434)
- Legitimacy of a strike (2435)
- Obligations of rich nations (2437–2439)
- Direct aid to poor nations (2440)
- The right of nations to seek and find their potential (2440–2441)
- Love for the poor (2443–2449)

much focused on private property but on material goods in general.

In a variety of social encyclicals, the popes have weighed in on the topic of private property. The Church's position is best summarized by saying that "the right to private property is valid and necessary"[6] but it is not an absolute right. The earth first of all belongs to God the Creator. Humans are at most stewards of this gift. All have, therefore, a God-given right to be sustained by the earth. The reality of famine anywhere in the world elects all to responsibility. The ownership of property is therefore subject to a higher principle, namely, that the "goods of this world are originally meant for all."[7] It means that private property has a social function justified "by the principle of the universal destiny of goods."[8] Private property for this reason is always to be seen in relation to all the goods of creation which, in the final analysis, are to serve the needs of all. The issue of the distribution of material goods, however, has not disappeared. The concern today is no longer a national issue but a global one: "The most pressing question of our day concerns the relationship between economically advanced commonwealths and those that are in process of development."[9]

Guiding questions

1. The right to private property is not an absolute right. What are the implications of this teaching?
2. Why is it no longer adequate today to speak only about the right of private property? Why must the right to own material goods be considered as well?

Solidarity

Most modern political theories have a common point of departure: the individual and his or her instincts and drives to possess him or herself and material goods. This individual's bond to a larger social whole is based on a tacit "social contract" which obliges each citizen to abide by the social arrangement. The social bond must be so constructed as to be in the individual's self-interest. Historically, the motivation for compliance has mostly been fear of death (Hobbes) or fear of chaos and unremitting confrontation.

Catholic social teaching has consistently advocated another style of social relationship with a different point of departure: the common good. Catholic social teaching says that individual goods ought to serve the common good. Justice, not fear, is what binds us to this common good. And solidarity is the virtue that binds us to one another in the distribution of wealth. This solidarity can be understood in its widest sense as a solidarity with God's love of creation. It can also be seen as a solidarity with those who are near to us (family, community, country) and far away (all are children of God). And finally, it is seen as solidarity with the earth and the earth's ecosystems (see Chapter 14). What has become more central in our understanding of solidarity is the solidarity with the poor, also known as the "preferential option for the poor."

The "preferential option for the poor" must be understood as a commitment to the poor on account of God's concern for the poor. This principle of Catholic social teaching is a recent development. The U.S bishops in their pastoral letter on the economy[10] understand the principle as follows:

> [It is] an obligation to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless… The "option for the poor," therefore, is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another. Rather it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community… These wounds will be healed only by greater solidarity with the poor and among the poor themselves. (#87–88)

This solidarity with the poor suggests that when we consider problems of the social order, our solutions must bear in mind the people who are poor and powerless. The U.S. bishops proposed three priorities in economic decision-making:

- The fulfillment of the basic needs of the poor is the highest priority…
- Increasing active participation in economic life by those who are presently excluded or vulnerable is a high social priority…
- The investment of wealth, talent, or human energy should be specially directed to benefit those who are poor or economically insecure. (# 90–92)

Guiding questions

3. What is the meaning of "preferential option for the poor"?
4. What is the meaning of the "preferential option for the poor" in light of the huge discrepancy of wealth in Canada? How are goods redistributed to the poor?

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you apply the following test: Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj *[self rule] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away.*

M. K. Gandhi

Proportional equality

What justifies that a hockey player earns $4 million a year while a single mother working as a waitress receives the minimum wage? If before God all are equal, should there not be more equality in remuneration for work done? Commutative justice was described above as blind. It makes no difference whether I owe $50 to Wayne Gretzky or to the grocer down the street. It is still $50. In distributive justice, on the other hand, there is no such arithmetic equality. It is proportional. It asks, "What is a fair or just distribution of wealth or material goods?" Here are four criteria that have been used to measure the just distribution of economic goods:

1. *Need*. Pope John Paul II says, "It is a strict duty of justice and truth not to allow fundamental human needs to remain unsatisfied…"[11] Every human being has the right to a decent human living. The distribution of goods must therefore provide at least a minimum standard of living. There is a standard, therefore, below which society must intervene. When the number of food banks and the number of homeless increase in a country, questions need to be asked about whether welfare subsidies have fallen too low, what can be done about subsidized housing, and whether programs for employment need to be revised. The support given to those who cannot take care of themselves and are dependent on social assistance must be enough to take care of the fundamental human needs of food and shelter.
2. *A just wage*. Interestingly enough a just wage does not fall under commutative justice, as we might expect. After all, wages are about a contractual relationship between individuals, or between individuals and corporations. According to Catholic teaching, however, a just wage falls under distributive justice. Because work is personal and necessary, this means that "Each one has a right to procure what is required in order to live."[12] Ultimately, it is not the contract, but the need, that ought to determine the wage. A just wage is a wage that allows one to fulfill the basic needs of human life. The needs of one person are higher than another and there is a considerable difference between the desires, capacities and powers of each worker. A just wage should permit each one to have his or her basic needs fulfilled.

How would you reconcile this teaching with the commutative notions of "equal pay for work of equal value"?

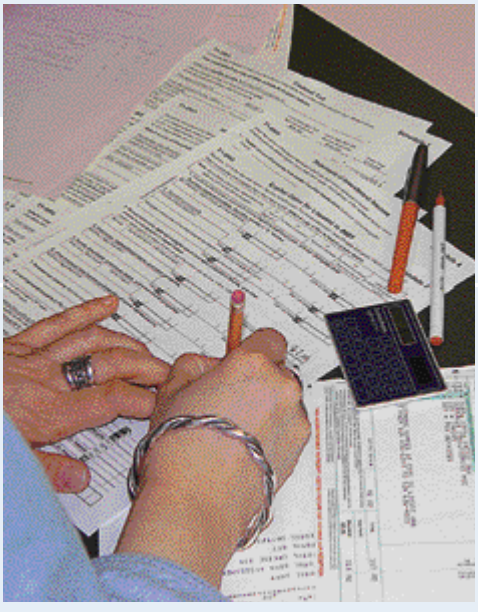
3. *Effort and skill required*. Unequal remuneration is also due to the different levels of effort and skill needed to do the work. In our economy wage levels are determined by a number of factors, including the power of the union, the success of the firm, the scarcity or abundance of workers in a field and the popularity of the product. At the level of justice, outside of other factors, effort and skill ought to be rewarded proportionately.
4. *Productivity*. In current economies it is the higher level of productivity which is frequently cited as the reason for higher salaries. At an individual level, the brain surgeon makes a greater contribution to the health of a patient than the attendant nurse and hence remuneration will differ.[13]

Market forces and the common good

76 The Catholic doctrine of the common good is incompatible with unlimited free-market, or laissez-faire, capitalism, which insists that the distribution of wealth must occur entirely according to the dictates of market forces. This theory presupposes that the common good will take care of itself, being identified with the summation of vast numbers of individual consumer decisions in a fully competitive, and entirely free, market economy. Its central dogma (as expressed by Adam Smith, the founding father of capitalist theory, in his *The Wealth of Nations* 1776) is the belief that in an entirely free economy, each citizen, through seeking his own gain, would be "led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was not part of his intention," namely the prosperity of society. This does sometimes happen; but to say that it invariably must happen, as if by a God-given natural law, is a view which can amount to idolatry or a form of economic superstition. Smith himself did not appear to think the rule was invariable, for he also observed "By pursuing his own interest he *frequently* promotes that of society."

77 The Catholic Church, in its social teaching, explicitly rejects belief in the automatic beneficence of market forces. It insists that the end result of market forces must be scrutinised and if necessary corrected in the name of natural law, social justice, human rights, and the common good. Left to themselves, market forces are just as likely to lead to evil results as to good ones. It is often overlooked that Adam Smith himself did not envisage markets operating in a value-free society, but assumed that individual consumer choices would be governed by moral considerations, not least the demands of justice.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales:
The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching, 1996.



Taxation: A tool of distributive justice

Governments redistribute wealth within a society by means of taxes. Taxes also allow the state to provide services for the common good – law enforcement, health care, education, transportation, infrastructure, foreign affairs, public safety, the judiciary, and so on. Citizens have an obligation and responsibility to pay for these public goods through their taxes. The only equitable way of regulating the tax burden is to have people pay progressively more according to their means.

As the U.S. bishops stated it, "The tax system should be structured according to the principle of progressivity so that those with relatively greater financial resources pay a higher rate of taxation. The inclusion of such a principle in tax policies is an important means of reducing the severe inequalities of income and wealth in the nation."[14] In other words, those who possess more pay more to the common good. Those who have very little pay very little, or nothing at all. The neediest members of society receive a basic level of support funded by the taxes on the more wealthy.

- What are the taxation rates in Canada? Are they proportionally or progressively distributed?
- Discuss the merit of progressive tax rates. Would a flat tax be just?

The landowner and the workers

In Matthew 20.1-16, Jesus tells a parable in which there is talk of wages:

> For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

In the parable the landowner pays the same wage for different hours of work. Our immediate reaction to the behaviour of the landowner is that something is not quite just. If he could be generous to the workers of the last hour, why could he not be generous with the workers of the first hour – despite the original agreement? The parable sets us up to react in this manner. According to the underlying expectation, our worth is measured by the wage we receive. A wage determines where we fit in the scheme of things. And so for us the right wage is a matter of justice. This parable subverts this expectation. The landowner offers those who worked all day a full day's wage; to the other workers from the third hour onward he promises what is *right*; to the workers of the final hour he makes no verbal agreement at all. We expect some kind of gradation in pay but the landowner pays all the workers the same amount. Our worth is not measured by our wage. The justice of the kingdom of God is obviously of a different texture than the justice the reader expects.

The point of the parable is to be found in verse 15: "Are you envious because I am generous?" Through the parable, Jesus confronts our legalistic notion of what is right, a notion that misrepresents God's goodness. Jesus is making the point that God's mercy surpasses all human measure and is not to be equated with strict

human justice. We have in the parable a striking picture of God's unfathomable generosity.

What does this parable teach us in terms of social justice? In our human relations and dealings with others, the Christian cannot be content merely to grant to others that which they have a strict right to receive. Love transcends and goes beyond merely giving people their due. As St. Thomas Aquinas puts it, "Justice without mercy cannot be perfect virtue."[15] A second lesson to draw from the parable is this: we should not look for evil where there is only good. All too often it is too easy to discredit another's good works because that person's generosity is upsetting our own narrow vision of justice.

Guiding questions

1. What do you consider to be a just wage? On what principles do you base your judgment?
2. Compare your answer with the response to the workers of the first hour in the parable of Jesus.
3. How could we apply in today's world the kind of generosity to which Jesus calls us? Explain.

Economic activity and social justice
Catechism of the Catholic Church

2427 *Human work* proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another… Work honours the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive.

2428 In work, the person exercises and fulfills in part the potential inscribed in his nature. The primordial value of labour stems from man himself, its author and beneficiary. Work is for man, not man for work.

2429 Everyone has the *right of economic initiative*; everyone should make legitimate use of his talents to contribute to the abundance that will benefit all, and to harvest the just fruits of his labour. He should seek to observe regulations issued by legitimate authority for the sake of the common good.

2430 *Economic life* brings into play different interests, often opposed to one another. This explains why the conflicts that characterize it arise. Efforts should be made to reduce these conflicts by negotiation that respects the rights and duties of each social partner: those responsible for business enterprises, representatives of wage-earners – for example, trade unions – and public authorities when appropriate.

2431 The *responsibility of the state*. "Economic activity, especially the activity of a market economy, cannot be conducted in an institutional, juridical or political vacuum. On the contrary, it presupposes sure guarantees of individual freedom and private property, as well as a stable currency and efficient public services. Hence the principal task of the state is to guarantee this security, so that those who work and produce can enjoy the fruits of their labours and thus feel encouraged to work efficiently and honestly … Another task of

the state is that of overseeing and directing the exercise of human rights in the economic sector. However, primary responsibility in this area belongs not to the state but to individuals and to the various groups and associations which make up society."

2432 Those *responsible for business enterprises* are responsible to society for the economic and ecological effects of their operations. They have an obligation to consider the good of persons and not only the increase of profits. Profits are necessary, however. They make possible the investments that ensure the future of a business and they guarantee employment.

2433 *Access to employment* and to professions must be open to all without unjust discrimination: men and women, healthy and disabled, natives and immigrants. For its part society should, according to circumstances, help citizens find work and employment.

2434 *A just wage* is the legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice. In

determining fair pay both the needs and the contributions of each person must be taken into account. "Remuneration for work should guarantee man the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level, taking into account the role and the productivity of each, the state of the business, and the common good." Agreement between the parties is not sufficient to justify morally the amount to be received in wages.

Love, justice and the Golden Rule

Justice has been defined as giving each person his or her due. In commutative justice this means acting in accordance to agreements and contracts. It is called a blind justice because it applies equally to all. I give so that you may give. This justice works with a logic of equivalence. I give the equivalent to what you give. In distributive justice we saw that the equivalence is not arithmetic but proportional – proportional to needs. Still there is an equivalence: I give so that you may live.

The Sermon on the Mount (or "in the plain") points us toward another option in distributive justice. It has become known as the Golden Rule. It seems on first reading not to be radically different from the logic of equivalency. We have two readings of it in the New Testament:

Matthew 7.12: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you."

Luke 6.31: "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

Jesus has taken this Golden Rule – which in a negative form also exists in other world religions (see margin) – and given it a surprising new meaning. The Golden Rule is in the language of justice: do to others what you would have them do to you. It seems very close to the definition of justice: give to everyone his or her due. But in the context of the Sermon, Jesus obviously means something more. In a sequence of questions, it is clear that if the Golden Rule appears at first sight to be the usual understanding of reciprocal justice, Jesus wants us to think again:

> If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour.
(Judaism)

What you do not want done to yourself, do not do unto others.
(Confucianism)

Let no man do to another that which would be repugnant to himself.
(Hinduism)

Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.
(Buddhism)

> whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. (Luke 6.32-34)

These words appear almost contrary to the Golden Rule. These sayings push for much more than just "loving those who love you." They want us to go beyond equivalence to a decidedly uneven equation: love your enemies; lend, expecting nothing in return. This is the sort of logic of grace, or of the gospel. It operates not out of measuring with impartiality the rights and duties of the one over and against the rights and duties of another. Here the measurement is of abundance: lend without expecting a return. It is not "I give *in order* that you will give," but "Give *because* it has been given you." In this case we are asked to interpret the Golden Rule in terms of generosity because God has been generous:

> Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other as well; and from him who takes away your cloak do not withhold your coat as well. Give to everyone who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods, do not ask them again. (Luke 6.27-30)

This is a higher commitment to justice which seeks to move beyond the "give that you may give" to an overwhelming of the other with the power of love. This is a disinterested justice: I have no interest in what the other will give to me. I act only out of love and generosity. We have seen some live this way: Jesus himself, St. Francis of Assisi and Gandhi, to name a few. We also see it in the concern of the Church for the poor. We see it reflected in John Rawls's second principle: "All social primary goods – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and these bases of self-respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favoured." The law of justice injected with the "law" of love would create a healthy equilibrium in the practice of justice. It would suggest that love asks for more, never for less, than what justice requires.

Guiding questions

1. How does Jesus understand justice in the Golden Rule?
2. What happens to justice when it enters into dialogue with love?

Living Christian justice

Douglas Roche, Mary Jo Leddy and Rosalie Bertell model for us what it means to be motivated by a sense of Christian justice. They share with us in their own words what they understand to be a concrete expression of Christian love.

Douglas Roche

Senator Douglas Roche, O.C., made the following statement on the occasion of the terrorist attacks on the United States. On September 11, 2001, terrorists, using hijacked civilian aircraft as weapons, destroyed the World Trade Center in New York, a wing of the Pentagon, and also crashed United Airlines flight 93 into a field, killing nearly 3,000 people that day, and changing the world forever.

Douglas Roche was first editor of *The Western Catholic Reporter*, a former Member of Parliament from Edmonton, and chairman of the international organization of Parliamentarians for World Order, ambassador to the United Nations for peace and disarmament, a position

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he held for five years, and served nine years in the Senate. He has continued to speak out on behalf of peace and disarmament and has written several books on militarization and development and is currently a lecturer at the University of Alberta.

Douglas Roche

September 12, 2001

Our first reaction to the horrible terrorist attacks in New York and Washington must be grief and prayers for the victims, their families and friends. An outflow of love and support for those so affected ought to guide our future actions.

The perpetrators of such evil acts must be brought to justice. But this must be done in a way that does not compound the violence. The law enforcement agencies must be given the resources they need to carry out their duties in maintaining order and apprehending criminals.

But revenge as an end in itself is unproductive and not worthy of the solemn obligation we have to ensure justice in the world. Rather, we must be motivated by a determination to end violence by getting at the root causes of violence. We must strengthen the international institutions working in the law and economic development fields so that more hope is given to the vulnerable, the oppressed and dispossessed that they can obtain the social justice that is their due without recourse to violence.

At this tragic moment, Canada has a special role to play in continuing to reach out to the United States with love and support to help the U.S. cope with a challenge of immense proportions. Canada, through its political and diplomatic work, must help the U.S. recognize that working multilaterally with the many governments, agencies and civil society leaders around the world is a far better response than acting alone. Canadian foreign policy should be directed at helping the U.S. to combat terrorism with comprehensive strategies that include the economic and social development of peoples around the world.

The New York/Washington attacks were attacks against humanity. They require a humanity-centered response.[16]

Spirit that matters

By Mary Jo Leddy,
Founder and Director of Romero House for Refugees in Toronto, and author of *At the Border Called Hope* and *Radical Gratitude*.

Let me start by giving you snapshot scenes from the dispirited life I sense in Canada today.

Every night on the television news, talking heads solemnly declare: "The economy demands cuts; there must be layoffs. There is no other way; there is no other choice. This is reality."

The nurse manager of a Chronic Care unit in Toronto lamented to me, "We have the best rating in the province: best care, most cost effective, but they're going to close us. It's as if nothing we have done matters."

A congregational study group in Vancouver confesses, "We are all concerned about the economy, but we don't really know what we are talking about. We need to get an expert in."

These scenes are examples of the generalized sense of powerlessness and the vague sense of guilt which grips so many people in this country at this time. It is a dispiriting time. ➤

When good people see the casualties of our present economic changes, they feel vaguely guilty; they think "We should do something" and "Somehow we're responsible, but we also feel powerless."… DEEP DOWN MOST PEOPLE FEEL THAT IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT THEY DO OR SAY.

We are perplexed and disturbed by this and we look for explanations… I suggest that much of our present sense of powerlessness and vague guilt has everything to do with the fact that we live in the culture of money – in the culture of consumerism. Capitalism is a form of materialism – the other form of materialism, communism, has been shown to be soul-destroying. But capitalism is also soul-destroying, dispiriting….

Capitalism works only as long as people want to shop; it works only as long as we want more, as we think we need more. Advertising is crucial to all of this because it sets up within us a craving for more, to the point where what once seemed like a luxury is now a necessity. We are encouraged to believe that: you must have more to be more: more things, more travel, more experiences, more relationships, even more spirituality. The message we get is "if you have more, you will be happy." It is a promise… We begin to believe that freedom is not a political reality, but it is having all these choices in the supermarket, such as twenty kinds of cereal…. In the culture of money, you are someone, if you have a car, if you get mail and you get catalogues and you shop.

The internal contradiction of capitalism is that it promises happiness which it will never deliver – not cannot, will never. It capitalizes on that deep human need for happiness – a need recognized long ago by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas who said that we are meant for happiness. Whomever you allow to define happiness will have the power to direct your life – not by coercion, but by seduction. In the consumer culture, our very best desires are turned into a drivenness – a compulsive searching for happiness. Although advertising communicates the promise of happiness, it must never be fulfilled because if you were satisfied, why would you shop. In the culture of consumerism, you must remain perpetually unsatisfied….

Mary Jo Leddy

In this culture, the deep sense of dissatisfaction becomes internalized at almost every level of our being so that "I don't have enough" becomes "I am not enough" or "I am not good enough." It isn't just about shopping and having things. It begins to transform us. "I am not enough" is a feeling of powerlessness. "I am not good enough" is a feeling of vague guilt….

Can we do something about this: in our own lives, in our place of work, in our churches, in our country? Will it matter? Will it make any difference? It would be obvious and easy to say that we should try to do something to change our political and economic situation – models of social change and social justice. But if we don't believe that what we do and what we think really matters or makes a difference, we will probably not even try. We will complain. We will blame….

Any change in our dispiriting situation must begin with a transformation of spirit. The change begins, I believe, not with an agonizing sense of guilt, but with a simple act of gratitude. It is simple, but the simplest things are often difficult. Gratitude is the only way to find our way back to the ground of our being and our way forward to the point of our being. I do not mean gratitude for this or that thing – but gratitude for the most obvious and most miraculous fact that we are alive. This is what we most take for granted….

To become grateful is to say of our lives "it is enough." This is the beginning of the transformation of spirit. To begin to say "I have enough" is the beginning of transformation on other levels of our being: I have enough. I am enough. I am good enough. This is not mere assertiveness;

it is an act of gratitude and faith. It enables us to say: "I don't need to have more, in order to act. I don't need to be more, in order to act. I don't need to speak better, in order to speak out. Just as I am, here and now, I can do good. I can make a difference." And once again the miracle, as 2000 years ago: The deaf hear, the dumb speak, the lame walk. Then, as now, this is called the power of the spirit, spirit that matters, that makes a difference in this world.…

Jesus said: "Happy are those who hunger and thirst for justice." Happy are those who desire to see and to share in the economy of grace. Who desire this, who are not driven. They will know that they will have enough energy, enough time, enough power to do good, to do justice. Happy are those who hunger for justice, for a world beyond cravings, beyond the permanent dissatisfaction of consumption and production. Happy are those who know what they are for, rather than what they are against; if we are only against something or someone, then we will become like what we are fighting against. But to seek justice, to love justice, is to become just.

Happy ar e those who know that spirit matters.

[Excerpt from Mary Jo Leddy's lecture in the series "Keeping the Spirit Alive" presented by St. Stephen's College]

Guiding questions

1. The above articles deal with terrorism, materialism and public health hazards respectively. Identify the issue(s) of justice in each.
2. Of the three types of justice, which does each article above treat? Explain.
3. How do the arguments made by Roche, Leddy and Bertell connect to the teaching of the Church? Does one have to be Catholic to understand the Catholic Church teaching on justice? Why or why not?

Mary's Magnificat

Mary's song is a wonderful example of justice imbued with love. Mary sings about the God of the covenant who has come to bring a new order to the world, bringing down the powerful and raising the lowly. Mary rejoices in what God is about to do for her people.

My soul magnifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour,
For he has looked with favour
on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Luke 1.47-55

Chapter review

Summary

- Justice under the old covenant is about persons relating consciously to the needs of others in terms of their human dignity as created, loved and prized by God.
- In the New Testament, God reveals the just and righteous one to be Jesus Christ. He is a model of how we are to live with and for others.
- There are three types of relationships that undergird the notion of justice:
  - Commutative justice: the relationship of one individual to another individual
  - Legal justice: the relationship of the individual to society or the state
  - Distributive justice: the relationship of society or the government to the individual
- The Catholic Church brings the gospel perspective of justice to bear on all political and economic systems.
- Private property is always to be seen in relation to all the goods of creation, which, in the final analysis, are to serve the needs of all.
- Catholic teaching takes as a point of departure the common good. It says that individual goods ought to serve the common good.
- The Catholic Church explicitly rejects belief in the automatic beneficence of market forces. It insists that the end result of market forces must be scrutinized, and if necessary corrected, in the name of natural law, social justice, human rights, and the common good.
- Governments redistribute wealth within a society by means of taxes. As the U.S. bishops stated it, "The tax system should be structured according to the principle of progressivity so that those with relatively greater financial resources pay a higher rate of taxation. The inclusion of such a principle in tax policies is an important means of reducing the severe inequalities of income and wealth in the nation."
- Through the parable of the landowner and the workers (Matthew 20.1-16), Jesus confronts our legalistic notion of what is right, a notion that misrepresents God's goodness. God's mercy surpasses all human measure and is not to be equated with strict human justice.
- The Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." Jesus asks us to interpret this rule in terms of generosity because God has been generous.

Glossary

common good: "The sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily." (*CCC*, #1906)

economics: Originally referred to the household and its management. Generally used to refer to the system of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services in a society.

Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

justice:

commutative: pertains to contractual relationships between individuals, and between institutions that have the legal status of a person

legal: the relationship of the individual to society, based on law and the enforcement of law

distributive: the relationship of government to the individual, and the government's obligations

private property: Something that is owned for one's exclusive use, or for one's exclusive control.

righteous: Acting in accord with divine or moral law.

solidarity: Unity with and among people, based on common interests, values, principles.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain the distinctions between commutative, legal and distributive justice.
2. Summarize the key teaching of Jesus in the parable of the landowner and the workers (Matthew 20.1-16).

Thinking and inquiry

3. What is the Golden Rule, and how does Jesus interpret it?
4. Describe the relationship between the private good and the common good in Catholic social teaching.

Communication

5. Create a class portfolio of stories of people who live justly.
6. Create a Web site (or design one on paper) that addresses from a Catholic perspective a critical justice issue in your community.

Application

7. Explain how taxation can be used by a government to address a particular injustice in society.
8. Analyze "Spirit that matters" by Mary Jo Leddy for what it means to be people of justice.

Let earth and sea and sky proclaim your glory

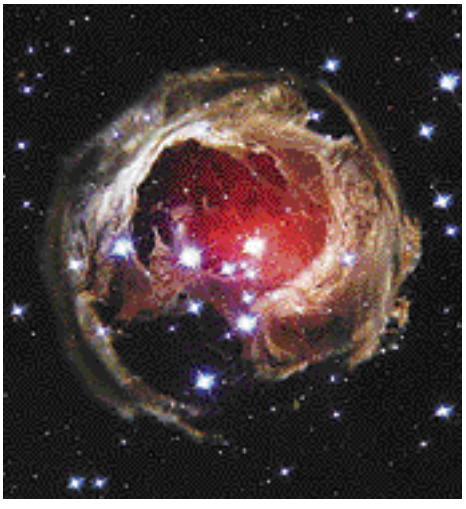
CHAPTER 14

I, the highest and fiery power,
have kindled every living spark
and I have breathed out nothing that can die…
I, the fiery life of divine being,
flame above the beauty of the fields;
I am the lightness of all the plants,
I shine in the waters,
in the sun, the moon and the stars, I burn
and by means of the airy wind,
I stir everything into quickness
as with invisible life sustaining all…
I, the fiery power, lie hidden in these things
and they blaze from me.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179)

God created the heavens and the earth

The earth must form one of our first considerations in our search for the good. The earth is not an object about which we can remain indifferent. It is indelibly connected with our origins; the cosmic dust that exploded into our universe and our earth is the same dust of which we are formed. It is generously marked by the glory of God and the Spirit of God shouting over the void, "Let there be…"



Hubble's view of an expanding halo of light around a distant star (V838 Monocerotis). The illumination of interstellar dust comes from the red super giant star at the middle of the image, which gave off a flashbulb-like pulse of light in 2002. The star is located at the outer edge of our Milky Way galaxy.

Since the stuff of which earth and cosmos is made is also the stuff of which we are made, ecology asks for a unique kind of ethics. The matter we work with – which we eat and drink, which we use for manufacturing, the air we breathe – is in a delicate balance. Our increasing power to interfere with or manipulate or extract the basic building blocks of matter has for the first time in history created a situation in which human activity has begun to affect the delicate ecological balance of the planet. In this context, ecology, or

Focus your learning

Cognitive

Explain how God's creation has a moral claim on humankind.

Practical

What does ecological stewardship mean in practical terms on a national, local and personal level?

Affective

What was St. Francis's insight into humankind's relationship with creation?

Key terms in this chapter

anthropocentrism
conservationist
dominion
ecology
globalist
hierarchist
preservationist
stewardship
theocentrism

Key thinkers

St. Francis of Assisi
Pope John Paul II
Catholic Bishops of Canada and the United States

the study of our relation to the earth, becomes a moral issue. Our choices affect not only the future of the earth but also that of humanity. This means – as we have come to understand justice – giving the earth its due. But even more than that, it means extending to the earth our solidarity.

Ecological responsibility

Education in ecological responsibility is very important: responsibility for oneself, for others and for the earth. This education cannot be rooted in mere sentiment or empty wishes. Its purpose cannot be ideological or political. It must not be based on a rejection of the modern world or a vague desire to return to some "paradise lost." Instead, a true education in responsibility entails a genuine conversion in ways of thought and behaviour.

Care for the environment is not an option. In the Christian perspective, it forms an integral part of our life, both personal and in society. Not to care for the environment is to ignore the Creator's plan for *all* of creation and results in an alienation of the human person.[1]

– Pope John Paul II

The ecological crisis

Ecology is the study of the earth's biosphere: the interacting web of plants and rocks, fungi and soils, animals and oceans, microbes and air that constitute the habitat of life on our planet. The definition comes from the Greek words *oikos*, or house, and *logia*, from *logos*, meaning word, reason or discourse. It is a discourse about our dwelling place, our house, which is the planet earth. The interrelationships in the biosphere show signs of extensive stress, largely as a consequence of human activity since the industrial revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The science of ecology is relatively new, but it has provided us with some important insights about the earth.

Oil from a spill contaminates this shoreline in the photo below.

1. All life is interrelated. In order for creatures to survive, they need other creatures, not only as food but also to adapt to and create a suitable environment. Human beings are related to many other creatures and the non-living world in varied and complex ways. Without phytoplankton and tropical rainforests to produce oxygen, we could not breath. Without grain crops, massive starvation would take place.
2. When one aspect of an ecosystem is changed, repercussions are felt throughout the biosphere. Here human beings have been the greatest culprits of intervening in the ecosystem. As Vaclav Smil (Distinguished Professor of Geography at the University of Manitoba, and the author of many books on energy and the environment) writes, "Humans alone violate the established order and, by cultivation upset the equilibrium."[2] In the 1950s,

the sea lamprey, a parasitic fish, was introduced into the Great Lakes accidentally after the St. Lawrence Seaway was opened. It attacked many of the larger freshwater fish, causing the fish population to collapse and wiping out the Great Lakes fisheries.

3. Some ecosystems are more resilient than others. Generally speaking, the greater the diversity of species, the greater the capacity to bounce back after ecological systems are disrupted. An Arctic tundra ecosystem, for example, is more fragile than a tropical rainforest.

Our beautiful, imperilled planet

We belong to a planet that is both beautiful and under great strain. Looking at pictures of exploding stars and colliding galaxies, we are enthralled by its magnificence and awesome power. We are in awe of its wondrous splendour as we contemplate the intricate beauty of the monarch butterfly or the complexity of the human genome. We have not lost our attraction to nature, to camping and cottages, to our national and provincial parks, or to the "wilderness." There remains in us a desire to live off the land, to return to the simple lifestyles that preceded modern urbanization. Nature continues to inspire writers and artists. Many have pointed to nature as a reflection of the sacred. However, the relation of the human to the biosphere has by all accounts become problematic.

One of the most pressing imbalances, global warming, is caused by the excess of carbon dioxide in the biosphere. It is increasing at a rate of about half a percent each year. This is largely the result of the burning of coal and oil, car exhausts, and other human activities. The increase in carbon dioxide brings about changes in the transport of energy through the atmosphere and in the growth and reproduction of plants. The physical effects of this marked increase can be seen in the changes of "rainfall, cloudiness, wind strength, and temperature, which are customarily lumped together in the misleading phrase 'global warming.' This phrase is misleading because the warming caused by the greenhouse effect of increased carbon dioxide is not evenly distributed… The warming mainly occurs where air is cold and dry, mainly in the arctic … mainly in winter … and mainly at night. The warming is real, but it is mostly making cold places warmer rather than making

hot places hotter."[3] This climate change affects Canada, in other words, more than it does more temperate regions of the earth. The abundance of carbon dioxide at one level is good for the growth of plants and in fact may well have resulted in a 15 percent increase in the world's food supply in the past thirty years. It may also have allowed plants to grow with less water. The earth needs large amounts of carbon dioxide. It is calculated that a mature field of corn in full sunlight uses up all the carbon dioxide within a metre from the ground in about five minutes. Without a constant access to carbon dioxide there would be no growth. If, for instance, there would be an increase of the amount of carbon dioxide transferred from the atmosphere to the earth in plants and topsoil each year it may well equalize or exceed the annual return of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere of about four billion tons. Much more needs to be known about this transfer. But the climate change is real and our high Arctic is a foremost victim of the increase of carbon dioxide.

It is this increased interaction between humans and the ecosystem which today is sounding alarm bells around the world. In 2003 the Canadian bishops wrote:

[L]ife on earth today is plagued with an unprecedented and accelerating ecological crisis. Deforestation, species extinction, climate change, ecosystem collapse, contamination of air and water, and soil erosion are just a few of the enormous ecological problems which we face in Canada and elsewhere in our world. How many of us remember a childhood spent playing under the sun, a beach we were once able to swim at, a river we were once able to drink from – but no more! The closing of the once overwhelmingly bountiful cod fishery in Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador is a particularly painful example of this crisis. Indeed, every region has been affected in some negative manner. Environmental health concerns are frequent, arising from the Sydney Tar Ponds in Nova Scotia to urban smog alerts in Toronto or Montreal, from contaminated mine sites in northern Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories to the safety of food that every Canadian family will eat.[4]

Hardly a day goes by without the news causing us to wonder about some aspect of our ecological crisis: Where will we dispose of our garbage? How will we deal with skin cancer caused by a depleting ozone layer? Should we allow logging of old-growth forests? This crisis is one of the most pressing of our contemporary problems. How did we get to this point?

Dominion or domination?

Some have placed the responsibility of the ecological disruption at the feet of Judeo-Christianity. Lynn White, in "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" (1967), claimed that the words of the Lord to Adam to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth," was like an invitation to ravage the earth. Let us begin by reading the whole text from the Book of Genesis:

> Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."
>
> God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.
>
> God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Genesis 1.26-31)

The "dominion" is not a dominion without responsibility to God. The Hebrew word *radah* (which we translate as "dominion") means to rule over so that *right order* may be achieved. In other words, in this passage of the Bible, God is inviting humanity to steward the animals and other forms of life, that is, to take God's place in taking care of them. It is certainly not understood as a mandate to mismanage or destroy. That is obvious also from praying the beautiful Psalm 8:

Psalm 8

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;
What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the
field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

A dominion of service, wisdom and love

The Church is responding to the ecological crisis through on-going reflection on the Scriptures and Tradition. Here are some reflections of the bishops of Florida on the interpretation of Genesis 1.26-31:

… Man's Lordship is not absolute, but ministerial: it is a real reflection of the unique and infinite Lordship of God… It is not the mission of an absolute and uncensurable master, but of a minister of the Kingdom of God, called to continue the work of the Creator, a work of life and peace. His responsibility, defined in the Book of Wisdom, is to govern "the world in holiness and justice" (Wisdom 9.3).

This dominion is not a power to exploit or use wantonly. Rather it is a stewardship, a caring cooperation in creation.[5]

Similarly, the bishops of Alberta state:

Humans are called to exercise dominion over the earth, a dominion of service, wisdom and love.[6]

O God of my
ancestors and
Lord of mercy,
who have made
all things by
your word,
and by your wisdom
have formed
humankind
to have dominion
over the creatures
you have made,
and rule the world
in holiness and
righteousness,
and pronounce
judgment in
uprightness of soul,
give me the wisdom
that sits by your
throne…

Wisdom 9.1-4

Where then does this notion of domination or licence to act without responsibility for the well-being of the earth come from? It emerged with the advent of the industrial revolution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Only then did we pass from the tool stage to the industrial machine with its need of energy and its capacity to mass produce. We recognize that this revolution was accompanied by a new mode of self -understanding. The seventeenth century saw the emergence of the modern notion of the self as a subject and a will to power. Coupled with the licence to promote self-interest and a utilitarian ethics based on maximum pleasure, the newly found freedom of the self was bound to have an impact on the environment. This self as a will to power saw itself as isolated from its environment as a sort of spectator. As subject it no longer understood itself as a participant within the forces of nature. The individual recognized itself as set apart, as a power that could "harness" nature. It understood itself as a worker trying to wrest its freedom from nature. Nature was there to be exploited, not honoured for itself. Despite the powerful discovery of the human self as free, we have also seen that there were negative repercussions to a self that understood itself as a will to power. Just as it has been difficult for this modern self to get beyond its self-interest in the political sphere, it has been equally difficult to accept responsibility for the ecology. We have too great a fear of what we would have to give up if we sought to live within the limits of sustainable development.

Guiding questions

1. What do you consider to be the most threatening ecological problems in your community?
2. What work of literature, music or visual art speaks to you most powerfully about the wonder of creation? Explain.
3. Discuss some of the causes of our ecological crisis.

Anthropocentrism or theocentrism?

*A **worldview** is a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic make-up of our world.*

James Sire,
The Universe Next Door

Our pattern of perception of how things are in our lives has been termed *worldview*. Perception is a powerful factor because it is how we perceive reality, how we think the world works and how we fit into our perception. This obviously affects how we behave, in terms of how we deal with both people and events, but also in how we plan and make decisions. Our worldview has a major influence on our future, because our decisions today will decide our future tomorrow. To take a simple example, the subjects we choose at school will influence the rest of our lives and in many cases play a major part in deciding our choice of career.

Thus our worldview affects the way we interact with people and nature, the major decisions we make over our long-term relationships, the way we spend our time at work and play and our beliefs in terms of our own abilities and how other people will perceive us. In short, one's worldview is an immensely powerful force in shaping our lives. Most of the time our worldview seems to be decided for us, either by

external factors such as family, our faith, the media and the people we allow to influence us, or by internal factors relating to our past experiences, beliefs, values and attitudes. In reality though, we have ways of controlling these factors by choosing the people we interact with, to an extent at least. We can choose to involve ourselves in experiences that we feel are appropriate to help us shape our future. Another simple example of this is the way that people will often obtain relevant job experience prior to applying for a particular subject at university or for a job.

Anthropocentrism: The anthropocentric worldview sees mankind at the centre of all reality and relationships. This worldview came out of the possessive individualism of the seventeenth century. Anthropocentrism focuses on the world as a resource base for human use (utility). Whatever is on the planet is for the service of humankind. When we have ecological problems we tend to call them *environmental* issues. But whose environment are we talking about? The assumption is that it is the human environment. But it is not enough only to think of how useful things are for us. That is why many thinkers have been moving towards thinking in terms of *ecological* issues because the term is not as anthropocentric. Naturally, some degree of anthropocentrism will enter into our thinking because it is we humans who are doing the thinking!

Anthropocentrism is opposed to the Christian *theocentric*, or God-centred, worldview. The earth belongs to God. Our lives and our being only find completion in the divine. With all of creation, we bow down to the Creator who has entrusted his creation to us. As creatures with a special gift of consciousness, we have a crucial role to play in sustaining a world that is both blessed and broken. While we have the ability to break the world as no other creature can do, we also have the ability to heal the world as no other creature can do. Both science and religion tell us that we are inextricably entwined in the web of life. Ecologists can show how people are part of a food chain. In the first chapter of Genesis, human creation is part of the whole sequence of creation.

The earth taken from Apollo 8 on Christmas Eve 1968. This picture was one of the first images that showed the earth. It reinforced the idea of the integrated unity of all the earth and the responsibility that humanity carries for its maintenance. The earth is our home together.

anthropocentrism: from the Greek *anthropos* – man. A worldview that considers the human being as the most significant entity in the universe.

theocentrism: from the Greek *theos* – God. A worldview that considers God to be the most significant entity in the universe.

Psalm 148

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights!

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!

Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created.

He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cann be passed.

Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps,

Fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!

Young men and women alike, old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven.

He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the Lord!

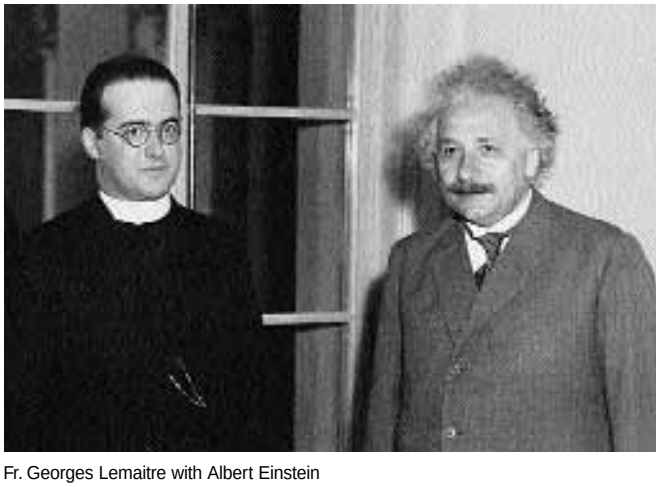
We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.

Aldo Leopold

St. Francis and the integrity of creation

Our Catholic tradition holds that creation shares with humankind the promise of salvation. The Bible contains many references to nature as a metaphor for God's beauty and majesty. Scriptural writers celebrate the beauty of creation and invoke all of creation including human beings to praise the Creator. As the Alberta bishops wrote: "Catholics see creation in a 'sacramental' way. The abundance and beauty of God's creation reveals to us something of the generosity of the Creator. God is present and speaks in the dynamic life forces of our universe and planet as well as in our own lives. Respect for life needs to include all creation."[7] The one whom our tradition holds out as an example of respecting the integrity of creation is St. Francis of Assisi.

In the Catholic tradition St. Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of ecology. Francis Bernadone (1182–1226) was born in the Umbrian town of Assisi, Italy, to a family belonging to the up and coming merchant class of citizens. In his youth, Francis was known for having an active social life. After being captured in a military skirmish around the year 1205, Francis began to experience a conversion. He abandoned his apprenticeship in his father's clothing trade to devote himself to solitary prayer. While praying before a crucifix in the run-down wayside chapel of San Damiano, Francis heard a voice telling him to rebuild the church. Francis understood this as a command to physically rebuild ruined churches in the Assisi area. Later, he perceived this vocation as one of living out the gospel ideals of poverty and simplicity. He experienced the presence of God in creation, calling different aspects of creation as brother or sister. (A popular film about Francis made in 1972 was entitled, "Brother Sun, Sister Moon.")



Fr. Georges Lemaitre with Albert Einstein

Many stories are told about Francis's affinity with creatures. One well-known story, "the wolf of Gubbio," can be seen as a parable of ecological reconciliation. As the story tells it, the wolf was eating local residents. Francis worked with both the wolf and the citizens of Gubbio to create a sense of affinity. The citizens of Gubbio were able to see themselves as part of nature rather than antagonistic towards creation.

By the year 1209, a group of followers had gathered around him, forming what was to become the Order of Friars Minor. These Franciscans, as they were to become known, tried to emulate Jesus Christ as presented in the gospels, preaching repentance and the love of God in the town squares and serving the needs of the poor, especially lepers. Francis composed a Rule, or Way of Life, in order to guide this growing community. Francis of Assisi died on October 4, 1226, and was canonized two years later.

The Franciscan tradition of affinity to creation continues through Church history through Catholic scientists who have seen in

their research an exploration of the handiwork of the creator. For example, Fr. Georges Lemaitre propounded the "Big Bang" theory of cosmic evolution in the 1920s. Developments of his idea are now held by most cosmologists as being the most likely explanation for the way that the universe is expanding.

It is for this reason that the Church holds that our dominion over creation given to us by the Creator is not absolute: "It is limited by the concern for the quality of life of [one's] neighbour, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation." (*CCC* #2415) With regard to animals we are reminded that they are God's creatures: "By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory." (*CCC* #2416) They may be used for food and clothing; they may be domesticated to help in our work and leisure. As to medical experimentation, it is permissible "if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives." (*CCC* #2417)

Guiding questions

1. Examine an ecological issue. Give examples of anthropocentric attitudes. What would be a theocentric response?
2. If St. Francis were alive today, what do you think he would do?
3. What is the role of the human being in ecological crisis?

Does nature have moral standing?

What is moral standing? We give moral standing or 'value' when we feel an obligation to an entity to treat it well or as something important when that entity has a "hold" on us that makes us regulate our actions. There are different approaches to the moral standing or value of nature: hierarchist, conservationist, preservationist, globalist and sacramental. Let us take the case of an upland marsh to illustrate the differences between these stances:

A landowner has a significant upland marsh. Not only is the ecosystem rich in plant and animal life, it also has a stream flowing out of it that flows through a nearby town. Each stance will have a different approach to the status of the upland marsh.

Hierarchist

Aristotle viewed nature as a *hierarchy*. He believed that lower or less rational creatures are made for the benefit of those that are higher and more rational. He wrote: "Plants exist for the sake of animals, and brute beasts for the sake of man." Similarly, Immanuel Kant wrote: "So far as animals are concerned we have no direct moral duties; animals are not self-conscious and are there merely as a means to an end. That end is man." For these thinkers only human beings have moral standing, so the welfare of other creatures matters only if they are useful to humans.[8] A hierarchist would justify clearing the marsh and turning it into a housing project for profit. For the hierarchist, disrupting the ecosystem is right and just because it belongs to the owner to do with it whatever he or she likes. In fact this is a utilitarian ethic.

Hierarchy refers to a structure in which there is a gradation from higher to lower levels of importance or power or authority.

Conservationist

Also for a conservationist, only humans have moral standing. Therefore what is done for nature is measured by the good it brings to humankind. Conservationists see nature as a resource. Nature may be preserved but it is only for wise human consumption. Many of our national and provincial parks were set up and run according to this stance. In Ontario, for example, provincial parks are operated by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Many parks are viewed as resources to serve people for their recreation and sometimes economic needs.

Setting up reserves for nature to protect an ecosystem for its own intrinsic right to exist has only happened in the past few decades in Canada. A conservationist might argue that it is wise to preserve an upland marsh because it acts as a reservoir to stop downstream flooding, thereby protecting life and property.

Preservationist

Nature is good in itself and needs to be protected against ill-considered exploitation. Particularly important to protect would be endangered ecosystems. If we return to the situation of the upland marsh, the preservationist would argue that the sentient species in that marsh would be deprived of their habitat. They have a right to live and they should thereby be protected. Aldo Leopold, the pioneering writer on ecology, holds that an action "is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." There is a complicating factor in trying to determine motives for preservation. In Canada, nature preserves have been established not only because of the preservationist stance but also from a utilitarian perspective. Proponents of preserving portions of ecosystems often argue from two perspectives: first, nature deserves to be protected; and second, this preservation will be useful because it might preserve threatened species and thereby enhance the gene pool.

Globalist

Globalists go beyond the preservationists by also including non-living ecological components. Both the living and non-living are part of creation and those all need sustaining. The upland marsh including the water, peat, and supporting geology all have moral standing because they are necessary for sustaining the rest of the ecosystem.

Sacramental

When in 2001 the Canadian and U.S. bishops wrote an extended meditation on the Columbia river and on the meaning of water as a vital part of the ecosystem, they brought in another dimension not touched on in the previous points. In the document *Caring for Creation and the Common Good,* the bishops insist that all creation has moral standing because it is ultimately God's. Traces of God are woven throughout creation. Creation is sacramental. In this perspective they go beyond the globalist perspective. The upland marsh is also God's creature and entrusted to people to be cared for. People are bound to care for that marsh. The marsh can be a revelation of God's power and majesty.

Sacrament

The Greek word mysterion *was translated into Latin by two terms:* mysterium *and* sacramentum. *In later usage the term* sacramentum *emphasizes the visible sign of the hidden reality of salvation which was indicated by the term* mysterium. *In this sense, Christ himself is the mystery of salvation: "For there is no other mystery of God, except Christ." The saving work of his holy and sanctifying humanity is the sacrament of salvation, which is revealed and active in the Church's sacraments (which the Eastern Churches also call "the holy mysteries").*

***CCC* #774**

Guiding questions

1. Does nature have moral standing? Which of these positions works with an ethical perspective?
2. How would a person operating out of each of the moral stances described above respond to these situations: (1) logging old growth forest in a woodlot; (2) flooding a valley to create a reservoir; (3) creating a park on the outskirts of town *as* a wildlife preserve that was off limits to all but park wardens?
3. Consider a watershed near which you live. What are the signs of the majesty of God?
4. Develop an ethical argument for the case of the upland marsh.

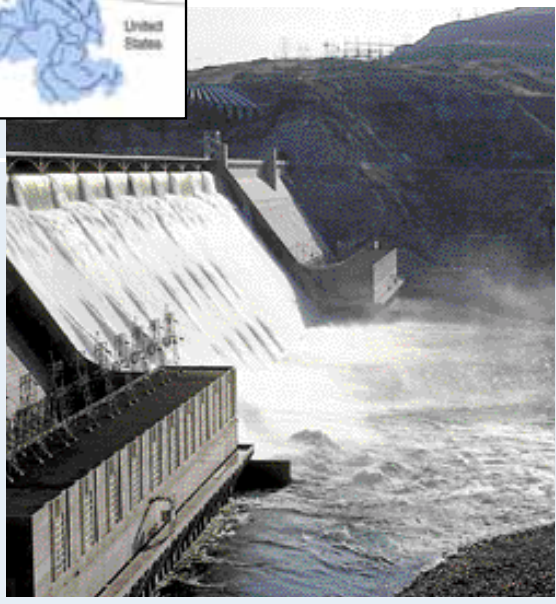
The map shows the large area of land in Canada and the United States which is influenced by the Columbia Watershed.

Dams similar to the one in the picture can be found throughout this and other watersheds.

The Columbia Watershed

The Columbia Watershed and all creation are entrusted to our loving care. As persons created in the image of God and as stewards of creation (Genesis 1–2), we are challenged to both use and respect created things. The watershed is ultimately God's; human beings are entrusted with responsibility for it, concern for its species and ecology, and regulation of its competitive and complementary uses.

The watershed, seen through eyes alive with faith, can be a revelation of God's presence, an occasion of grace and blessing. There are many signs of the presence of God in this book of nature, signs that complement the understandings of God revealed in the pages of the Bible, both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. [9]



Moral and ethical principles of ecological stewardship

Catholic ethical principles

As awareness of ecological issues grows, the Church as well reflects on these issues and develops its teaching. In 1990 Pope John Paul II issued a message for World Day of Peace – "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation" – on ecology and its ethical implications. In October 2003 the Canadian bishops' Social Affairs Commission put out a pastoral letter on the *Christian Ecological Imperative* urging a new concern for ecological justice. Above we referred to the joint Canadian / U.S. bishops' statement on the Columbia River Watershed. The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace has taken on a number of ecological issues as part of its mandate to educate and support efforts in the area of social justice (see "Right to water" on page 276). From these documents we draw a number of principles to consider in our relationship with the ecological system.

a) The ecological disharmony, according to the Book of Genesis, is a repercussion of human disharmony with God. After humanity's first sin God reminds them that nature would resist their efforts and work would be hard. Our peace with God is also a peace with nature. That is why Pope John Paul II has said that the ecological crisis is at its roots a moral crisis.

b) The earth is the Lord's and we are charged with being its stewards. It is the responsibility of humans to maintain biodiversity and to safeguard the earth to the extent that this is within our power. Our knowledge and our theories, while becoming more and more sophisticated, are still superficial, and our knowledge of the earth's evolution is still sparse. We are required therefore to gain as much information as possible as to what impact our activities are having on the earth's biosphere.

c) We are called to assume a God-centered perspective. This means understanding the earth as God's creation. As such, the earth carries traces of God's acts and presence.

d) God has given the earth as our common home. We live in this home with all its diversity which we must protect and respect.

e) The goods of this earth belong to all. The goods must be shared equitably. The earth is abundant in its gifts. We may not deprive people of its wealth because of greed, unecological business ventures, improper patenting of life forms, appropriation of water rights, etc.[10]

Guiding questions

1. What is a "steward"? Explain how Christians understand themselves as stewards of creation.
2. Why is the ecological crisis a moral crisis?
3. What impact would the principles have on our understanding of ecology?

Right to water

Praise be my Lord for our sister water,
which is very serviceable to us,
and humble and precious and clean.

St. Francis of Assisi,
The Canticle of the Sun

Water is the source of all life, and a primary symbol in religious traditions. Water cleanses, purifies, refreshes and inspires. The bible speaks of living waters, of becoming a fountain of living water, of longing for running water, and of justice flowing as a mighty river. Yet how can anyone speak about the "waters of life" if these waters can no longer sustain life? As Thomas Berry writes, "if water is polluted it can neither be drunk nor used for baptism. Both in its physical reality and its psychic symbolism it is a source not of life but of death."

Without water everything dies. Water is the basic element through which all life forms emerged, exist and flourish. Water is the life-blood of the planet, and maintains an intricate and delicately balanced circulation system that has evolved for over four billion years. Water not only serves the common good, but is part of the common good.

Today, water is threatened almost everywhere on earth. Many water systems are over-saturated with contaminants and carcinogens. The diversion and damming of rivers has resulted in drought, and in deserts where lush ecosystems once thrived. Ground water is diminishing and aquifers are mined. Bulk exports of thousands of gallons of freshwater are planned as if such ecological trauma would leave no negative footprint. These realities pose grave risks to human health and food security, as well as to the future of entire regions.

The world's fresh water resources are finite and are now becoming market commodities, no longer public goods. Currently, inadequate access to safe drinking water affects the well-being of over one billion people, and 2.4 billion persons lack access to adequate sanitation. Some persons living in urban slums in poor countries are forced to pay between four and one hundred times more for water than their middle- and upper-class fellow citizens. No wonder that for persons living in poverty, water has become, in the broad sense of the concept, a right to life issue. The tragedy of seven deaths and thousands of illnesses in Walkerton, Ontario, as a result of a contaminated water system has brought this concept into the Canadian consciousness, as well.

One of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs – which Canada is committed to achieving by 2015) is to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water. The United Nations has declared 2003 the International Year of Freshwater. This is a propitious time for Christian communities to reflect on the meaning of water in our lives, the need to preserve it and safeguard its purity, and also to redefine how it is shared. Not only should every human person enjoy the right to a safe environment but, specifically, every person's right to water must also be respected. Canada's bishops encourage all Canadians to sign the "Water Declaration" and to participate in the action campaigns of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace as a concrete way to advance these concerns.

Such a basic human right as access to water cannot be left to the whims of market forces to deliver. In our own country, Canadians should insist on government action to ban bulk exports of water, exclude water services from international trade agreements, ensure high quality standards of drinking water for all and guarantee that water utilities remain public, rather than private entities. Campaigns such as that of the Franciscan Family of Quebec, which raise our attention to international trade agreements that threaten our ability to protect and preserve supplies of freshwater, are worthy of our support. Members of Christian communities, especially in Catholic schools, are encouraged to include education related to environmental issues, especially water, in their upcoming programs.[11]

Water is a fundamental component of life. Those searching for life on other planets such as Mars are looking for signs of water. If water exists, the likelihood of life increases. Not only is water a fundamental building block of life, it is so important that it plays an important part of many religions' ritual actions. Consider, for example, the cleansing ablutions of Islam. In both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures water or the absolute lack of it plays a fundamental role. We read about the importance of the crossings of the Red Sea and Jordan River. The desert is also a central image. The lack of water makes the desert a place of relative ecological simplicity but it is also a place of trial for the wandering Israelites in Sinai and for Jesus leading up to his temptations. In the Church the water of baptism is a sacramental sign of God's grace.

Blessing and invocation of God over baptismal water

Father, you give us grace though sacramental signs,
which tell us of the wonders of our unseen power.

In baptism we use your gift of water,
which you have made a rich symbol of the grace
you give us in this sacrament.

At the very dawn of creation
your Spirit breathed on the waters,
making them the wellspring of all holiness.

The waters of the great flood
you made a sign of the waters of baptism
that make an end of sin
and new beginning of goodness.

Through the waters of the Red Sea
you led Israel out of slavery
to be an image of God's holy people,
set free from sin by baptism.

In the waters of the Jordan
your Son was baptized by John
and anointed with the Spirit.

Your Son willed that water and blood
should flow from his side as he hung upon the cross.

After his resurrection he told his disciples:
"Go out and teach all nations, baptizing them
in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit."

Father,
look now with love upon your Church
and unseal for her the fountain of baptism.

By the power of the Holy Spirit
give to this water the grace of your Son,
so that in the sacrament of baptism
all those whom you have created in your likeness
may be cleansed from sin and rise to a new birth of innocence
by water and the Spirit.[12]

Guiding questions

1. Why are the waters of creation, of the flood, of the Red Sea, of the Jordan River, of Jesus' side connected in this blessing to the water in a baptismal font immediately before a person receives the Sacrament of Baptism?
2. When Catholics enter a Church, they traditionally have immersed the fingers of their right hand into holy water to sign themselves with the sign of the cross. What is the significance of this action?
3. In what scripture stories or books of the Bible are the following references to water found?
   a. "a wind from God swept over the face of the waters"
   b. "the rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights"
   c. "lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it"
   d. "as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove"
   e. "at once blood and water came out"
4. What do these references have to do with the life-giving properties of water?

There is a deep symbolic meaning to the contamination and depletion of water. When we allow pollutants to contaminate our water supply, are we allowing toxic chemicals to flow through the waters of baptism? When we allow the deserts to increase by over-irrigation and global warming, are we increasing the times of trial to our children and children's children?

The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP) is the official international solidarity agency of the Catholic Church in Canada. It raises awareness and plans actions to help redress some of the world's most pressing problems. A campaign launched in 2003 in relation to water had four principles:

- Water is a sacred gift that connects all life.
- Access to clean water is a basic human right.
- The value of the earth's fresh water to the common good takes priority over any possible commercial value.
- Fresh water is a shared legacy, a public trust and a collective responsibility.

Development and Peace, along with the Canadian bishops, call upon all Canadians to become aware of the ecological crisis and its causes, and to respond in ways that are in keeping with these four principles. Log on to their Web site (www.devp.org) to check on the status of their campaign, and current issues.

Guiding questions

1. In what sense is the water crisis an environmental crisis? ecological crisis? spiritual crisis? moral crisis?
2. What is the most pressing aspect of the water crisis that your community faces?
3. What actions can you take both individually and as a school community to care for water resources, and to promote access to fresh, clean water for those whose access is limited?

The obligation to reduce ecological impact

In face of the gravity of the ecological crisis, how does our initial shock and outrage at the various ecological disasters turn into constructive actions? Sometimes ecological threats are not immediately obvious to the senses. Ozone layer depletion cannot be directly observed except with sophisticated satellite imagery. Other situations are too complex to reduce them to facile slogans and simple actions. Pictures of oil-soaked birds, foul chemicals pouring into rivers, and smokestacks belching noxious waste into the sky often evoke emotions of outrage. But what is the appropriate form of action? I may feel totally powerless as an individual and yet I know that there have been individuals who have had the courage to intervene. How can an individual become a movement? When do we resolve to act? What is the best strategy for ecological change? How do I know what I am doing is right? How is this action a reflection of the gospel's message of justice and love?

On June 10, 2002, Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople signed a Declaration on the Environment entitled "We Are Still Betraying the Mandate God Has Given Us." In this document, the leaders laid down some considerations for those undertaking ecological action.

> We therefore invite all men and women of good will to ponder the importance of the following ethical goals:
>
> 1. To think of the world's children when we reflect on and evaluate our options for action.
>
> 2. To be open to study the true values based on the natural law that sustain every human culture.
>
> 3. To use science and technology in a full and constructive way, while recognizing that the findings of science have always to be evaluated in the light of the centrality of the human person, of the common good, and of the inner purpose of creation. Science may help us to correct the mistakes of the past, in order to enhance the spiritual and material well-being of the present and future generations. It is love for our children that will show us the path that we must follow into the future.
>
> 4. To be humble regarding the idea of ownership and to be open to the demands of solidarity. Our mortality and our weakness of judgment together warn us not to take irreversible actions with what we choose to regard as our property during our brief stay on this earth. We have not been entrusted with unlimited power over creation; we are only stewards of the common heritage.
>
> 5. To acknowledge the diversity of situations and responsibilities in the work for a better world environment. We do not

expect every person and every institution to assume the same burden. Everyone has a part to play, but for the demands of justice and charity to be respected the most affluent societies must carry the greater burden, and from them is demanded a sacrifice greater than can be offered by the poor. Religions, governments, and institutions are faced by many different situations; but on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity all of them can take on some tasks, some part of the shared effort.

6. To promote a peaceful approach to disagreement about how to live on this earth, about how to share it and use it, about what to change and what to leave unchanged. It is not our desire to evade controversy about the environment, for we trust in the capacity of human reason and the path of dialogue to reach agreement. We commit ourselves to respect the views of all who disagree with us, seeking solutions through open exchange, without resorting to oppression and domination.[13]

Guiding questions

1. Does everyone have an obligation to reduce ecological impact? Why or why not?
2. Reflect on "We Are Still Betraying the Mandate God Has Given Us."
   (a) What are the underlying values of each of the statements given?
   (b) What are practical actions that could result from each of these statements?
3. Which of the strategies listed below under "What can you do to protect the environment?" are most practical in your school? Why?

What can you do to protect the environment?

1. Set up a study group on ecology in your school or church.
2. Engage in actions designed to minimize your ecological footprint.

3. Participate actively in the advocacy campaigns of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, and contribute financially to projects for social and ecological justice.
4. Oppose the bulk export of water from Canada.
5. Participate in the ecological justice activities of environmental groups.
6. Assess the energy use of your school.
7. Engage your political representatives on the issues of social and ecological justice.

Renew the face of the earth

All of creation is of God, and is as yet unfinished. We are called as co-creators to join God's work to repair some of creation's wounds which have been inflicted due to our ecological sins. We are also called to creative actions of solidarity with those who have less access to the benefits of God's bountiful creation. The "Lover of Life," who came so that we all might have life and have it abundantly, continues to provide us with opportunities to renew the face of the earth.[14]

St. Francis' hymn to Brother Sun

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord,
All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour and all blessings.
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your Name.

Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour,
Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
In the heavens You have made them bright, precious and fair.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
And fair and stormy, all weather's moods,
by which You cherish all that You have made.

Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,
So useful, humble, precious and pure.

Praised be You my Lord through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You my Lord through our Sister,
Mother Earth
who sustains and governs us,
producing varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

Praise be You my Lord through those who grant pardon
for love of You and bear sickness and trial.
Blessed are those who endure in peace,
By You Most High, they will be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord through Sister Death,
from whom no-one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!

Chapter review

Summary

- Care for the environment is not an option. In the Christian perspective, it forms an integral part of our personal life and of life in society. Not to care for the environment is to ignore the Creator's plan for *all* of creation and results in an alienation of the human person. The earth must form one of our first considerations in our search for the good.
- Ecology is the study of the earth's biosphere. All life is interrelated. When one aspect of the ecosystem is changed, repercussions are felt throughout the biosphere.
- Life on earth today is plagued with an unprecedented and accelerating ecological crisis. Deforestation, species extinction, climate change, ecosystem collapse, contamination of air and water, and soil erosion are just a few of the enormous ecological problems which we face.
- Humans are called to exercise dominion over the earth, a dominion of service, wisdom and love.
- Our worldview affects the way we interact with people and nature. The *anthropocentric* worldview sees mankind at the centre of all reality and relationships, and focuses on the world as a resource base for human use (utility). The Christian *theocentric*, or God-centred, worldview sees the earth as belonging to God. Our lives and our being only find completion in the divine. We have a crucial role to play in sustaining a world that is both blessed and broken.
- Catholics see creation in a "sacramental" way. The abundance and beauty of God's creation reveals to us something of the generosity of the Creator. God is present and speaks in the dynamic life forces of our universe and planet as well as in our own lives. Respect for life needs to include all creation.
- In the Catholic tradition St. Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of ecology.
- There are different approaches to the moral standing or value of nature:
  - Hierarchist
  - Preservationist
  - Sacramental
  - Conservationist
  - Globalist
- Some key Catholic ethical principles:
  - Ecological disharmony is a repercussion of human disharmony with God.
  - We are called to a God-centred perspective on ecology, understanding the earth as God's creation.
  - God has given the earth as our common home with all its diversity which we must protect and respect.
  - The goods of the earth belong to all and must be shared equitably.

Glossary

anthropocentrism: From the Greek *anthropos* – man. A worldview that considers the human being as the most significant entity in the universe.

conservationist: One who sees nature as a resource to be preserved for wise human consumption.

dominion: Word used in Genesis to describe humankind's rule over creation, so that right order may be achieved. Humans are called to exercise dominion over the earth, a dominion of service, wisdom and love.

ecology: Study of the earth's biosphere. From the Greek words *oikos,* or house, and *logia*, meaning word, reason or discourse. It is a discourse about our dwelling place, planet earth.

globalist: One who regards all elements of nature, living and non-living, as worthy of protection.

hierarchist: One who views nature in terms of a hierarchy of living creatures, from the lowest microbe to the highest – human being. The lower forms are meant to serve the higher forms.

preservationist: One who views all living creatures as part of an integrated ecosystem, all having value in and of themselves.

stewardship: How humankind is to exercise dominion over creation: a caring cooperation with God, a caring for creation with a sense of service, motivated by love.

theocentrism: From the Greek *theos* – God. A worldview that considers God to be the most significant entity in the universe.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain why care for the environment, from a Christian perspective, forms an integral part of our personal life and of life in society.
2. Distinguish and explain these different approaches to the moral standing of nature. Use an example.
   - Hierarchist
   - Preservationist
   - Sacramental
   - Conservationist
   - Globalist

Thinking and inquiry

3. Explain the relationship between "dominion" and "stewardship" from the Catholic perspective.
4. Explain how one's worldview impacts one's decision making. Distinguish between an anthropocentric and a theocentric worldview in your answer.

Communication

5. The text features several psalms and hymns that proclaim the glory of God's creation. Choose one, and develop a creative and effective communication or proclamation of that psalm or hymn.
6. Create an "ecological calendar" that features ethical principles and teachings from Church teaching and Scripture. Provide suggestions for applying these principles and teachings throughout the year.

Application

7. Choose one of the key Catholic ethical principles and show what kind of impact its application to a current ecological issue would make.
8. Explain how prayer of praise and thanksgiving is central to any action plan that you will take to reduce your ecological footprint.

"If I sin, what do I do to you?" (Job 7.20)

CHAPTER 15

[Jesus] breathed on them and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit.
If you forgive the sins of any,
they are forgiven them;
if you retain the sins of any,
they are retained."
John 20.22-23

Death by sin

On a flight from Melbourne to Hong Kong Matt Manson happened to have been given a seat next to Mother Teresa. In the course of the flight Mother Teresa said to him, "Forgiveness is the greatest thing in the world." She told him how one day as she and some of her nuns were putting some people needing care in an ambulance she heard the cry of an old woman. She looked up and down the street but could see no one. But the cry for help continued. Finally she spotted a trashcan against the wall and in it an old woman, bleeding and in terrible state. "Please, please help me," the woman pleaded. "My son put me here to die."

They took her out of the garbage can and brought the old woman back to the House. They washed her and cared for her. All day and all during the night the sisters talked with her, prayed with her and stayed with her in an attempt to get her to forgive her son. Early the next morning, the old woman turned to the nuns and said, "I want to say something to you. I can remember well the day when my son was a young boy and something happened. I shut him out of my home and closed my heart to him. It has never been opened since. From that point that boy took the wrong path. I am to blame because he had no one to turn to." Mother Teresa said to her, "If we got him here now would you ask him to forgive you?" She replied, "Yes, yes, find him. Find him." And she told the sisters where to go.

They found the son and persuaded him to come with them. Mother and son confronted each other. The mother said to the son, "Son, I shut you out of my life when you were a boy. You had nobody to turn to. I am to blame for the life of misery that you have to lead. Will you please forgive me?" The man – a tough man by all accounts – suddenly broke down and wept. "Of course, of course," he said. "But will you forgive me?" Shortly after the woman died. "She was at peace," Mother Teresa said.[1]

Focus your learning

Cognitive
Explain the effects of sin on the sinner, and on his or her relationship with God and with others.

Practical
What is necessary for forgiveness and reconciliation to take place?

Affective
How does forgiveness and reconciliation restore us to wholeness?

Key terms in this chapter

absolution
intentional act
penance
penitent
repentance
restorative justice
sin: mortal and venial
social sin

This powerful story of forgiveness is significant also for what it says about sin. Both the mother and the son had done something that literally destroyed them. The mother had turned her son out of her home and refused to have anything to do with him. The son had ruined his life by taking "the wrong path" and in the end had shoved his mother into a garbage can to die. Their lives were forever changed by what they had done to each other.

The wrong that they did to each other our Judeo-Christian tradition calls sin. Sin is a deeply religious concept. Its spectre first arose in the writings of the prophets. It measured the infinite distance between the holiness of God and people's actions toward God, toward one another, and toward one's self. Over the centuries Christians have realized how powerful and devastating this capacity to sin is. As we saw in Chapter 10, St. Augustine made the awesome discovery that sin is the turning against one's deepest self. He discovered a capacity in us that can literally destroy us. Through our free actions we shape our identities and our deepest selves. Our own actions can also destroy us at the core. Christians understand sinful actions to be self-destructive because they destroy the relationship that is at the very root of human existence. That relationship is our relationship with God. Sin reaches into the very depths of our heart and soul. Sin shatters us at the point where we are "image and likeness of God." Sin is both an offence against God and against those who reflect the image and likeness of God. As Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25.40). Our sins affect our relationship with God, that is, our very identity. Sin is a form of self-destruction.[2]

Guiding questions

1. How did sin destroy the mother and her son?
2. How did they stop this destructive process?
3. How does sin affect us at the very core of our being?

What is sin?

Sin is an intentional act, thought, word or deed

Sin is an act committed freely and with deliberation. Sin is not a mistake or an error. Mistakenly erasing someone else's computer file or accidentally breaking something valuable is not an intentional act and therefore is not sin.

Sins are actions or omissions

Sins are actions that I do or I do not do on purpose. Since they are committed deliberately and freely by me, I must admit responsibility for them. I am accountable to God for acts and omissions that violate God's law of love. Since I am the author of sinful acts, I bear the consequence of these actions, which is guilt. Guilt is the internal burden of sin: what sin feels like within.[3]

Sin can be venial or mortal

Catholic tradition distinguishes between actions that are grave, or "mortal," (mortal: from the Latin *mors – death*) and actions that are less serious, or "venial." Mortal sin is destructive not only of our relationship with God and others; it is also self-destructive. Hence, to call sin "mortal" is very appropriate since we are freely and deliberately turning ourselves against the source of all life and love. Mortal sin negatively affects our capacity to relate to others, God and self freely and peacefully. These negative effects of sin on our core rarely result from an isolated sinful action. Putting the mother in a garbage can was an action that probably was years in the making. "Venial" refers to those sinful actions which harm our relationship to God and others. For

Definition of sin in the *Catechism*

1849: Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbour caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law."

1850: Sin is an offense against God: "Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight." Sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it. Like the first sin, it is disobedience, a revolt against God through the will to become "like gods," knowing and determining good and evil. Sin is thus "love of oneself even to contempt of God." In this proud self-exaltation, sin is diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, which achieves our salvation.

1851: It is precisely in the Passion, when the mercy of Christ is about to vanquish it, that sin most clearly manifests its violence and its many forms: unbelief, murderous hatred, shunning and mockery by the leaders and the people, Pilate's cowardice and the cruelty of the soldiers, Judas' betrayal – so bitter to Jesus, Peter's denial and the disciples' flight. However, at the very hour of darkness, the hour of the prince of this world, the sacrifice of Christ secretly becomes the source from which the forgiveness of our sins will pour forth inexhaustibly.

Mortal and venial sin

1857: For a *sin* to be *mortal*, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent."

1861: Mortal sin is a radical possibility of human freedom, as is love itself. It results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices forever, with no turning back. However, although we can judge that an act is in itself a grave offence, we must entrust judgment of persons to the justice and mercy of God.

1862: One commits *venial sin* when, in a less serious matter, one does not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when one disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent.

1864: "Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven." There are no limits to the mercy of God, but anyone who deliberately refuses to accept his mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of ... sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss.

example, how many hurts, insults and assaults were exchanged between the mother and son that led to her degrading abandonment in the garbage bin? In other words, venial sin sets us on a slippery slope, seducing us into more and more actions that become increasingly grave, often ending with a mortally sinful act. It is easy to delude ourselves into justifying sinful actions as being not really very "serious," especially when our capacity to choose is diminished by habitual behaviour.

Sin destroys the relational

The Bible presents sin as a breach of the covenant with God. Recall Chapter 4 – a covenant is a *relationship freely offered* by God to a people who *freely respond* to God's offer to be God's people. The Ten Commandments describe how the people of this covenant are to live faithfully in their relationship with God. The beatitudes describe a new covenant of God's kingdom come in Jesus. When the Bible talks about sin, it is referring to a breaking of this covenant. Sin is "missing the mark" or falling short of living according to the covenantal life. Although frequently these transgressions are against people, the sins are equally directed against God. Sin is infidelity or betrayal of the covenant. Being unfaithful to God happens when we live our lives for created goods like money, power and fame instead of using these goods to relate to others as God calls us to do. Living for created goods rather than for God is like creating false gods for ourselves. In terms of the covenant, this is the sin of idolatry. Unfaithfulness to the covenant affects our relationship with God and with one another, and also affects who we are. By sinning, we deliberately choose to distance ourselves from God and from our neighbour.

Sin is an enduring state of hard-heartedness or moral blindness

Just as our actions can become habits that shape us into this or that type of person, so too habitual sin can reshape the core of our being. It can destroy the humanity in our hearts, esteem the dehumanizing fantasies of our mind and close down our hope of becoming a truly loving person. This can be described as a sinful state of mind or heart or soul. The sinful state, or "hardness of heart," corrodes and destroys our capacity to relate to others. If at our core we are relational, then when we succumb to hard-heartedness, our freedom to be the kind of person God has called us to be is diminished. At this point our sin can be said to have power over us. Instead of the grace of God moving us to action, it is our rebellious hard-heartedness or selfish obsessions leading us against others and against God or seducing us to substitute other created goods (power, money, popularity) as gods in our lives. This state of sin has the power to alienate us from God, others and even ourselves. Alienation is contrary to the communion of love that God has created and has prepared for us. Yet, we are the ones who propagate this destructive, alienating power from the core of our being. Because we are relational, the alienating power of sin spreads throughout our community and the world. This is the power of sin that resides within the human heart, mind and soul.

This applies to groups as well as individuals. Groups of people can succumb to the power of sin and get stuck in their sinful ways. Groups or institutions may try to legitimize sin by enacting laws that are an offence against God and against

Guiding questions

1. Why does sin affect us at our deepest self? Why are some sins called "mortal"?
2. How is sin an act against God?
3. Distinguish venial from mortal sin.

Social sin in the *Catechism*

1869: Thus sin makes men accomplices of one another and causes concupiscence, violence, and injustice to reign among them. Sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to the divine goodness. "Structures of sin" are the expression and effect of personal sins. They lead their victims to do evil in their turn. In an analogous sense, they constitute a "social sin."

human dignity. The Bible points to what it calls the "sin of the world" (John 1.29), indicating the historical massive alienation of humanity from God. Sin has been in this world as long as there have been human beings. All of us enter into a world contaminated by sin. No one is free from its effects. Sin has affected the very fibre of our existence in the world.

The impact of sin on institutions and society

So far we have looked at sin as action or omission that destroys our relationship to God, others and ourselves. We have seen how living in a state of sin can corrode and destroy the communion and solidarity to which God calls us. What impact does sin have as it spreads throughout the institutions of society?

There is another face of evil that goes beyond individual responsibility and individual self-destructiveness. Social or structural evil can be manifest in many ways and under a variety of names: apartheid, Holocaust, ethnic cleansing, genocide, anti-Semitism, fascism, "dirty war" and terrorism.

During the twentieth century, more than 100 million people were killed in more than 250 wars. Massive numbers of refugees have desperately been knocking on the doors of recipient countries with heart-rending stories of hatred, ethnic cleansing, rape, police harassment, and death threats. In the twentieth century brutal genocides affected the Jews (1941–1945), the Roma (1940–1945), Cambodians (1975), Rwandans (1994) and Kosovar Albanians (1997). As well, dictatorial regimes in Russia and China killed directly or indirectly more than 50 million of their own people.[4] We are silenced by these atrocities because such crimes are truly unspeakable. Attempting to explain or justify them would be blasphemous. The stories of survivors are painful to hear. One of the most powerful stories of a survivor of Auschwitz, a Jewish extermination camp during the Second World War, came from Primo Levi.

In *The Awakening*, Primo Levi tells the harrowing story of how, as an Italian Jew, he struggled to retain his humanity in the death camp of Auschwitz. When he finally escapes at the end of the war, he arrives by train in Trzebinia in Poland. He steps off the train in zebra clothes. He attracts a group of people who ask him all sorts of questions in Polish. He is not able to communicate with them except in German until suddenly a lawyer approaches who speaks French and German. Here is Primo Levi's account of his first encounter with the outside world:

> I had a torrent of urgent things to tell the civilized world: my things, but everyone's things of blood, things which (it seemed to me) ought to shake every conscience to its very foundations. In truth, the lawyer was courteous and benevolent: he questioned me, and I spoke at dizzy speed of those so recent experiences of mine, of Auschwitz nearby, yet, it seemed unknown to all, of the hecatomb from which I alone escaped, of everything. The lawyer translated into Polish for the public. Now I do not know Polish, but I know how one says "Jew" and how one says "political"; and I soon realized that the translation of my account, although sympathetic, was not faithful to it. The lawyer described me to the public not as an Italian Jew, but as an Italian political prisoner.

Expressions of anti-Semitism have occurred during certain periods of Christian art. The illustration above shows a carved figure from the cathedral of Strasbourg, intended to represent Judaism as the personification of the Jewish Synagogue. The figure is intentionally blindfolded, symbolizing impaired vision and the inability to see the truth.

Slave labourers in the Buchenwald concentration camp at Weimar, Germany. Many had died from malnutrition before they were liberated by Allied Forces.

I asked him why, amazed and almost offended. He replied, embarrassed: "C'est mieux pour vous. La guerre n'est pas finie." ("It is better for you. The war is not over.")…

> I felt my sense of freedom, my sense of being a human among humans, of being alive, like a warm tide ebb from me. I found myself suddenly old, lifeless, tired beyond human measure; the war was not over, there was always war. My listeners began to steal away; they must have understood. I had dreamed, we had always dreamed, of something like this, in the nights of Auschwitz: of speaking and not being listened to, of finding liberty and remaining alone. After a while I remained alone with the lawyer; a few minutes later he also left me, urbanely excusing himself.[5]

Primo Levi remembered the desperate efforts of a Yiddish singer in Auschwitz who each night came into his Lager to remember, to sing the tale of suffering and of the victims so that what had happened might not be forgotten. Primo Levi could not contain himself to tell the story of Auschwitz when he escaped. He wanted to talk of his experiences. For him the experience in all its gruesomeness and evil was so terrifying that he was desperate to tell it. He needed the acknowledgment of others to know whether he really had survived the experience. In its absolute starkness Levi's experience is the witness of the depravity of the evil that can invade governments and communities. His story haunts us and makes us ask the questions we are forever afraid to ask: Am I capable of terrible actions? Is there any hope in life? Is there a future worth living in face of the suffering of the past?

The people of Trzebinia could not bear the enormity of the events that had taken place so near to them. They drifted away into their homes. Most hearts cannot bear to take on the depth of these sufferings and want to numb themselves against the pain. We ask to be left alone. We do not want these spectres stirred up because their violence is too horrible to contemplate! And yet, such inaction is a serious omission in the face of such evil. Deliberately hiding from the reality of such cruelty and inhumanity is contrary to God's law of love calling us to communion and solidarity with all people.

Large-scale violence, hatred, suffering, human degradation and death extend far beyond Europe and the World War II era. Around the globe, societies stagger under the social evils of hatred, violence and death. Think, for example, of the long-standing conflicts between the Israelis and the Palestinians, or between Hindus and Muslims in India. Consider too the long history of violence surrounding separatist groups like the IRA in Northern Ireland or Basque separatists in Spain. How are we to understand these very complex conflicts? As people of faith and members of the Church, how are we to find ways of reconciliation? Although it will not be possible to go into all the theories, it may be instructive to mention a few points that have come out of recent scientific research.

Seeking to understand social evil

Fundamentally, the unconverted human heart is the basis of the world's evil. "The root of evil ... lies in free and responsible persons who have to be converted by the grace of Jesus Christ in order to live and act as new creatures in the love of neighbour and in the effective search for justice, self-control and the exercise of virtue."[6] The true practice of love of neighbour and effective work for justice face difficult challenges when basic human needs are not met due to particular historical or social conditions. The research of Vern Redekop (Director of the Canadian Institute for Conflict Resolution at St. Paul University, Ottawa) and René Girard (author and longtime professor at Stanford University) can help us to understand these challenges.

Threats to identity

Conflicts involving identity contribute to the social evil we witness. Most conflicts come out of a preoccupation with a particular pain, a sense of being a victim of others, and a resentment about an injustice perpetrated against us. Most of these conflicts have to do with issues of identity. When people feel that their identity is threatened they will go to great lengths to remove the threat. Violence often follows. What are these human identity needs? Vern Redekop identifies five: meaning, action, connectedness, security and esteem.[7] A denial or conflict about any of these five can lead to violence. For example, a Jew, Hindu, Catholic, Muslim or a secularist sees the world differently. What is meaningful in the worldview of one is understood differently in another. The secularist may find religion to be superstition, while for the Muslim the Quran is the deepest source of truth. Different ideological positions on abortion, for example, have led to confrontations and physical violence. As another example, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, have clearly shown how much individuals and states value security, and how violence can consume a people who feel threatened in their existence. Consider also the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, based to a large extent on the identity and security needs of both these peoples. The need for identity touches us at the heart of the self. If these needs are not satisfied or feel threatened, we can strike out towards others in surprisingly vicious ways.[8]

Rivalries

Another contributing factor to social evil is frustrated desires for things that we perceive to be indispensable for our well-being. What we desire more than anything else are what we call human identity needs (meaning, action, connectedness, security and esteem) – all the things we think we must have to be whole. But what happens when two people or groups desire these same things? The ensuing rivalry can escalate to completely dominate their lives. The frustration of these desires can easily lead to violence. For example, the rivalry between the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda, which ultimately led to the slaughter of 800,000 people, can be understood as a case of rivalry that became lethal.[9]

Need for scapegoats

A third category often used to explain social evil is called the scapegoat function. The call for a scapegoat emerges whenever a community suffers violence or whenever a catastrophe overwhelms a community; for example, a child is abducted, a SARS outbreak threatens the health of a community, a car bomb explodes. There follows an immediate explosion of emotion and an automatic search for a culprit. René Girard says, "The process of finding a surrogate victim (the real or imagined perpetrator) constitutes a major means, perhaps the sole means, by which humans expel from their consciousness the truth about their violent nature." Violence in a school, bullying, for instance, usually ends with the finding and expelling of a surrogate victim upon whom all the violence of the school is placed. Usually, after such a purifying action, peace is restored for a time. The surrogate victim has become the scapegoat for all the violence and in true biblical fashion the scapegoat is expelled from the community. The scapegoat is made to look like an outsider who introduced the violence into the community. The cure is to rid the community of this person. In this way Jesus is presented as a scapegoat upon whom the sin of the world was placed. By executing him outside

Sin offering: Leviticus 16.20-22

Aaron shall present the live goat. Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region.

the city, the leadership thought that they had overcome the threat to their community.[10]

These three categories may not explain all the violence around us and perhaps we are only beginning to understand it. More important, however, are the ways in which today we must seek to overcome violence, by arriving at reconciliation through forgiveness. It is to these that we must now turn.

Guiding questions

1. Give some examples of social evil. Find examples of how in your school scapegoating takes place.
2. What are some of the human identity needs that are so often the cause of violence when they are lacking? What is your reaction when your identity is attacked (name-calling, exclusion…)?

The gift of forgiveness

In her conversation with Matt Manson Mother Teresa said at one point: "Forgiveness is the greatest thing in the world."[11] Almost everyone has at one time or another felt that they have not been treated correctly. It may have been as little as a glance interpreted as a mocking look. Or it may have been more serious. The student who is constantly bullied, the young woman who is treated as a sexual object, the teen who is ridiculed for his looks – each one undergoes profound changes in his or her outlook on life and on the possibility of forming relationships. How each one responds varies. Some retreat in shame and reproach themselves as cowards or as worthless. Others internalize the way others regard them. Still others respond by repaying in kind, seeking to get even with the perpetrator.

Those who have suffered violence or humiliation at the hands of another human being find it almost impossible to think of forgiveness. Imagine how difficult it would be to forgive someone who has killed a loved one. Forgiveness without an acknowledgement on the part of the perpetrator almost always feels like a betrayal to oneself or to the loved one. How can one forgive if the perpetrator refuses to admit guilt? Must one forgive? What does it mean to forgive?

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

Matthew 18.21-22

Vengeance

"Vengeance is a passion to get even. It is a hot desire to give back as much pain as someone gave you. The problem with revenge is that it never gets what it wants; it never evens the score. Fairness never comes. The chain reaction set off by every act of vengeance always takes its unhindered course. It ties both the injured and the injurer to an escalator of pain. Both are stuck on the escalator as long as parity is demanded, and the escalator never stops, never lets anyone off."[12]

A story tells that two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand: "TODAY MY BEST FRIEND SLAPPED ME IN THE FACE." They kept on walking until they found an oasis, where they decided to have a swim. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After the near-drowning, he wrote on a stone: "TODAY MY BEST FRIEND SAVED MY LIFE." The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone. Why?" The other friend replied: "When someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

Forgiveness between individuals

Forgiveness between two individuals is different from reconciliation between two groups. Let us begin with forgiveness between individuals. Below we will examine in more detail what reconciliation for social evil might be.

What forgiveness is not

- Forgiveness is not to tolerate the wrong that the other did to me. I do not have to accept injustice in order to forgive. What is wrong remains wrong even after forgiveness is given. In fact, forgiveness requires that I recognize the wrong and the wrongdoer. Forgiving the wrongdoer does not mean the wrongdoing or the injustice is made acceptable or right.
- Forgiveness is not to forget what happened. Forgiveness does not mean that I erase the wrong from my memory, as if it never existed. I cannot change the past. I can, however, get another perspective on the wrong done to me. I can, for instance, place a wrong or a sin into the framework of the story of Jesus' passion and resurrection. *I* may change, but it does not mean that I must forget what may have led to my change.
- Forgiveness is not to give up my right to justice as though forgiveness were a legal category. Forgiveness goes beyond the balancing of rights. It goes beyond administering justice to take account of the whole event by touching the acts of the other, the trauma of those acts and their lasting consequences. Forgiveness also seeks to mend the affected relationships. It goes beyond justice, but it does not mean that once I enter into the mode of forgiveness that I can no longer turn to justice. Forgiveness without justice strips forgiveness from being a gift; justice without forgiveness leaves us with the status quo of a tit for tat.
- Forgiveness does not invite someone to hurt me again. I need not fear that if I forgive, I am just giving a licence to the bully, the sexual offender, the thief, or the domestic abuser to continue the hurt. To forgive is not only a gift for the other – at times undeserved or unaccepted – but it is even more so a gift to the self. The one who forgives is also transformed by forgiveness.[13]

In forgiving we do not lose anything, rather we receive a gift.
Father Andrija Vrane, Bosnia, 1998

Mortal sin, by attacking the vital principle within us – that is, charity – necessitates a new initiative of God's mercy and a conversion of heart which is normally accomplished within the setting of the sacrament of Reconciliation.

CCC #1856

What forgiveness is

What then might forgiveness or reconciliation be? Reconciliation has a number of facets. We examine six points:

- Forgiving is God's work. Forgiveness needs a power of love that is not within us to give. We do not have the power to overcome the damage wrought by violence and oppression. We need only examine the painful situations in our own lives, or the violence of terrorism or of ethnic hatred to realize that sin and social evil are more than we can overcome on our own. We never seem to get completely free of the snowballing effect of evil. What we try to build to replace the abuse or the mistrust never quite succeeds in setting things right again. However, it is our inability to set things right on our own that challenges us to cooperate with the reconciliation and forgiveness that comes our way from God. As St. Paul says, "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespass against them." (2 Corinthians 5.19) It is God's love for us that is the force for reconciliation and forgiveness among us. God's Spirit usually starts with the victim. The victim is called to retake the humanity which the wrongdoer sought to take away. In accepting the offer of God's love the victim is victim no longer and is able to become an agent of reconciliation for others. Jesus on the cross taught us this. Alluding to the image of Jesus the victim on the cross, St. Irenaeus writes, "For God's power is shown most perfectly through weakness."[14] Jesus prayed "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23.34) In his own humiliation Jesus prayed to God to forgive, that is, to let the power of God's love enter into his persecutors.[15]
- Forgiveness is the first step toward repentance. We can give forgiveness, and we can receive forgiveness. First, let us look at the fact that we all have something to forgive. Forgiving begins with faith and hope in the Spirit of God sent among us through Jesus Christ. Reconciliation begins with the power of God's love. We experience something in us that is more powerful than the pain or the desire to get even. This experience of God's love and power to forgive arrives as a gift preparing us for reconciliation with the one who has offended us. Second, we all have something to be forgiven for. Receiving forgiveness is not something we earn for doing penance and being sorry. Forgiveness is a gift freely, unconditionally and constantly given by God's Spirit. But God respects the human freedom he has created in us. We can choose to remain in a state of sin, or we can turn around, face the God of mercy and accept the grace of forgiveness. To repent means to turn around, to change our minds and hearts by opening ourselves to God's grace which calls us to communion and solidarity with one another and with God. Repentance is our response to God's merciful initiative, God's grace. Repentance is not a proof of our sincerity for seeking forgiveness. Repentance flows from a forgiveness that has already taken place.[16]
- Forgiveness makes both the victim and the wrongdoer into new persons. Repentance includes a commitment to the righting of wrongs and a turning away from evil doing. This is the beginning of the path of reconciliation. But this is only the beginning. God's Word in the Holy Scriptures reveals a new creation that comes about as a result of the process of forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation. With forgiveness we arrive at a new place. This is true both for the victim and for the perpetrator. They do not go back to the situation prior to the offence. They are enriched by the experience of reconciliation. That is why forgiveness does not erase the memory of the evil done; it transforms both the victim and the evildoer. In a sense, reconciliation empowers them to grow beyond themselves. Forgiveness is a way of dealing with the past by going beyond it and so opening a road to the future. The past is no longer an obsession for the victim or the wrongdoer, an obstacle blocking the rest of their lives. Forgiveness opens the way to the

future. Only love can find the way through the experience of evil to a new freedom.

- Forgiveness in our Catholic tradition is best understood in the narrative of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Accepting God's forgiveness or that of others may not come easily. That is why we remember and revere the story of the cross. In the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus we see active at the heart of forgiveness and human transformation the suffering and death of Jesus. The freedom and life that Jesus brought passed through his death to burst forth as the power of the Holy Spirit upon the world. That is why the resurrection stories are filled with greetings of peace and the power of forgiveness. The broken and raised body of Christ gathers the despairing, fearful and dejected disciples into a new community. The violence he suffered remains as a mark – the wounds in the hands and feet and side of Jesus – carried on the body of the Risen One. His betrayal, suffering and death are historical facts, yet through Christ's fragile humanity, God has shown the power of forgiveness. The resurrection of Christ manifests God's mercy as the power to give new life on earth and to endow our mortal nature with the hope of eternal life. The crucified and risen Christ is with and in the Father. He brings the violence of the world into the healing presence of God. The cross remains the symbol of the possible transformation of humanity into a reconciled community. Catholics sign themselves with the cross before and after praying as a reminder of the power of the cross and the new life that forgiveness brings.
- Forgiveness is eschatological. In our history we only see fragments of this forgiveness. Also in our lives forgiveness comes in bits and pieces but is never complete. Our world will never be without conflict or violence. Only when God is revealed completely in Christ in the fullness of time will forgiveness be complete and our broken relationships fully healed. In the Bible, the return of Christ is known as the second coming, or *parousia*. The "New Jerusalem" is a biblical term referring to the fullness of God's kingdom to come.
- The Church is the ambassador of forgiveness and reconciliation. First of all the Church embodies the message of reconciliation. The Church continues in history the story of Jesus and the actions of the Holy Spirit. It carries within it a rich spirituality and ministry of reconciliation. Within its history many have borne witness to the power of forgiveness and reconciliation. People throughout history have experienced how forgiveness restored them in their humanity. That is why we must continue to tell the story of the reconciliation in Jesus Christ to the world. But the Church not only must tell the story of the death and resurrection of Christ, it must also celebrate forgiveness sacramentally. In the sacrament of penance, or reconciliation, the Catholic Church celebrates God's gift of forgiveness in a personal and individual way.[17] (See page 295.)

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Guiding questions

1. How do you understand the gift of forgiveness? Where does the power to forgive come from?
2. How does forgiveness transform both the victim and the wrongdoer?
3. Distinguish: reconciliation from repentance; forgiveness from reconciliation.
4. What do the terms "second coming" and "New Jerusalem" mean, and what does this have to do with forgiveness?
5. Why do Catholics sign themselves with the cross, saying "In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" before and after their prayers?

The celebration of the sacrament of penance

Over the centuries and in a variety of ways the Catholic Church has responded to the Lord's command to forgive and to retain sins: "[Jesus] breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any they are retained.'" (John 20.22-23) The introduction to the rite of reconciliation reads, "In the sacrament of penance the Father receives the repentant son who comes back to him, Christ places the lost sheep on his shoulders and brings it back to the sheepfold, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies this temple of God again or lives more fully within it."[18] The reconciliation of penitents may be celebrated at any time of day, but it is desirable that the faithful know the day and time at which the priest is available for this ministry. The Season of Lent is most appropriate for celebrating the sacrament of penance. Already then on Ash Wednesday the people of God have heard the solemn invitation, "Turn away from sin and believe the good news."[19]

There are three rites for the celebration of the sacrament of penance in the Catholic Church: 1. the rite of the reconciliation of individual penitents; 2. the rite for reconciliation of several penitents with individual confession and absolution; 3. the rite of general absolution, which is used only in rare and exceptional circumstances. A guide for celebrating the first rite follows: ➤

Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son*

Henri Nouwen, in his book *Return of the Prodigal Son*, reflects on this painting:

Often I have asked friends to give me their first impression of Rembrandt's *Prodigal Son*. Inevitably, they point to the wise old man who forgives his son: the benevolent patriarch.

The longer I look at "the patriarch," the clearer it becomes to me that Rembrandt has done something quite different from letting God pose as the wise old head of a family. It all began with the hands. The two are quite different. The father's left hand touching the son's shoulder is strong and muscular. The fingers are spread out and cover a large part of the prodigal son's shoulder and back. I can see a certain pressure, especially in the thumb. That hand seems not only to touch, but, with its strength, also to hold. Even though there is a gentleness in the way the father's left hand touches his son, it is not without a firm grip.

How different is the father's right hand! This hand does not hold or grasp. It is refined, soft, and very tender. The fingers are close to each other and they have an elegant quality. It lies gently upon the son's shoulder. It wants to caress, to stroke, and to offer consolation and comfort. It is a mother's hand....

As soon as I recognized the difference between the two hands of the father, a new world of meaning opened up for me. The Father is not simply a great patriarch. He is mother as well as father. He touches the son with a masculine hand and a feminine hand. He holds, and she caresses. He confirms and she consoles. He is, indeed, God, in whom both manhood and womanhood, fatherhood and motherhood, are fully present. That gentle and caressing right hand echoes for me the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Can a woman forget her baby at the breast, feel no pity for the child she has borne? Even if these were to forget, I shall not forget you. Look, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."[20]

How to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation

Preparing your confession

- Pray to the Holy Spirit for self-knowledge and the humility to be totally honest.
- Listen to whatever strikes you from the Word of God at church or in your personal reading; use this "word" to help you with your examination of conscience; then bring this "word" to confession with you.
- Ask God to fill you with true sorrow for your sins because they have offended God, who is so good to you, as well as other people in your life.
- Pray for the conversion of heart and reconciliation that are necessary for forgiveness.

When you are with the priest

- You may kneel or sit depending on your preference and the room.
- Begin with the sign of the cross, then say, "Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned" (or similar words).
- Say how long it has been since your last confession and what your state in life is (married, single, etc.).
- The priest will welcome you and say a brief prayer, such as "May the Lord take away any fears and anxieties and fill you with trust so that you can make a good confession."
- Now you can read one or two lines from the Word of God that struck you during the past week or so (the priest can also read from Scripture if he chooses).
- It is good to mention at this point a few blessings you have received from God.
- Confess your sins openly and candidly, especially any serious sins along with the number of times each was committed, and any circumstances surrounding them.
- You may also confess what is bothering you, such as anxieties and fears; these often can reveal an attitude of heart that needs healing from God.
- Then listen to the priest's advice and respond to any questions he may ask to help you in your conversion of heart; you are also free to ask any question of the priest to help you grow in your life of faith.
- The priest will then ask you to do an act of "satisfaction" or penance for your sins, such as reading from Scripture, doing an act of mercy, saying a prayer, etc.
- The priest will ask you to say out loud or in your heart some act of contrition (sorrow) either in your own words or one you have learned by heart, such as the following:

Prayer of contrition

My God,
I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong
and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you
whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help,
to do penance, to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Saviour Jesus Christ
Suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy.[21]

The prayer of absolution

The priest will then pray the prayer of absolution:

God, the Father of Mercies,
through the death and resurrection of his Son
has reconciled the world to himself
and sent the Holy Spirit among us
for the forgiveness of sins;
through the ministry of the Church
may God give you pardon and peace,
and I absolve you from your sins
in the name of the Father, +
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

You answer: "Amen."

The priest will end with a short prayer of dismissal, such as "The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace."

After confession

You may wish to remain in the church to do the act of satisfaction the priest asked of you. [22]

> For this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.
>
> "He committed no sin,
> and no deceit was found in his mouth."
>
> When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.
>
> 1 Peter 2.21-24

Social reconciliation

How do we who believe in the Risen Lord confront the shattering experiences of crimes and acts of violence in our community and throughout the world? How do we who participate in the life of Christ, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, face the barbaric acts of terrorists, and the devastation of interracial wars and state-sponsored violence?

This final section of the chapter examines some of the ways in which the Catholic Church and other agencies have worked for reconciliation to heal social evil. We will look at only some of these efforts to restore peace and harmony and good order and to move beyond horrendous violence. We are referring here to situations of massive global violence – situations such as the apartheid policy of South Africa from 1950 to 1990; the "dirty war" in Argentina during the rule of the generals when thousands of people disappeared; the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans between 1991 and 1997 where in the town of Srebrenica in 1995, 8000 men were shot and clubbed to death; the Shoa or Holocaust of the Jewish people by the Nazis in Germany; the starvation of millions during Russia's forced collectivization and during Mao Tse-tung's engineered cultural revolution; the mass killings through starvation and mistreatment of Cambodians by Pol Pot and his Maoists in 1975; the 800,000 Tutsis killed in Rwanda in 1994. (There is some controversy about the accuracy of these figures, but whatever the exact number the enormity of the events remains.)[23] The list could go on. Such enormous suffering and violence cause some people to lose faith in God; while for others it is their faith which moves them to ask what can we do? What can the world do to stop these unspeakable crimes against God and humanity?

The first step is to stop the violence. As has become evident in these conflicts, the warring factions, particularly the dominant factions, seem to be caught in a vortex of revenge and blood lust. Almost in all cases outside help is needed to break the cycle of violence. Our time has begun to rely on the United Nations to initiate intervention or to separate the warring factions.

The second step is to reinstall the rule of law and the structures of justice. At times this means overhauling the army or the police force so that people can regain some sense of security. If possible, the main culprits of the violence should be isolated and brought to justice. Victims of violence know that their suffering was not accidental. It is often deliberate and carefully planned. It is astounding to find perfect records of what the Stasi secret police did in East Germany or what the KGB did in Soviet Russia. As Geneviève Jacques (Director of Programs at the World Council of Churches) has said, "The victims need public recognition of the wrongs they suffered and need to see those responsible identified, named and held to account."[24] By doing this, society clarifies who are the victims and who are the accused guilty. This has everything to do with a restoration of self-esteem

which, as Ricoeur says, belongs to the "moral quality of the human person."[25] All this needs to be done publicly. Justice ought to shine as a beacon of light for all to see. Reason, justice and the law must prevail. Only the restoration of justice and the rule of law can begin to restore as well both the humanity of the victim and the humanity of the perpetrators (by affirming their responsibility). The establishment of the International Court of Justice in The Hague is a welcome institution for the functioning of international justice. No dictator, politician or general is safe any longer from prosecution.

But having justice in place does not mean that relationships have been righted. Sometimes the violence has arisen from historic imbalances of power or from historical injustices. Sometimes the violence between and within communities is not resolved by sending the main culprits to jail. Sometimes the evidence is not sufficient to bring culprits to justice or the violence is so deeply ingrained in society that the courts and justice cannot resolve the broken relationships. In Rwanda, for example, 100,000 prisoners were charged with the crime of genocide. How can justice be administered in a land almost without a judiciary or a police force? And even if a judicial system is in place, it does not mean that the past has been dealt with. That is why a number of countries have attempted to go beyond the structures of justice and sought to go the route of reconciliation. Reconciliation is a process of healing broken relationships between individuals and peoples. Reconciliation is a journey towards solidarity and communion of peoples.

To conclude, consider two examples where the gift of reconciliation seems to be taking root today. The one, restorative justice, is used most frequently in cases where communities want to go beyond justice. The cases are generally not of the magnitude of the atrocities we have mentioned above. But they are applied to situations where murder or other grave offences have shaken a community. The second example, on reconciliation commissions, turns once again to social evil and the attempts to arrive at reconciliation in political situations.

Restorative justice: A call for forgiveness and reconciliation

Restorative justice emphasizes healing the harm caused by a crime. It seeks to name the truth and to make amends personally. Restorative justice brings together victims, offenders and the community in order to repair the harm and promote harmony. The process is based on respect for the dignity of everyone affected by the transgression. The goal is to build understanding among all the people involved, to encourage accountability, and to provide an opportunity for healing.

A restorative justice process encourages the offender to take responsibility for the harmful behavior in a meaningful way, to gain insight into the causes and effects of that behaviour on others, to change that behaviour and to be accepted back into the community. The process gives the victim a forum to ask questions, receive answers, gain understanding, explain the impact of the crime on them and contribute to the outcome of the process. The victim can thereby receive an apology, restitution, services or some other form of reparation, and seek closure in a safe

> environment. Finally, the process enables the community to reinforce its values and expectations, to understand the underlying causes of crime and to determine what can be done to repair the damage caused, and thus to promote community well-being and reduce future crime.[26]

Restorative justice is rooted in the understanding that an offence is not only a private act between two people. It is also an offence against a community. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the community, the victim and the offender to bring about reconciliation and restitution. Justice requires much more than punishment for the perpetrator. It requires healing between offender and victim, the restoration of the victim to a state of peace, the rehabilitation of the offender, and the restoration of unity within the community.

Restorative justice has its roots in the many religions of the world. It calls both sinner and victim to a spiritual awareness of God's gift of love. In assessing the value of restorative justice, the Correctional Service of Canada notes this spiritual dimension:

> Restorative justice, with its principles of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation, is… a deeply spiritual process. It is never the easy way out; neither for the offender, the victim, nor the community. It requires all of us to come to grips with who we are, what we have done, and what we can become in the fullness of humanity. It is about doing justice as if people really mattered. It addresses the need for a vision of the good life, and the Common Good.
>
> Justice initiatives in many countries provide convincing evidence of the effectiveness of restorative justice values, and are even re-defining the principles of practices of justice. These values include personal responsibility, healing, reconciliation, vindication, negotiation, forgiveness and transformation of human situations.
>
> Persuasive evidence suggests that public policies must take seriously the role of religion in criminal law, as indeed in other areas of public life. On a purely practical level, of course, our grasp of religious traditions enhances our ability to deal with the issues they raise. Openness to spiritual and cultural diversity enriches the lives of all who choose to participate. But there are deeper reasons for taking the role of religion seriously.
>
> By providing integrative spiritual context, symbols and metaphors, faith traditions offer dynamic – and largely untapped – potential for Restorative Justice. A holistic expression of moral values, spiritual traditions offer keys to the wholesome transformation of persons, situations and institutions. They provide the matrix for creating communities based on dignity and respect. They strengthen our capacity to repair and restore broken friendships.[27]

In Canada among the First Nations there is the growing practice of "healing circles." This system of justice involves the whole community and the perpetrator. In Canada in 2004, more than 130 organizations and groups in all the provinces and territories were working for restorative justice. These initiatives are part of a growing movement of people seeking to go beyond retributive justice to restorative justice. (Check www.restorativejustice.ca.) In most cases it is a search to reactivate more traditional forms of justice based on recognized and accepted community codes.

Restorative justice, which seeks to re-create right relations, must take into account the need of reparation for the structural economic injustices that are often at the root of conflict. Agrarian reform and restoration of respect for minority rights are often necessary for long-term processes of reconciliation. Genuine reconciliation requires the removal of the economic roots of oppression and conflict. Justice and reconciliation are thus intimately connected and their objectives merge. Both bring together individual *responsibility* for others, individual *accountability* to others and the *will to live together.*[28]

Reconciliation commissions

Although there have been a number of examples of how nations have dealt with the egregious events of their past, one that stands out is the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Between 1950 and 1990 the National Party of whites enforced a radical separation ("apartheid") between the different races. Brutal violence was used to enforce this government policy. One of its victims was Nelson Mandela. He was imprisoned for his armed uprising against the apartheid government in 1964. In 1990, after twenty-seven years of imprisonment, Mandela was finally released. Four years later he was elected president of South Africa. Both the National Party, which had initiated apartheid forty years previous with such disastrous results, and Mandela wanted to end the violence. But this could not happen without dealing with the atrocities of the apartheid era. Mandela was

Let's talk about love

(Excerpts from Jean Vanier in conversation with Pamela Wallin)

Jean Vanier: We all hurt each other. We are tired and don't respond to one another's expectations. And each one has his or her own ways. So, necessarily we hurt one another. We all have to learn to forgive. That's the heart of all relationships, of family, of community. If we don't learn to forgive, then we harbour vengeance and create blockages. The whole growth of human beings is to move toward freedom – freedom from compulsions, but also freedom from hurt, which prevents us from entering into relationships with others. For me, to forgive is to accept people as they are. You may not be what you want to be – you are just you, and it's okay. But I believe also that you can grow. This is what it's all about. Forgiveness is not some sort of event; it is allowing people to be who they are and trusting that they can grow.

Pamela Wallin: What is a broken heart and what is violence? That is my question about human nature.

Jean Vanier: We're all lovers and we're all "destroyers." We're all frightened and at the same time we all want terribly to trust. This is part of our struggle. We have to help what is most beautiful to emerge in us and to divert the powers of darkness and violence. I have lived experiences where I sensed the anger and violence in me and my capacity to harm or even kill another. It is important to recognize all that is in us, to name our anger, our handicaps, to be able to say, "This is my fragility. I must learn about it and use it in a constructive way." Then when we are in difficult situations where negative feelings come up, we learn to govern and manage them.[29]

concerned about the victims of apartheid. The National Party wanted amnesty for the previous governments, the police, the secret service, and the vigilante groups who had terrorized the population. The negotiations led in 1995 to a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Its mission was both to get at the truth of the suffering of so many victims and to provide amnesty under certain strict conditions for the perpetrators.

What emerged was nothing short of a miracle.

For the victims of apartheid there was an attempt to restore to them their personal and civil dignity. They were encouraged to present their account of what had happened to them and to their relatives. The hearings were intended to honour the victims. When they entered the room all present stood up. There were no cross-examinations. They could speak in their own languages. It is important for victims to be able to speak and to know that there is someone who listens. Victims must break out of the isolation and the shame that was imposed by those who tortured them. "Scream as loud as you want; no one will hear you," torture victims were told in the apartheid jails. Tormentors were confident that their crimes would never pass beyond the cell walls. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission broke this dirty secret. As one of the victims said, "Now there is a chance for the whole world to hear the victims scream…" One woman who came forward told how she had been forced to watch her son's execution. She had no chance to say goodbye to him. She wanted to know where her son was buried. She did not want revenge. All she wanted was to have the government acknowledge her pain by telling her the burial site.

By telling their stories the victims reclaimed their dignity and their humanity in the community that had taken it away. Any reconciliation process must allow the victim to speak and to be heard. But there is a deeper reason as well which is ethical. The truth of what happened needs to be brought into the light of day. There ought to be no doubt left in the country that the story of the victims is true so that it will not be disputed in the nation's memory. There was not to be any future glorification of apartheid. And it served as a warning to other countries who might try similar policies of racial segregation. The stories of the victims need therefore to lead to a strengthening of laws so that no law can ever be used to create and legitimate this type of violence. It was also recognized that the victims must have a right to financial compensation for all the losses they incurred because of the state's actions.[30]

A second objective for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was to provide amnesty for the perpetrators. This was highly controversial. Would not this granting of impunity make a mockery of justice and let off all those who had caused so much pain and suffering? Yes, but it was thought to be in the interest of national unity to provide a way for the perpetrators to enter into the process of reconciliation. All those who had committed "gross human rights violations" (murder, attempted murder, abduction and torture) were offered an opportunity to confess in an open court in full view of the whole nation. The hearings were nationally televised. They would receive amnesty if they were prepared to give a full and detailed account of what they had done, their background and motives. It had to be clear that these crimes were politically motivated. The parade of the apartheid villains and their stories astonished the nation.

"No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness"

Excerpts from the Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2002

#2 …shattered order cannot be fully restored except by a response that combines justice with forgiveness. *The pillars of true peace are justice and that form of love which is forgiveness.*

#3 But in the present circumstances, how can we speak of justice and forgiveness as the source and condition of peace? *We can and we must,* no matter how difficult this may be; a difficulty which often comes from thinking that justice and forgiveness are irreconcilable. But forgiveness is the opposite of resentment and revenge, not of justice. In fact, true peace is "the work of justice" (Isaiah 32.17). As the Second Vatican Council put it, peace is "the fruit of that right ordering of things with which the divine founder has invested human society and which must be actualized by man thirsting for an ever more perfect reign of justice" (Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 78). For more than fifteen hundred years, the Catholic Church has repeated the teaching of Saint Augustine of Hippo on this point. He reminds us that the peace which can and must be built in this world is the peace of right order – *tranquillitas ordinis*, the tranquillity of order (cf. *De Civitate Dei*, 19,13).

True peace therefore is the fruit of justice, that moral virtue and legal guarantee which ensures full respect for rights and responsibilities, and the just distribution of benefits and burdens. But because human justice is always fragile and imperfect, subject as it is to the limitations and egoism of individuals and groups, it must include and, as it were, be completed by the *forgiveness which heals and rebuilds troubled human relations from their foundations*. This is true in circumstances great and small, at the personal level or on a wider, even international scale. Forgiveness is in no way opposed to justice, as if to forgive meant to overlook the need to right the wrong done. It is rather the fullness of justice, leading to that tranquillity of order which is much more than a fragile and temporary cessation of hostilities, involving as it does the deepest healing of the wounds which fester in human hearts. Justice and forgiveness are both essential to such healing.

Regarding justice in the midst of terrorist atrocities

#5 *There exists … a right to defend oneself against terrorism*, a right which, as always, must be exercised with respect for moral and legal limits in the choice of ends and means. The guilty must be correctly identified, since criminal culpability is always personal and cannot be extended to the nation, ethnic group or religion to which the terrorists may belong. International cooperation in the fight against terrorist activities must also include a courageous and resolute political, diplomatic and economic commitment to relieving situations of oppression and marginalization which facilitate the designs of terrorists.

Regarding the meaning of forgiveness

#8 Forgiveness is above all a personal choice, a decision of the heart to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil. The measure of such a decision is the love of God who draws us to himself in spite of our sin.

Regarding forgiveness as foundation of society and justice

#9 Forgiveness therefore, as a fully human act, is above all a personal initiative. But individuals are essentially social beings, situated within a pattern of relationships through which they express themselves in ways both good and bad. Consequently, *society too is absolutely in need of forgiveness*. Families, groups, societies, States and the international community itself need forgiveness in order to renew ties that have been sundered, go beyond sterile situations of mutual condemnation and overcome the temptation to discriminate against others without appeal. *The ability to forgive lies at the very basis of the idea of a future society marked by justice and solidarity.*

We pray that wounds that may have been re-opened in this process have been cleansed so that they will not fester; that some balm has been poured on them and that they will now heal.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

There is a long walk to reconciliation. The TRC marked the beginning of a process which must go on throughout the structures of our nation in the next 10 or even 20 years. Like a signpost, we have shown the way which will lead our nation to genuine reconciliation. It is not the easy or popular road to traverse – look at us now and see the scars in our souls – but it is the only way.

Bongani Finca, TRC Commissioner

The whole structure and organization of the violence by the police and the so-called "special branches" (organized thugs to incite violence among the blacks) became clear. The responsibility went all the way to the top: a former president and a former chief of police were clearly implicated. The stories of those who had made people disappear, of those who had tortured innocent victims sent shockwaves through South Africa. Here the true evil of apartheid was on display so that at no point would it ever be possible to cling to the illusion that there had been anything good behind the apartheid policies.[31]

Do these commissions, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa or the one in Chile, or the prospect of instituting them elsewhere bring full reconciliation? They do not. But they are important steps. They indicate that beyond the justice of the courts there is much more that must be done; that solidarity, harmony and communion in the human family require both justice and forgiveness.

The efforts of the Church, of restorative justice and of reconciliation commissions make us aware of the enormous damage war, terrorism and genocide do to the fabric of society. A broken society needs the healing message of God, since a crude or naked form of justice does not resolve the historical degradation suffered. Only God's love and healing can effect these changes. We look for people who understand that there can be no peace without justice and no justice without forgiveness. The resurrection of Jesus expresses our hope and the hope of the Church that sin and social evil and death can be defeated by the victory of Jesus. Our participation in the power of Jesus' resurrection is a celebration proclaiming that injustice and evil do not have the final word in our history. The raising of Jesus from the dead is our guarantee of God's victory over violence in the fullness of time.

Guiding questions

1. Discuss the need of reconciliation at the level of social sin.
2. What is the achievement of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission?
3. Discuss the title of Pope John Paul II's peace message of 2002, "No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness."
4. Pope John Paul II writes: "Society too is absolutely in need of forgiveness. Families, groups, states, societies and the international community itself need forgiveness." Do you agree? Why or why not?

The Church appeals to the mercy of God

The Church proclaims the truth of God's mercy revealed in the crucified and risen Christ, and she professes it in various ways. Furthermore, she seeks to practice mercy towards people through people, and she sees in this an indispensable condition for solicitude for a better and "more human" world, today and tomorrow. However, at no time and in no historical period – especially at a moment as critical as our own – can the Church forget the prayer that is a cry for the mercy of God amid the many forms of evil which weigh upon humanity and threaten it. Precisely this is the fundamental right and duty of the Church in Christ Jesus, her right and duty towards God and towards humanity. The more the human conscience succumbs to secularization, loses its sense of the very meaning of the word "mercy," moves away from God and distances itself from the mystery of mercy, the more the Church has the right and the duty to appeal to the God of mercy "with loud cries." These "loud cries" should be the mark of the Church of our times, cries uttered to God to implore His mercy, the certain manifestation of which she professes and proclaims as having already come in Jesus crucified and risen, that is, in the Paschal Mystery. It is this mystery which bears within itself the most complete revelation of mercy, that is, of that love which is more powerful than death, more powerful than sin and every evil, the love which lifts man up when he falls into the abyss and frees him from the greatest threats....

In the name of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, in the spirit of His messianic mission, enduring in the history of humanity, we raise our voices and pray that the Love which is in the Father may once again be revealed at this stage of history, and that, through the work of the Son and Holy Spirit, it may be shown to be present in our modern world and to be more powerful than evil: more powerful than sin and death. We pray for this through the intercession of her who does not cease to proclaim "mercy...from generation to generation," and also through the intercession of those for whom there have been completely fulfilled the words of the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, §15

Chapter review

Summary

- Sin is both an offence against God and against those who reflect the image and likeness of God. Our sins against others affect our relationship with God, that is, our very identity. Sin is a form of self-destruction.
- Sin is an anti-relational intentional act or omission that is committed freely and with deliberation. It can be venial or mortal.
- Sin is an enduring state of hardheartedness and moral blindness.
- "Structures of sin" are the expression and effect of personal sins. They lead their victims to do evil in their turn. In an analogous sense, they constitute a "social sin."
- One contributing factor to social evil is conflicts that have to do primarily with identity.
- A second contributor to social evil is rooted in people's desires for things that they perceive to be indispensable for their wellbeing.
- A third category often used to explain murderous violence is called the scapegoat function.
- Forgiving is God's work. Forgiveness needs a power of love that is not within us to give.
- The offer of forgiveness moves us to repentance.
- Forgiveness makes both the victim and the wrongdoer into new persons.
- The terrible reality of sin and the wondrous power of God's mercy are revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- Forgiveness is eschatological – only when God is revealed completely in Christ in the fullness of time will forgiveness be complete and the broken relationships fully healed.
- The Church responds to the Lord's command to forgive and to retain sins through the sacrament of reconciliation.
- The Catholic Church and other agencies work for reconciliation to heal social sins by first seeking to stop violence, by seeking to reinstall the rule of law and structures of justice, and by engaging in the process of healing broken relationships between individuals and peoples.
- Restorative justice emphasizes healing the harm caused by a crime by naming the truth and making amends personally, bringing together victims, offenders and the community.
- In some cases of social sin, there is more to be done than the exercise of justice through the courts; namely, solidarity, harmony and communion in the human family require both justice and forgiveness, such as exercised through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.

Glossary

absolution: In the sacrament of reconciliation, the priest absolves the penitent from his or her sins. Absolution is the remission of sins pronounced by the priest.

penance: In the sacrament of reconciliation, the priest asks the penitent to do an act of "satisfaction" or penance for his or her sins. This act of penance serves not only to make up for the past but also to help him or her begin a new life. This act of penance may take the form of prayer, self-denial, or especially service to one's neighbour and works of mercy.

penitent: A person who recognizes his or her sinfulness, and touched by the grace of God, seeks reconciliation through the sacrament of reconciliation.

repentance: The act by which a penitent recognizes his or her sinfulness, manifests contrition, and resolves to begin a new life by asking God's pardon.

restorative justice: A process that brings together victims, offenders and the community in order to repair the harm and promote harmony. It emphasizes healing the harm caused by crime by means of naming the truth and making amends personally.

sin, mortal and venial: Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent. One commits venial sin when, in a less serious matter, one does not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when one disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent. (*CCC* #1857, 1862)

social sin: Personal sin gives rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to divine goodness. They lead their victims to do evil in their turn. Living in a state of sin corrodes and destroys the communion and solidarity to which God calls us.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain what sin is and is not. Describe the consequences of sin.
2. Why is forgiveness important in our relationships with God and neighbour? What are the consequences of not giving and receiving forgiveness?

Thinking and inquiry

3. John Paul II wrote that there is no peace without justice, and no justice without forgiveness. Explain what this means.
4. Explain how the Christian notion of forgiveness goes beyond the popular cultural expression, "Forgive and forget."

Communication

5. Research a restorative justice initiative and prepare a written or an oral report describing the process.
6. Write a story of reconciliation. Through the story, map the process of forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation.

Application

7. As a class and with the help of your teacher or school chaplain or pastoral agent, prepare and celebrate a reconciliation service, culminating with an opportunity for individual confession.
8. In a journal reflection consider: How does forgiveness and reconciliation restore you to wholeness?

Building a civilization of love

UNIT VI

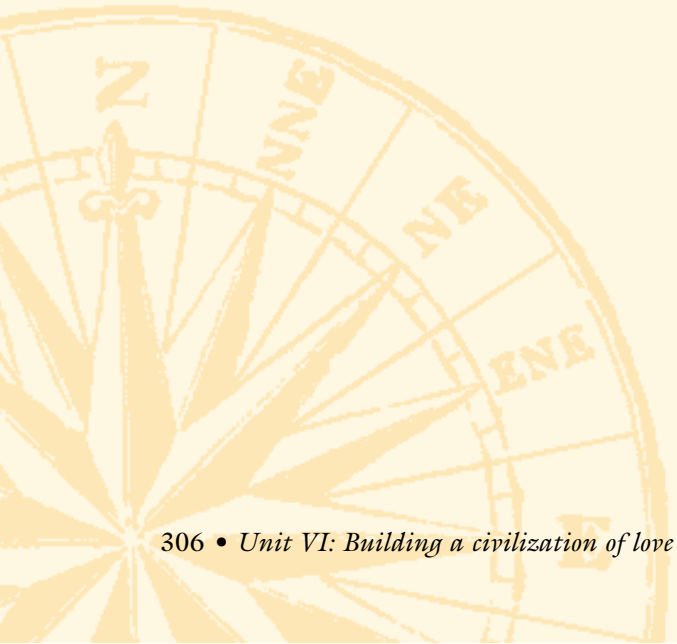
Introduction

Ethics was defined as the aim of the good life with and for others in just institutions. These final chapters look at some of the institutions where ethics and morality are lived out. We examine three "homes" for the good life: marriage, the family, and the civic community or state. These three entities frame the ethical quest. They provide ethics with its soil for development. They also give ethics its greatest challenges. Ethics and morality require institutions. They provide a framework in which ethics can flourish. They are important building blocks for a civilization of love.

Marriage (Chapter 16), from the Catholic perspective, is a privileged space for the sacred and the good. Not everyone is called to it. Many people stay single – whether by choice or by circumstance. Marriage is a vocation, not a lifestyle. To understand marriage as a "vocation" involves the concept of the One who calls, namely, God. From this perspective marriage mirrors the extraordinary in the ordinary. Love and its fruitfulness dip into the mystery of life that is God in the Trinity of persons.

Family is at the heart of the civilization of love. (Chapter 17) Habits settle in early in life. Experiences of love or neglect have their deepest impact from the start of life. In the family we are nurtured into the pattern of human life. Our desire for and sensitivity to the good are at first imitations of the ones who brought us into the world or with whom we were most intimate. For the development of one's ethical and moral orientation in life families are indispensable. Families today come in many forms. In the breakdown and tensions of families today we see reflected the tensions of our culture. It is also the place for its restoration.

The state and political life are not always understood as havens for ethical, moral life. The philosopher and former President of the Czech Republic, Václav Havel, once wrote: "Genuine politics – worthy of the name, and the only politics I am willing to devote myself to – is simply a matter of serving those around us: serving the community, and serving those who will come after us. Its deepest root is moral because it is a responsibility, expressed through action, to and for the whole." (Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations* tr. Paul Wilson [Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 1992] p. 6) Chapter 18 reflects on the role of Catholics in the political arena.



Marriage matters

CHAPTER 16

On their wedding night Tobias and Sarah began to pray:
"Blessed are you, O God of our ancestors,
and blessed is your name in all generations forever.
Let the heavens and the whole creation bless you forever.
You made Adam, and for him you made his wife Eve as a helper and support.
From the two of them the human race has sprung.
You said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone;
Let us make a helper for him like himself.'
I now am taking this kinswoman of mine,
not because of lust, but with sincerity.
Grant that she and I may find mercy
and that we may grow old together."
And they both said, "Amen, Amen."
Tobit 8.5-8

Most people spend most, if not all, of their lives within the context of a marriage relationship – first as children, and then as husband or wife, and as a member of an extended family. Hence, our "search for the good" takes place within this context, is shaped by it, and most often finds fulfillment within it. This chapter explores marriage as a human reality, as an institution, and as a sacrament.

Focus your learning

Cognitive
What is marriage?

Practical
Of what importance is marriage to society?

Affective
How are a husband and wife a sign of God's love for each other, for their children, and for their community?

Key terms in this chapter

annulment
conjugal commitment
consent
fidelity
indissolubility
procreation
promise
sacramental covenant
social cell
vocation

"It is not good that the man should be alone..." (Genesis 2.18)

The second account of creation (Genesis 2.4b-25) begins with God lovingly forming the human (*adam*, taken from *adamah*, dust or soil) with his own fingers. Then God breaths his own life into the nostrils of the human. God places the human in the Garden of Eden to keep and cultivate it and to care for it. And God observes that it is "not good" (Genesis 2.18) for the human to be alone, so God creates every animal on the earth. He then presents these animals to the human to be named. But, as the human is naming all the creatures in the garden, he becomes aware that, in spite of all these creatures, he has no "helper as his partner." All is not as it should be. The LORD God puts the human in a "deep sleep" and "builds" the woman from the human's side, and brings her to the human. The sheer delight and wonder of the human are heard in his exclamation:

"This at last
is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken." (Genesis 2.23)

The helper is like the human (*adam*) yet different. And in the difference the human (*adam*) discovers himself to be Man (*ish*) face to face with Woman (*ishah*). By naming her Woman, Adam knows himself to be Man. To be a helper the other must be alike ("bone of my bones") and at the same time unlike (Woman and Man).

The reasons for this account now become clear. First, being alone, even in the midst of creation with all its beauty and life, was not perfect; something was missing. The experience of being alone indicated that the human was incomplete. Second, awareness of human identity happens in and through the presence of the other who is the same, yet different. We get to know who we really are in and through the other person. Mutual presence corrects the loneliness and offers completeness to the meaning of being human. Third this account explains the meaning of man and woman "become one flesh." "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh." (Genesis 2.24) They join bodily, share a home, become totally attached to each other in all aspects of life; in other words, male and female marry. From the beginning they are created from a unity; separated and alone the human is less than complete. Complemented by each other, man and woman discover the meaning of the human in relation to God.

God places Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. "Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil…. The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'" (Genesis 2.9,15-17) We know what they chose to do. But why did they disobey God? In Genesis chapter 3 we are told how self-interest enters their minds.

> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "we may eat of the fruit of he trees in the garden, but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it *your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God*…." (Genesis 3.1-5)

We also read in verse 6 that after she eats, she gives some to her husband. Having been told a lie, that they would not die, they succumb to the temptation to "be like God." They eat from the tree. They disobey God's command. The relationship broken by their disobedience is the relationship of human to God, of creature to Creator. Their disobedience

was an attempt to recreate what God had already created and given them, a complete human relationship to God. They tried to destroy that relationship. Based on a lie they act to become what they are not – like God, the Creator. The lie they believe is the very source of unreality. God has created them in relationship – as male and female. They then try to destroy this relationship given to them by their Creator. Eating from this tree is the beginning of relational difficulties between the human and divine, between women and men, and between the human and the natural world.

Adam and Eve's fall from God's grace is known as *original sin*. The story of the fall explains that the human tendency to act against God and even our own good, finds its origin in that act of disobedience of our first parents. (The expression "the human tendency to act against God and even our own good" is what we generally mean by concupiscence. Our faith teaches that this tendency is not rooted in our own choices but is an abiding effect of the original sin of our first parents, that primeval rebellion at the dawn of human history which mysteriously marks all human beings. [*CCC* #390 and 405])

The account of the fall from grace in Genesis identifies the disruption of three relationships: the creature/Creator relationship, the creature/creation relationship and the male/female relationship. The Genesis account identifies the following effects of the fall on the male/female relationship:

First, they discover their nakedness. The lie that seduced them with the empty promise of knowing good and evil, like God, leaves them filled with shame. The discovery of their nakedness makes them want to cover themselves. In the Garden of Eden they were not ashamed to be naked in the presence of each other (Genesis 2.25). Now they discover a painful boundary between them. Even before God they are ashamed to be naked. Before their sin their nakedness posed no boundary in their relationships. Now they are experiencing a strain in their relationship. They no longer can be free and open with each other or with God so they hide themselves. Fear now enters the human heart and human relationships, "I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was *afraid* because I was naked; and I hid myself"(Genesis 3.10). When God confronts the man about their eating from the tree, Adam's previous exclamation of gratitude for having received a helper becomes an accusation. Eve becomes "the woman you gave to be with me," the helper of the man's demise. Their relationship has passed from the joyous discovery of the other to mutual antagonism.

Second, the woman is condemned forever to struggle with the "serpent." "I will put enmity between you and the woman" says God to the serpent. Henceforth, human freedom will always struggle with the desire to "be like God." The fall from God's grace wounded the human heart and soul, but not to the extent that they lost their natural capacities. The desire to be what we are not is a universal temptation that destroys our relationships with God, with one another and with the world. We can easily be tempted and seduced with what appears to be something good, but in reality is our undoing.

Sometimes our human vulnerability to temptation – the gateway to sin – has been attributed to women. It was the woman, it is often said, who succumbed to the siren song of the serpent. This perception has persisted in various artistic expressions throughout human history. Doesn't Shakespeare's Hamlet say to Ophelia, "Frailty, thy name is woman"? But that is not the intent of the creation account. As contemporary philosopher Paul Ricoeur says, "Every woman and every man are Adam; every man and every woman are Eve; every woman sins 'in' Adam, every man is seduced 'in' Eve."[1] The serpent in the story is the evil one, who speaks within each one of us with that voice of falsehood that so easily takes over our heart and seduces us. The relationship of man and woman will always struggle with the voice of temptation in their hearts. Of the new situation of the woman after the "fall," God says, "yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you"(Genesis 3.16). The domination by men, so common in human culture,

I delight in three things, and they are beautiful in the sight of God and of mortals: harmony among brothers and sisters, friendship among neighbors, and the mutual love of husband and wife.

Sirach 25.1

A wife is her husband's richest treasure, a helpmate, a steadying column. A vineyard with no hedge will be overrun; a man with no wife becomes a homeless wanderer.

Sirach 36.29-30

is not God's intent but a result of the diminished existence due to the Fall.

Third, the man's existence is diminished by their sin as well. Having "listened to the voice" of his wife, Adam disobeyed the voice of God. Their relationship to God has been destroyed by the lie that passed between them. Their shared ambition to be what they wanted rather than to become what their Creator had intended taints the very heart of their relationship. Henceforth, the relationship will be a struggle to restore what had been theirs from the beginning, a harmony in communion with God.

Fourth, by rejecting the state of their relationship to God, they lose their place in Eden, a garden of harmony with all plant and animal life. Consequently, they enter an environment in disharmony where they must earn their keep. "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread." (Genesis 3.19) Worse, because their choice rejects the giftedness of all their relationships, death will be the inevitable outcome. Labour and death are the consequences of the disordered relationships they have chosen.

Despite the loss of the free and uninhibited life together, their life together remains a blessing. The man and the woman chose to sin, were expelled from the garden and did lose their innocence, having to struggle for a living and having to face death, but the story of God's gift of life and love does not abandon them. The man calls the woman *hawwah* (Eve) which the text interprets as "the mother of all living." To her was given the blessing of life and the transmission of human life. She is the glory of human life, the mother of all living.[2]

Guiding questions

1. What insights does the Book of Genesis's account of Adam and Eve offer about marriage today?
2. How did the "fall" affect the relationship between the man and the woman?
3. How does the relationship between man and woman continue to be a blessing, even after the fall?

Defining marriage

Society is challenging the Catholic understanding of marriage in many different ways from several different points of view. The Catholic Organization for Life and Family summarizes the way society questions the traditional meaning of marriage this way:

> Men and women today are seeking new expressions – and possibly new answers – for their deepest aspirations concerning human love. Why should people marry today? What is so different about love in marriage? What is gained by getting married instead of just living together? In what way is being a couple of concern to others? of concern even to God? Why should love be confined to an institution that may no longer even be relevant? Is marriage an obsolete institution? Does it have a future? Should it be protected? What *is* marriage?[3]

These questions reflect some of the uncertainties and confusion in a multicultural society about marriage. So how does the Catholic Church understand marriage? The *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World* describes marriage as follows:

> The intimate partnership of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed with its own proper laws: it is rooted in the covenant of its partners, that is in their irrevocable personal consent. It

is an institution confirmed by the divine law and receiving its stability, even in the eyes of society, from the human act by which the partners mutually surrender themselves to each other; for the good of the partners, of the children, and of society this sacred bond no longer depends on human decision alone. For God Himself is the author of marriage and has endowed it with various benefits and with various ends in view: all of these have a very important bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of every member of the family, on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family and of the whole human race. By its very nature, the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory. Thus the man and woman, who "are no longer two but one" (Matthew 19.6), help and serve each other by their marriage partnership; they become conscious of their unity and experience it more deeply from day to day. The intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of children demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable unity between them.[4]

In this text about marriage five significant elements stand out:

First, Catholic teaching defines marriage as an "intimate partnership of life and love." At the core of marriage is the interpersonal relation of the man and the woman. It is a partnership and communion reaching every aspect of life. Marriage is a "covenant" and "partnership." It is important to note that Catholic teaching does not use the word "contract" to describe marriage. Marriage is an unconditional and public "yes" of a man and a woman to create a complete and personal community of life and love. Marriage is a communion of a man and a woman in all the things of life.

Second, the central trait or soul of marriage is love. It is a love that is to grow from *eros* – physical, sexual love – to *agape*, the love with which Christ loved: a selfless love totally for the other.

Third, this love is open to procreation. "By its very nature, the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory."[5] Love and new life are the gifts of marriage. Mutual love and the procreation and education of children are both central goods of marriage.

The fourth significant element is the role of consent. Marriage is built on the consent of the

Statement by the Permanent Council of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

Marriage understood as the lasting union of a man and woman to the exclusion of others pre-exists the State. Because it pre-exists the State and because it is fundamental for society, the institution of marriage cannot be modified, whether by the Charter of Rights, the State or a court of law.

Enlarging and thereby altering the definition of marriage in order to include same-sex partners discriminates against marriage and the family, and deprives them of social and legal recognition as the fundamental and irreplaceable basis of society.

Permanent Council
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
Ottawa, 19 June 2003

two partners. The Church's canon law describes this consent as "an act of will by which a man and a woman by an irrevocable covenant mutually give and accept one another for the purpose of establishing a marriage."[6] The marriage covenant implies a giving and receiving from one another "a partnership and communion of one's whole life." The Church realizes that this requires a high level of consent. She holds therefore that some people are incapable of contracting a marriage.

a) This is true, first of all, for those who are unable rationally to understand what they are consenting to. One must have the intellectual maturity to be able to consent. Physical attraction or sexual compatibility – although important – is not enough. One must know the other person. One cannot consent to enter into marriage, for example, if one does not know an important aspect of the other person's life. I may not know that the other has a child from another relationship. I may not have let the other know that I had an accident or illness which made me infertile. I may not have informed the other of a congenital disease in my family history. Deceit and fraud can make the marriage invalid.

b) But consent also implies that both are capable of making a judgment. The couple must be able to appreciate and to will for themselves the rights and duties of marriage. If one of the partners, it turns out, is not able, there can be no marriage. One must be able to make a free and responsible judgment to enter into the marriage covenant. If one has no understanding of what marriage entails, one can hardly consent to it. One must accept that it is for life, that it commits one to faithfulness to the other, that it gives the right to sexual intercourse and the right to become parents, that it commits one to an integral communion of life. There is no consent unless one is able and willing to commit oneself to this understanding of marriage. Marriage demands a level of personal maturity.

c) Consent also implies that one is able to assume the essential obligations of marriage. There may be all sorts of psychological reasons why one or the other partner is unable to do so. Sometimes someone is psychologically unable to enter into a partnership and communion of their whole life. Similarly, a homosexual cannot marry if he or she is incapable of entering into a heterosexual relationship. What a person cannot do, he or she cannot consent to. Hence also those who suffer from psychosis, neurosis, psychopathology or sociopathology cannot validly marry. This is the case also when someone because of age or development is not sufficiently mature to assume the demands of a true partnership.[7]

Fifth, a valid marriage between baptized persons is by that very fact a sacrament. You will read more about marriage as a sacrament later in this chapter.

Guiding questions

1. Identify the essential elements of marriage.
2. What is implied by "an intimate partnership of life and love"?
3. Why does a marriage include an openness to receive children?
4. Irina marries Hassan only to discover a few months later that Hassan has an addiction to heroin. When she confronts him about this, he admits that he has been struggling with his heroin addiction for years. He had hoped that in marrying Irina he would finally beat it. He chose not to inform her, telling himself that if he was beating the habit he would not have to own up. Did Irina consent to this marriage? Discuss.

Keeping your word

In Thornton Wilder's play *By the Skin of Our Teeth* there is a telling statement about the power of a word that is once given. Maggie turns in anger and pain to her husband George who has just told her that he is running off with another woman:

"I didn't marry you because you were perfect, George. I didn't even marry you because I loved you. I married you because you gave me a promise. That promise made up for your faults. And the promise I gave you made up for mine. Two imperfect people got married and it was that promise that made the marriage… and when our children were growing up, it wasn't the house that protected them; and it wasn't our love that protected them – it was that promise."

Stages of married life

Life is, of course, more complex than a sequence of stages. The following stages, however, help us to see that the events and struggles of marriage can lead to human fulfilment and maturity. Although many know that relationships in marriage do not remain the same, few seem to understand that husband and wife must work together to develop their relationship. Not to do so would mean that the changes in the relationship "just happen" as though they had no responsibility for the changes in their own relationship. Relationships and love can mature over a lifetime in ways that are unimaginable at the beginning of marriage. With this in mind here are some generalized traits of possible growth in marriage.

Stage 1: *Beginnings*

Every couple brings with them their family backgrounds, their past, their education, their friends and relatives, and their previous relationships. This past will have an influence, sometimes despite best-laid plans, upon every aspect of the new couple's life together. It will show in the doing of household chores, shopping, cooking, loving, negotiating, and just getting along. Most expectations of a spouse and one's marriage are based on one's past. Reflecting on one's past family experiences is critically important. Otherwise, one enters marriage unaware of the expectations he or she brings into the marriage. It is good right from the beginning to be aware of what family background and life-experience one brings into the marriage.

Stage 2: *Romantic love*

This romantic phase begins when the couple begins to talk about sharing life together. Depending on cultural customs this is the phase of engagement, marriage and cohabitation. This is usually a time of intense intimacy between a man and a woman, a sense of marvel about each other. At this point the man and woman

are each extremely attentive to the other, full of consideration for the feelings and desires of the other. It often leads to an intense closeness, a feeling of being merged with the other. The challenge of this stage is to create an intimate, deep and durable relationship based on good communication.

Stage 3: *Power struggle*

Some four or five years into the couple's life together the idealized image of the partner starts to fade. The hidden expectations that one puts on a back burner suddenly begin to crop up. He doesn't clean up behind him. She is never ready at agreed upon times. He never volunteers to do anything. She is endlessly on the telephone. One or the other of the partner wants change, usually arising because of pressures from work or from the family. The demands and constraints of time and energy are at times so overwhelming that one partner may feel that the other is not carrying his or her weight. Conflicts arise and a power struggle often ensues. But these conflicts do not have to be catastrophic. Working patiently together through each conflict with respect and openness leads to new insights about oneself and new ways of relating to the other. In this stage each partner works toward a new identity in the marriage. This is not disastrous; in fact, it is a new opportunity to grow. This phase requires good negotiating skills and the ability to forgive. It is worth it.

Stage 4: *Stability*

If the challenge for change in the previous phase is handled well, a period of stability may follow. You might call this period a truce if the demand for change has been met only partially, or an oasis if the challenge has been met. Often this is a time of deepening of the relationship. Each partner begins to ask himself or herself how each is contributing to the marriage. They may also ask themselves how they are the source of the problems in their marriage. Their deepening relationship often means that the couple will work to rekindle their deeper interest and love for each other. The challenge is to remain creative, not to fall into a deadly routine or to reinvent one another.

Stage 5: *Recommitment*

This stage takes place around the mid-life point of the couple. It is a time again for questioning one's choices and commitments. If in the previous stage, their efforts at deepening the relationship have not taken place and everything has become routine, the partners may drift apart. They may find it increasingly difficult to communicate with one another their fears and aspirations. Each will live in his or her own shell. Mid-life then leads to a real crisis in the marriage and often a withdrawal from the relationship. But if the couple has succeeded in being inventive in the previous stage, a new sense of trust and appreciation for each other may emerge. Each now will see the partner realistically, recognize the limitations and promote each other's strengths. This means a new commitment to the other with a deepening appreciation of each other's differences. The quotation from Thornton Wilder in the textbox on page 313 reflects the struggle to recommit based on the couple's original consent or promise.

Stage 6: *Fruitfulness*

This recognition and appreciation of each other's differences can have life-giving repercussions. Because each partner pursues personal interests, their individual identities grow. At the same time couples at this stage also begin to do more things together, such as travel, work together in a business, or become involved in social and community events. Finding this balance between personal but also mutual interests makes the couple more fruitful at the physical, psychological, affective, social and spiritual level at this time. The challenge will be not to go under as individuals and as a couple by becoming too involved in all sorts of activities.

Stage 7: *Growing old together*

This is the last stage of the couple's journey together. At this time they are probably retired. With today's longevity, this may well be the longest stage. They now have time. If they have succeeded in integrating all of their life's experiences and their married life together, they are often seen as pillars of stability and wisdom for their offspring, especially for their grand-

children. As grandparents they can remain fruitful for society. But this time is also a time of withdrawal. They become less involved in the social, political and economic sphere. They also experience the loss of friends and family through death. They are less active physically and socially. They may try to deny that they are getting older. But they can also learn to accept, to let go and remain positive and serene as they grow older. Such older couples can teach others that life together always contains opportunities for growth.[8]

Guiding questions

1. Write a story of a marriage. The story should show evidence of progression through these stages, or else focus on one stage of the marriage.
2. Talk to your parents or grandparents, or any other couple whose marriage you consider solid, and invite them to tell the story of their marriage.
3. Imagine married life for yourself at age 50. Imagine yourself at age 50 and not married. Examine your desires, fears, feelings.

Interview with Bob and Elizabeth Rapley

Bob and Elizabeth have been married more than fifty years. In an interview they reflected upon their life together.

In Search of the Good: How did you meet and decide to get married?

Elizabeth: I met Bob at the university…. At the time, I thought of being married as having children. I never thought of a career. When people got married then, they formed a team where the father had all sorts of outside responsibilities and the mother stayed at home. There was a very clear delineation between them. But that is not how our children are living…

Bob: …. It took me literally one evening to make up my mind that Elizabeth was the girl I wanted to marry. But it was three-and-a-half years before we got married. The end result was the same: we got married because we wanted to get married….

Elizabeth: The first word I heard Bob say when I saw him that evening was "Hooray!" There was a shortage of girls for a dance at the Newman Club at the University that evening, and when I and my girlfriend walked in, Bob was happy to see us. I was only eighteen at the time. I came from a convent boarding school before going to Oxford. I was not prepared. I had hardly met any men. It is not that I have any regrets. But I would not advise young women to do what I did. I had never been out with anyone else. You think, Bob, that you were immature. I was twice as immature. That was probably why I was happy to have your company, but I was not ready.

Elizabeth and Bob Rapley

Bob: I made sure that no one would come between us. I chased her. I kept all the men away.

In Search of the Good: How did you grow in your relationship?

Bob: We went through different stages during our marriage. I entered being the father of the family. I went to work. And Elizabeth stayed home. In essence the decisions at first were made largely by me. And, I would say, that lasted for about eighteen or nineteen years. By that time the oldest of our seven children had left home. At that point, Elizabeth said that she wanted to go and take a course at the university. ➤

She began by taking a course at Saint Paul University. Then she said, "I want to get a Ph.D. in women's studies, for that is where my interest lies. And I want you to take the same attitude towards my work that I took to yours." That became a very solid agreement. But it was also part of a gradual shift in the relationship – to an absolute equality. A third change came at the time I retired. There is now no longer any kind of divisions of duties. Everything that needs to be done, we just do it.

Elizabeth: Yes, eighteen or nineteen years into our marriage, things changed. I was no longer defining myself through my children. I began to look for my own identity by what was happening within me. But for a long time when I was away from home at the university or doing research, I felt I should be in the house. I felt guilty. I ought to be at home. Bob never laid this guilt on me. I did it to myself. I could justify it to myself only if what I did was serious or demanding. I could not have played golf or something like that. It would not have felt right. It had to be serious.

In Search of the Good: How did you experience this time?

Elizabeth: This happened at a time when one of the children was sick. I was totally housebound with her. There were days that Bob said to me, "Why don't you take a day and spend it at the archives?" When I would walk into the archives it was as if I was walking into paradise. Bob did that for me for I would not have done it on my own. That was part of it. I would not say I felt liberation because that sounds as if I would denigrate my life as a mother. They were the best years of my life. For me at that time, approaching middle age and not knowing what to do – with the problems at home; this life at the university was great.

Bob: It was a stressful time: the sickness of one of the children, the death around the same time of Elizabeth's mother. It was the time also that her father came to stay with us.

In Search of the Good: How strong has the bond been between you?

Elizabeth: Our background is very solid, you know. There has been no divorce in my own family. My parents were devoted to each other. That is very important. I can say that really the thought of separation never occurred to me. I think it is a habit of mind. That is what you expect. This attitude towards our marriage was the same as with our faith. We did not question it. Gratification comes and goes. But our bond was unquestionable. We were taught that all the time. The nuns at school were always on to that. Gratification comes and goes.

Bob: We talk about two people, that somehow a couple becomes a married identity. And I think it is important to keep in mind that there are always two people, living together in their own world, thinking separately with their dreams and ambitions and needs. And I think that to be conscious of the other as another person, with needs that have to be met and considered, is necessary if you are going to remain a couple. We have been very lucky. We have over time been able to meet the needs of the other. Not seeing the needs as conflicting but as essential for one another.

Elizabeth: When you are young and one of you or both are working, you are spending a lot of time apart. It is a time to do all those other things, to make these other relationships. To create your space in the world. So as you come to retire, you really have to decide whether you want to be inseparable. My parents never did anything separately. My mom and dad had breakfast together, coffee together, lunch together, tea together. Always together. We don't do that. We pursue our interests and are often apart. I don't think one type of marriage is more affectionate than another.

In Search of the Good: Tell us about your children. What did they bring to your marriage?

Elizabeth: They were everything for us. When we married we both wanted children; we wanted a large family. We had six of our own and we adopted Pat. With all the difficulties we have had, we are terribly proud of them all. Bob always thought we ought to be stricter; I was the softer one always trying to understand what they were doing. There were moments of tension when our kids were in trouble. There were times that were difficult.

Bob: It was back and forth. Neither of us got what we wanted. In the end, it turned out very well.

Elizabeth: It proves that if you just wait long enough, everything will come around. It is so good to see now that they are married, how they respect their partners. And I can honestly say that they give each other space. That was one of the grounding points of our

marriage: to respect each other. Today many young people live together. The problem with living together is the commitment. How can it be there? If you are flighty with people, if you cannot keep your word, you are bound to run into a problem.

In Search of the Good: How has Christian faith played a role in your marriage?

Elizabeth: It is hard to say. It is almost like the air I breathe. I cannot say what marriage would be like without it. We have had our difficulties and disagreements with the Church. But our faith was like the bedrock of our marriage.

Bob: We have always been part of this community. I have involved myself with poverty issues and the Shepherds of Good Hope (food and lodging for the poor); Elizabeth works with refugees. We are saddened at times when our children cannot share faith with us and that we cannot talk about it and celebrate it with them. Don't get me wrong: they are good and dedicated and are great parents. It is an area that we cannot communicate.

Elizabeth: One of the great influences in our early married lives was CFM (Christian Family Movement). It brought families together in each others' homes where we discussed topics of Church and family and society. It sort of gave us permission to talk about our faith. It is an area we do not easily talk about – even with colleagues. CFM created the space for that. It allowed us to question, to bring to the open the story of our convictions and test them with others. I will always be grateful for having had this opportunity.

Marriage from the perspective of society

The couple as a new social cell

Marriage is an essential building block of society, culture, and civilization. With marriage a man and woman create a new social cell in society. For this reason most societies provide a civic ceremony, grant a marriage licence and give marriages legal protection. Marriages create and strengthen bonds among the members and institutions of society; for example, health care and education. For the family, the bond between the husband and wife provides the stable environment for the growth and development of their children. As such, marriage in a secular, multicultural society is indispensable to establish and maintain the social order. Stable family relationships are more important than any other form of human relationship in society.

Marriage as a legal commitment

Since government regulates and protects marriage for the good of society, it legalizes marriage in the form of a contract. Each person enters the contract promising to live with the other in an exclusive and permanent relationship. No other relationship is quite like it. The commitment of marriage represents the couple's intention to create a new social cell. Their commitment is endorsed and recognized as such by society. This is why a legal marriage contract requires that someone in authority be present at the signing. This official presence is needed to ensure that there is a genuine and public vow made by the couple, and that this vow conforms to the requirements of the society. This is why a marriage is also a public act. The man and woman officially establish their relationship within society by publicly declaring their commitment to one another. Society extends the protection of law and certain social benefits to those who enter the institution of marriage.

During this wedding ceremony, the priest signs the marriage documents, acting as representative of the government and the Church.

Marriage as a rite of passage

Through marriage a couple enters into a new state of life. Marriage is part of a process of moving from a single state to a married state. In each culture and society this process may differ. But this personal and social transition encompasses a series of intentional acts, such as engagement, the meeting of the two families, the formal setting of dates and place of marriage, wedding showers, pre-marriage parties, marriage rehearsal, etc. The wedding, the ceremony in which promises are exchanged before witnesses, uses gestures, symbols and words to publicly declare that the partners are entering a new status in society. As a result of this declaration, the man and woman are now spouses, husband and wife, life partners. Their entry into a new state of life also creates new kinship relations that are enshrined in affinity and parental ties.

Marriage as an institution

Marriages have existed in one form or another throughout history. As an institution, marriage is surrounded and protected by morality and customs. Because it is part of the public and social domain, marriage involves third parties. Marriage involves all sorts of representatives of society: the witnesses, the community, the law, society as a whole. For Catholics marriage also involves the Church and God. As an institution marriage has deep ecclesial and anthropological roots involving relationships of blood and affinity that are among the strongest social bonds within society.[9]

Guiding questions

1. Why does marriage have a social dimension?
2. How is this social aspect of marriage expressed?
3. What do married couples bring to society?
4. What are the responsibilities of society towards couples?

Secular society and homosexual partners

For Catholics the term "marriage" describes a permanent and exclusive union between a man and a woman. But this meaning has become the subject of an intense debate in many Western societies. The secular perspective of marriage does not take into account the revelation of sacred Scripture or Catholic tradition or the perspective of other religions. Most considerations of marriage in society are social and anthropological. Thus the debate in the context of a secular society is reduced exclusively to that of legal rights. One consequence of this is that people who are attracted to the same sex and cohabit have demanded the legal right of marriage. But the meaning and celebration of marriage has a historical and constitutive impact on the fibre of Western society. In a letter of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops dated September 10, 2003, the bishops state:

> The marriage of a man and a woman is not just one form of association or institutional model among others. It is the institution on which society is founded. The relationship created by marriage between a woman and a man is a fundamental human reality which is at the basis of the social community.
>
> Marriage needs to be preserved as an institution uniting two members of the opposite sex. For the common good of society, it must be protected. … We reject the attempt of the State to reduce all intimate personal relationships to the same level, leading to the disappearance of the civil institution of marriage as understood in all human societies since time immemorial. Because of the recognized contributions that the institution of marriage brings to the stability of the family and to the future of society, legislators have the duty of preserving the distinction between marriage and other forms of relationship involving two persons.[10]

Marriage statistics in Canada – 2001

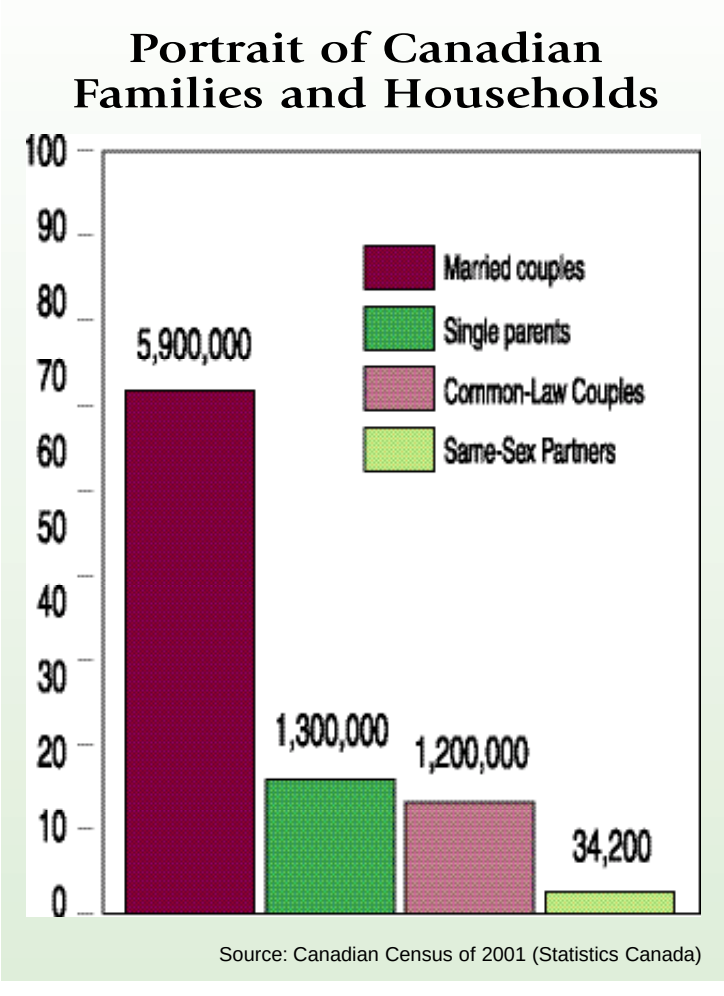
The 2001 Canadian census provides the following information about marriage:

- Marriage remains the dominant choice of most couples. Of the 8.4 million families in Canada, 5.9 million (70%) are married-couple families. That is a decline, however, from the 83% who were married-couple families in 1981. In 2001, 1.3 million families (16%) were headed by single parents, and 1.2 million (14%) by common-law couples. There were 34,200 households composed of same-sex partners.
- There was a marked increase of common-law families. In 1981 these comprised only 5.8% of all families; in 2001 they had increased to 14%. The increase was greatest in Québec where common-law couples made up 30% of all couple families. The meaning of this trend becomes clear when we realize that 40% of men and women begin their conjugal life through a common-law arrangement. Eventually 75% of common-law couples will marry, if the trends seen in 2001 continue.
- The 34,200 same-sex couples represent 0.5% of all couples. They tend to live in metropolitan areas of Canada.

The data from Statistics Canada also bears out the importance of marriage both for the couple and for their children:

- 9% of Canadians (1.5 million) are divorced. Most of the divorces take place when couples are around 40 years of age. The average duration of their marriages is 13.7 years, even though the most critical year of marriage is the fifth year. The likelihood that a marriage ends in divorce within 30 years was about 36% of all couples at the beginning of the millennium.
- Children born to a married couple who did not live together before marrying were the least likely (13.6%) to see their parents separate. As a general rule, children do best in an environment that includes a mother and a father.
- The risk of family breakdown for children of unmarried common-law couples was immense. Common-law couples with children have a very high likelihood of separating at some point (63.1%).

Children whose parents had lived common-law but then married (either before or soon after starting a family) also had a higher likelihood of their marriage ending in a breakdown than those who did not live common-law. About 25% of children born out of these unions experienced family breakdown.[11]



The permanency of marriage in the Catholic Church

Indissolubility

Catholics believe that a valid and sacramental marriage is permanent and for life. The term that is used to describe the permanency of marriage is "indissoluble." This term refers to the fact that the sacrament of marriage is *dissolved* only in death and that since the marriage is a covenant in the Lord through the Church, the state has no power to "dissolve" a sacrament of the Church by the granting of a civil divorce. The reason for the permanency of marriage has been revealed in the Scriptures, beginning with the book of Genesis. When the Catholic couple marry in the Church, their promises to each other are uttered in union with the words of Jesus: "What God has joined together, let no one separate." Or more explicitly: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." (Mark 10.9, 11-12) The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states the following:

> By its very nature conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of the spouses. This is the consequence of the gift of themselves which they make to each other. Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement "until further notice." The "intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children, demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable union between them." (#1646)

Annulments

A *valid and sacramental* marriage in the Catholic Church cannot be dissolved by civil authorities. However, sometimes it happens that from the very day of the wedding the marriage covenant is void and invalid. This happens when the couple does not fulfil the conditions of marriage. They enter what they may think is a valid and sacramental marriage, but it is not because the conditions for the sacrament (to understand marriage, to appreciate, know and will the rights and duties of marriage, and to be psychologically capable of entering into a marriage) were not fulfilled. For example, after being married in a Catholic Church, one spouse intends never to have children and takes steps to prevent having children without ever telling the other spouse. In this case, the marriage covenant would be null and void, since an openness to having children is precisely what the other partner understood about their vows. In a case such as this, in the eyes of the Church, the marriage is invalid. Should the spouse who is trying to have children find out the truth, she or he has recourse through the Catholic diocese to have their sacramental marriage declared invalid. This canonical procedure of the Catholic Church is called an annulment.

Separation and divorce

There are situations in which living together for a couple becomes practically impossible, and so they decide to separate. Living separately does not prohibit them from receiving Holy Communion at Mass. In such cases a couple may separate and seek a legal, civil divorce. But such a divorce, in the Church's understanding, does not dissolve the marriage and so the person is not free to marry someone else. A validly contracted marriage remains indissoluble. (*CCC* #1649-1650)

Does this mean that those who are divorced, but not remarried, cannot partake of the Eucharist? This is a common misunderstanding. People who for valid and serious reasons have separated and obtained a legal, civil divorce are able to partake fully in the life of the Church and receive Holy Communion at Mass.

Divorce and remarriage

Catholics who have been granted a civil divorce but have not received an annulment from the diocese may not marry again. Marriage is a covenant made within the Church. The civil divorce dissolves the civil contract but not the marriage covenant or sacrament. A civilly divorced Catholic therefore cannot remarry in the Catholic Church. If a civilly divorced Catholic were to marry before a judge or before

The lost wedding ring

It happened so quickly. One minute I was holding my wedding ring in my hand, and the next minute, it was tumbling to the floor. For a moment, the whole room stood still as my ring rolled to the nearest wall and fell through a half-inch opening, disappearing under the cement floor.

I was taken aback at what happened next. The whole room ran over in disbelief and immediately began a salvage operation, headed by the most elderly in the crowd. I assured the group that the monetary value of the ring was minimal. Three days later, I was presented with my wedding ring amidst the sounds of a cheering crowd. I can't think of another object I own that would compel strangers to spend so much time and energy ensuring its recovery. Why is that?

another religious leader, the marriage would not be recognized as valid by the Catholic Church since the first marriage is permanent. People remarried outside the Catholic Church continue to be members of the Catholic Church. They are encouraged to participate in the activities of the Catholic community, but are not allowed to receive Holy Communion.

Guiding questions

1. Why are marriages indissoluble – "until death do us part" – according to the Church?
2. Discuss the importance of consent.
3. Distinguish the terms divorce and annulment.
4. Distinguish the terms covenant and contract.
5. Which of the following does Church teaching prohibit from receiving Holy Communion: Separated Catholics? Divorced Catholics? Catholics with annulments? Catholics remarried outside the Church?

Marriage as a sacrament

Since the Council of Trent in 1563, the Church has considered marriage a sacramental act: that is, a concrete sign of the advent of salvation through Jesus Christ and a source of sanctifying grace. In calling marriage a sacrament, the Church recognizes the legal and moral aspect of marriage, but it also reveals its religious meaning. Marriage as an institution is universally accepted. This institution legitimizes the union between a man and a woman who are open to children and willing to accept the responsibility of educating them. For Catholics, marriage goes further. Marriage means two people entering a sacred history that began at baptism. As a married couple, they themselves become a community of faith and love, a sign of the love of Christ for his Church.

Profound love goes beyond mere sentimentality and reaches a high level of giving. "To love means to give and to receive something, which can be neither bought nor sold, but only given freely and mutually."[12] Love is a gift from one person to another. Maturity arises from this offering of unselfish love. Each member of the couple is invited to become what God asks of him or her. One of the most beautiful fruits of the couple is that each one helps the other to become all that he or she can be.

"Mutual giving creates the communion of persons…which means to exist one for the other in a relationship based on natural gifts."[13] "I give myself to you in order to love you…I accept you as my spouse," says one formula of consent.[14] A gift is not a loan. Something loaned can be retrieved or returned, but a gift cannot.

> The couple's calling is that the man and the woman love each other ever more in truth, ever more intensely and build as a

The sacramental sign of marriage

Like the bread and wine that are the Body and Blood of Christ or the waters of Baptism that are a sign of real cleansing from original sin, Marriage too is a sign revealing and effecting God's presence in our lives. But what is the sacramental sign of marriage?

1. One could say that a sign in marriage that reveals God is the providential discovery of each other. There is a sense that God has made the man and woman for each other. The other is like the treasure hidden in the field of Jesus' parable. It takes a lifetime to find and dig up the treasure of the other. It is as if on the day of marriage God indicates the place where from this day forward the couple must seek their happiness. Married life is not a possession; it is a journey of communion and love that leads to union with God and eternal life. The couple experience this because God created them one for the other. That is precisely what the angel Raphael said to Tobias and Sarah on the night of their marriage: "Do not be afraid, for [Sarah] was set apart for you before the world was made." (Tobit 6.18)

On the threshold of his public life Jesus performs his first sign – at his mother's request – during a wedding feast (John 2.1-11). The Church attaches great importance to Jesus' presence at the wedding in Cana. She sees in it the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence. (*CCC*, #1613)

couple and with their children a true community of love like the one which exists in God. It is at this deepest level of love that the sacrament of marriage is rooted, a love which tends towards the fullest union, the fullest respect for the other, the fullest intimacy (to be with) and the fullest difference (you are unique).[15]

The sacrament of marriage is fundamentally an experience of faith. It continually calls for trust and commitment. It is an experience of faith in oneself, an unconditional affirmation of one's original value and personal dignity. Faith in the other helps the spouses find themselves and give of themselves, at the same time as it calls on them to deny themselves. Faith in their relationship and in the sealed bond of their marriage is deeper than romantic feelings, deeper even than love, since love can suffer breakdowns. Faith in God sustains and supports those who draw on the source of all love. The husband and wife are for each other and their children a sign of the love of the Lord.

[Source: COLF: *In Love for Life*]

Marriage is a sacramental covenant

The matrimonial bond establishes itself as part of a covenant, an unconditional promise between two persons and two wills. "Though the love of a man and a woman is marked by imperfection, it is always called upon to reveal in concrete terms that which Jesus revealed in full: the irrevocable love of God who has tied himself for all time to our humanity… Married people take part in this mystery. They become its living signs." Thus, the sacrament of marriage signifies the union of Christ and the Church. (Ephesians 5.31-32) "It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the

2. The essential sacramental sign of marriage is the bond itself that ties the couple together. This bond has been called a covenant since it resembles the covenant which God made with Israel, or Christ with the Church. Marriage is a privileged place of encounter with God because of the word that the couple gives, the promise that will hold their future life together. In their love the couple gives life to one another. When Moses encountered God in the burning bush, he was told, "Come no closer! Remove your sandals; the place on which you are standing is holy ground." (Exodus 3.5) So God says to the couple, you are standing on holy ground. Be always aware of the God-like mystery of the other person.

> The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament. (*CCC*, #1601)

3. Marriage becomes an even stronger sign of God through the family to which it gives rise. If both husband and wife are transformed by their relationship with each other, they are transformed even more so in their relationship with their child. It is wondrous to see how a couple changes when a child completes their union. The woman becomes a mother and the man becomes a father. Life has begun anew. That is why the Christian family is a sign on earth of the Holy Trinity. In their unity as a family, the family is an image of the love that proceeds from the Father to the Son (as man to woman or woman to man) and binds them together in the Holy Spirit (the fruit of this love). Within the family God is active as Father, Son and Spirit to shape its members into God's image.[16]

> In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centres of living, radiant faith. For this reason, the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are "by word and example… the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation." (*CCC*, #1656)

human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life."

Every sacrament gives a grace to support and assist persons according to their life experiences. The grace of the sacrament of marriage supports and strengthens the couple. It is not a magic wand that relieves spouses of their human condition, but instead helps them to view things differently and calls on them to surpass themselves. Perhaps the first grace of the sacrament is this change in perspective. The Holy Spirit at the heart of the couple's communion, revitalizes them and renders the man and the woman capable of the same love as that of Christ for humanity.

At the marriage celebration, the presider represents the entire Church community, but is not the one performing the marriage. The husband is the sacramental minister for his wife, and the wife is the sacramental minister for her husband. To be considered valid, however, a marriage must meet three criteria: no impediments may exist, ecclesiastical law must be observed, and consent must be given and received before the Church. The married couple, like the universal Church, constitutes a small Church whose mission is to express God in the world by offering it true love.[17]

Guiding questions

1. In what ways are married couples a "sign"?
2. What graces or gifts does the sacrament of marriage give spouses, the family and the community?
3. What is sacramental love?

Conditions for a truly human and sacramental love

- ***Freedom***
  The man and woman are called upon to choose each other and to choose marriage without regard for social pressure (by parents and friends), emotional pressure (such as the fear of being alone), institutional constraints (getting married because it is the tradition), and so on. In fact, the couple reach their full depth when they welcome and accept the other's gift, offered fully and freely.

- ***Fidelity***
  Both partners must help each other to remain faithful to their love. The goal of fidelity is to accept the full and therefore exclusive integration of the other into one's own life.

- ***Permanence***
  Marriage is for life. Indissolubility is not based on emotion, because emotions are changeable. It is not based on the force of will, which stands on its own, because then love would be a matter of willpower. Rather, the permanence of the couple is based on faith as an affirmation of self and of the other. And it is based on promise.

- ***Fruitfulness***
  The culmination of a couple's fruitfulness is the desire for and acceptance of [children], with all the attendant responsibilities of parenthood. Bringing a child into the world is an act of faith and hope. Beyond the child, the fruitfulness of human love flows out in all spheres of human life. Through the communion of persons, the couple creates its own sense of unity and reaps the fruits of patience, of service, of love that "rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13.4-7)[18]

Wedding vows from the Roman Catholic rite of marriage

The priest addresses the bride and bridegroom in these or similar words:

My dear friends,
you have come together in this church
so that the Lord may seal and strengthen your love
in the presence of the Church's minister
and this community.
Christ abundantly blesses this love.
He has already consecrated you in baptism
and now he enriches and strengthens you
by a special sacrament
so that you may assume the duties of marriage
in mutual and lasting fidelity.
And so, in the presence of the Church,
I ask you to state your intentions.

N. and N.,
Have you come here freely and without reservation
to give yourselves to each other in marriage?

Will you love and honour each other as man
and wife for the rest of your lives?
Will you accept children lovingly from God,
and bring them up according to the law
of Christ and his Church?

Priest: Since it is your intention to enter into
marriage, join your right hands,
and declare your consent before God
and his Church.

The bridegroom says:

I, _____, take you, _____ to be my wife. I
promise to be true to you in good times and
in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love
you and honour you all the days of my life.

The bride says:

I, _____, take you, _____ to be my husband.
I promise to be true to you in good times and
in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love
you and honour you all the days of my life.

The priest says:

You have declared your consent before the Church.
May the Lord in his goodness strengthen your consent
and fill you both with his blessings.
What God has joined, men must not divide.

Blessing and exchange of rings

The priest says:

May the Lord bless + these rings
which you give to each other
as the sign of your love and fidelity.

As the bride and bridegroom exchange rings, each may say:

_____, take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity.
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.[19]

Guiding questions

1. In the Catholic Rite of Marriage, explain how the following terms are used: consent, love, fidelity, Christ, Church.
2. At the beginning of the rite, the priest asks the bride and groom three questions. What is the purpose of these three questions?
3. What is the significance of invoking the Blessed Trinity with the exchange of the rings?
4. How does a sacramental marriage differ from a civil marriage?

Marriage and the mystery of Christ

"The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery; it is, so to speak, the nuptial bath which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist. Christian marriage in its turn becomes an efficacious sign, the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church. Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between baptized person is a true sacrament of the New Covenant." (*CCC* #1617) That is why the celebration of a marriage between two baptized Catholics normally takes place during the Eucharist. In this way marriage is connected with the celebration of the death and the resurrection of Christ. There they give themselves to each other as Christ gave himself to others. (*CCC* #1621)

Since the sacramental symbol is found in the couple's life and commitment and in their fruitfulness, the couple are "ministers of Christ's grace." It is not the priest who marries; the couple marry each other. And so they confer the sacrament upon each other. They do so by the consent they give each other: their "I do." "I take you to be my wife" – "I take you to be my husband." The consent binds the couple to each other, making them "one flesh." (*CCC* #1627) The consent makes the marriage to be a valid marriage. The priests or bishops are witnesses to the mutual consent. In the Eastern Church the consent needs to be completed with a blessing. Without it the marriage is not valid as a sacrament. (*CCC* #1623) In the Latin Church the marriage symbol is completed by the consummation of the marriage. In the prayer known as the epiclesis – a prayer invoking the Holy Spirit – the couple receives the Holy Spirit as the bond of their union. The Spirit is invoked upon the couple so that the couple will take on more and more the attitude of Christ. "The Holy Spirit is the seal of their covenant, the ever-available source of their love and the strength to renew their fidelity." (*CCC* #1624)

Guiding questions

1. How does marriage point to the activity of God between the couple?
2. Why does one marry in the Church and preferably during a Eucharist?

A spirituality of marriage

In his novel *The Man Without Qualities*, Robert Musil presents a brilliant, talented man, whose many qualities have not yet been solidified or hardened by any choice. He has succeeded in avoiding making a decision about his program of studies, his profession, and his life partner. For the main character, Ulrich von… – even his name is not complete – life must consist of a succession of new challenges. He seeks to try out the most interesting ways of being human. Each time he seeks out new adventures. He never makes a choice; everything remains an experiment. The result: he remains a man without qualities, a non-descript human being.

This refusal to choose is not possible in a marriage. Each partner must make choices. When fiancés give each other their "I do," a part of their history has come to an end. They have given each other their word; this begins a new phase in their life. They have found their vocation. The options in life are narrowed to this one man and this one woman. Marriage as a vocation means to lay anchor in the one harbour which God has sought out for them. This

Some facts about wedding ceremonies in the Catholic Church

1. The Catholic marriage rite provides several different versions of the wedding ceremony depending on the circumstances. For example:
   a) If husband and wife are Catholic, the Sacrament of Matrimony is usually celebrated within the Mass. (*CCC* #1621)
   b) If the wedding in a Catholic Church is between a baptized and an unbaptized person, the marriage is non-sacramental (what makes marriage a sacrament is two baptized Christians) and the wedding ceremony is usually celebrated without Eucharist.
   c) If the wedding is between a Roman Catholic and a Protestant or Anglican, the marriage is truly a sacrament of the Church, but usually, for pastoral reasons, is celebrated without Eucharist.
2. Arranging for a Catholic wedding ceremony:
   a) The wording of the vows in the Catholic Church are a fixed part of the rite so you may choose to memorize them or you may repeat the vows as the priest or deacon says them. Wedding vows for a Catholic are always exchanged in a Catholic Church. The exception to this is explained below in #d.
   b) You may determine the music for your wedding from the selection of sacred music proposed by the local Catholic parish church.
   c) Each Catholic parish has policies regarding rehearsals, music, flowers, photos, dress, instrumentals, etc. These policies are intended to promote and protect the sacred nature of the sacrament. You should ask the parish priest during your first appointment about the particular policies of the parish church.
   d) If you wish to marry in a Christian church that is not Catholic you must make an appointment with your parish priest or deacon. He will seek permission from the bishop so that you may validly celebrate a Catholic wedding in another Christian church.
   e) You must notify your parish priest of your intent to marry in the Catholic Church well in advance of your wedding. Most Catholic parishes require six months' to one year's notice.
   f) You will need to gather some personal documents after your first appointment with the Catholic priest or deacon. Official documents, both civil and ecclesiastical, must be completed with the pastor. Several appointments with the parish priest will be necessary. The parish priest or deacon will explain what other civil and church documents you will need for the wedding.
   g) Since the priest or deacon is licensed by the province to conduct marriages, you will need a marriage licence or provincial banns and will be required to sign provincial documents.
3. The Catholic Church requires that engaged couples capable of marriage take part in a marriage preparation program to help them examine expectations in areas such as children and natural family planning, expectations regarding finances, work, sexuality, etc. Usually these courses are provided by married couples and they entail couples discussing issues together.

harbour carries the name of one's partner. Human life has many possibilities; it can go in a variety of directions. We know that things could have been different. But one has chosen one direction, one possibility. It is this possible route in life that a marriage seeks to make a reality. One no longer looks for alternatives. Dag Hammarskjöld, a former secretary general of the United Nations, once expressed this as follows:

> Your body and your soul contain thousands of possibilities, out of which you can build up many egos. But only in one of these possibilities is there a real harmony between the chooser and the chosen. Only in one – and this possibility you will never find unless you eliminate definitively all other chances with which you would love to play out of curiosity. But they prevent you from casting your anchor in the mystery of life.[20]

How do I know that God is calling me in this direction? Some young lovers think that because of the intensity of their feelings for one another they must be made for one another. But these intense emotional drives are not a sign either way for the couple. The intensity of feelings demonstrates that one is capable of deep emotions; they do not necessarily point to a vocation of marriage. Marriage is more than to succumb to the physical attraction of the other. To be attracted to another is instinctual. But love and marriage is a free and deliberate choice. All people are called to love and be loved just as all people are called at some point in their life to be touched and moved by God. Marriage is more than love. Many people love and do not marry. Some love deeply at a religious level and remain alone. For a marriage more is required than following natural impulses. Love implies a great asceticism and a constant control of natural impulses. In other words, one must have a measure of maturity marked by self control. In other words, one must be capable of marriage. As Jesus said, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?" (Luke 14.28) One must have talents, capacities and possibilities for this vocation.

Guiding questions

1. What are the spiritual implications of the exclusive covenant with one person?
2. Why is marriage more than the strong physical attraction and emotions, important as they may be, toward the other?

"My beloved is mine
and I am his."

Song of Songs 2.16

Chapter review

Summary

- From the beginning human beings are created from a unity; separated and alone the human is not good. Complemented by the other, man and woman discover the meaning of the human.
- The account of the fall from grace in Genesis identifies the disruption of three relationships: the creature/Creator relationship, the creature/creation relationship and the male/female relationship. Despite the loss of the free and uninhibited life together, their life together remains a blessing.
- For Catholics the term "marriage" describes a permanent and exclusive union between a man and a woman. Marriage is a partnership or covenant that reaches into every aspect of life. The soul of marriage is love that is open to procreation. Marriage is built on the consent of the two partners. A valid marriage between baptized persons is by that fact a sacrament.
- Husband and wife must work together to develop their relationship. Relationships and love can mature over a lifetime in ways that are unimaginable at the beginning of marriage.
- Married couples are essential building blocks for society's culture and civilization. Stable family relationships are more important than any other form of human relationship in society.
- Governments regulate and protect marriage for the good of society by legalizing marriage in the form of a contract.
- Through marriage a couple enters into a new state of life. Marriage is part of a process from a single state to a married state.
- Marriage as an institution has existed in one form or another from time immemorial. Marriage understood as the lasting union of a man and woman to the exclusion of others pre-exists the state.
- A valid and sacramental marriage is permanent and for life. It cannot be dissolved by civil authorities. However, sometimes it happens that from the very day of the wedding the marriage covenant is void and invalid.
- There are situations in which living together for a couple becomes practically impossible and so they decide to separate. In such cases a couple may separate and seek a legal, civil divorce. But such a divorce, in the Church's understanding, does not dissolve the marriage and does not give the right to remarry someone else. A validly contracted marriage remains indissoluble. Catholics who are granted a civil divorce but do not receive an annulment from the diocese may not marry again.
- Since the Council of Trent in 1563, the Church has considered marriage a sacramental act: that is, a concrete sign of the advent of salvation through Jesus Christ and a source of sanctifying grace.
- How does marriage point to God? One sign in marriage that reveals God is the providential discovery of each other. The proper sacramental sign of marriage is the bond itself that ties the couple together. Marriage becomes an even stronger sign of God through the family to which it gives rise.
- The matrimonial bond establishes itself as a covenant, an unconditional promise between two persons and two wills. Every sacrament gives grace to strengthen and support the couple.
- Conditions for a truly human and sacramental love: freedom, fidelity, permanence and fruitfulness.
- Since the sacramental symbol is found in the couple's life and commitment and in their fruitfulness, the couple are "ministers of Christ's grace." The couple marry each other.
- Marriage is a vocation, a calling from God.

Glossary

annulment: The determination by the diocesan marriage tribunal that a marriage covenant is invalid and therefore void, based on evidence that one or both of the marriage partners did not fulfill the conditions for a valid sacramental marriage.

conjugal: Relating to the married state, or the couple in their married relationship.

commitment: A pledge or promise to do something in the future. In marriage, it is entering into a lifelong partnership with another until death.

consent: To agree to something. In marriage, it is an agreement to a lifelong, exclusive partnership with the spouse, and acceptance of the marriage vows.

fidelity: Faithfulness, trustworthiness, loyalty.

indissolubility: Permanence. The sacrament of marriage is dissolved only in death.

procreation: The bringing forth of offspring.

promise: To declare that you will do or will refrain from doing something. In marriage, the partners vow or "… promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honour you all the days of my life."

sacramental covenant: The marriage bond between two baptized persons based on an unconditional promise to be faithful until death, and open to the gift of children.

social cell: The married couple is the basic "building block" of society. Stable family relations are the most important human relationship in society.

vocation: One's calling from God to a particular way of life.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. What does the creation story (Genesis 2) reveal about the relationship between man and woman?
2. Explain why marriage, in the eyes of the Church, is indissoluble.

Thinking and inquiry

3. Research current statistics on the status of marriage in Canada. Use the same or similar categories as this text on page 319. What do the statistics indicate about how our society values marriage?
4. Explain how and why marriage is a public action just as much as it is a personal commitment between a man and a woman.

Communication

5. Express in a creative manner of your choosing how marriage points to the activity of God between the couple.
6. In the medium of your choice, illustrate three sacramental signs of marriage.

Application

7. Create an outline of a program to help engaged couples prepare for marriage. Be sure that this program touches on the conditions for a sacramental marriage.
8. Explain the relationship between marriage and our search for the good.

The family

CHAPTER 17

More than ever, Christian families are called to help a world that is thirsting for meaning and hope to rediscover the meaning of God's extraordinary plan for humanity. We have to begin by helping our children live out the mission that was entrusted to them at their baptism: becoming collaborators with God at the beginning of this third millennium, even becoming saints and apostles – not with their own strength, but by counting on the power of the Risen One, offered through prayer, the Word of God and the sacraments.

The Christian Family: Good News for the World,
Catholic Organization for Life and Family, 2004

The family: A witness to love

"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me… Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25.34-36, 40)

Family is a place where we never stop learning how to love other people – the people who are closest to us – above all else. In our family, whatever its strengths or weaknesses, we learn about giving, forgiving and looking beyond ourselves to be with others in solidarity. In this natural learning environment, in this *sanctuary of life*, we discover the freedom and mutuality that lead to openness to the other, hospitality, and the creativity we need to reach the other family beyond the isolation and silence that keep them separate. Dwelling places of the breath of God, driven from within by the hope that gives faith in a living God, our families – whether they are deeply united, having difficulties, questioning, or unhappy – can become witnesses of merciful love.

Christian families, whatever their condition, are called to keep growing and maturing and to bear much fruit. (John 15.5) They are faithful to their mission when they create new ways of solidarity and compassion. As a family, a father, a mother, brothers, sisters – together and separately, each according to their talents, through a new "creativity" in charity – make present the solidarity and compassion of Christ when they welcome others in difficulty into their world. In the words of Pope John Paul II:

> This is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress…. It is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.[1]

Focus your learning

Cognitive

Explain how the family is the primary environment for the ethical and moral formation of the person.

Practical

Identify ways in which the family contributes to the common good.

Affective

How do our families help us come closer to Jesus?

Key terms in this chapter

basic cell of society
catechesis
compassion
discern
domestic church
family:
  nuclear and extended
formation
natural family planning
sanctuary
solidarity
vocation

In this way, we as a family can follow in Christ's footsteps through the simple and concrete actions of our everyday lives as we reach out to families that have been hurt deeply by life.

Even a wounded family can remain the primary source of well-being, spiritual renewal, emotional security and love for its members, as long as it is anchored by individuals who are full of life. At its most basic level, the family is a "bearer of Life."

No matter what a family's circumstances are, no matter how it suffers or what challenges it faces, when it opens itself to another family, it is a reflection of God – tender, faithful and merciful. It becomes a messenger of the compassionate Love of Christ for us all.[2]

Guiding questions

1. How do you understand the description of family as "a sanctuary of life"?
2. What are the practical ways in which families are called to be "bearers of life"?
3. How is the family the primary environment for the moral formation of persons?

The decline in the size of Canadian families

The family, grounded on marriage freely contracted, monogamous and indissoluble, is and must be considered the first and essential cell of human society. From this it follows that most careful provision must be made for the family both in economic and social matters as well as in those which are of a cultural and moral nature, all of which look to the strengthening of the family and helping it carry out its function.

Pope John XXIII, *Peace on Earth – Pacem in terris*, #16

Over the past century the size of Canadian families has changed dramatically. In the early part of the twentieth century, families with six to ten children or more were common. Today this is rare. The birth rate in 2004 was 10.5 live births for every 1000 Canadians. This is the lowest level since vital statistics were first collected in 1921. Births declined by 25% from 1994 to 2004. The number of births in Canada in 2004 was 331,000. The impact on family size is clear. The average number of people in a family in Canada at the beginning of the twenty-first century is 3.0. That is down from 3.7 in 1971. The average number of children per family in 2004 stood at 1.1 (in 1871 the average was 6.7). This means that Canadian families are not reproducing themselves. The figure needed for population replacement is 2.1. Without the 225,000 immigrants per year Canada's population would decline.[3]

A decline in population creates problems. Pope John Paul II wrote in *On Social Concern (Sollicitudo rei socialis)* that in the northern hemisphere, "the cause for concern is the drop in the birth rate, with repercussions on the aging of the population, unable to renew itself biologically…" There are many reasons for this drop-off. Demographic experts point to the increasing number of Canadian women who are working longer before they start a family. In the early part of the last century married couples had their families by the time they turned thirty. Today many married couples begin their families in their late twenties and early thirties. The demands of the economy and workplace make it difficult for couples to balance family and work. Some choose to have one child or none at all. But there are other reasons for the decline in size of the family: birth control and abortions. The legalization of contraceptives and abortion has had an enormous impact on the size of families.

Family planning

The Catholic Church has condemned the use of contraceptives in an encyclical by Pope Paul VI in 1968 *(On the regulation of birth, Humanae vitae)*. Until 1969 it was illegal in Canada to sell or distribute contraceptives. Prior to this date it was also illegal to provide or distribute information about birth control. The legalization of contraceptives in 1969 had the effect not only of reducing teenage pregnancies and making more accessible regulated births within families. They also had the effect of loosening the connection between the unitive and procreative

meaning of marriage; that is between sexual union of the couple and children that result from this union. With the new-found ability to control fertility, many people became sexually active outside of marriage. Sexual activity became more about "recreation" and less about the commitment of marriage and especially "procreation." This promotion of casual sex that began in the 1960s and 1970s is making it more and more difficult for some people to see in the sexual union a sacrament, a symbol, of God's love manifested in Jesus Christ. The trivializing of sex is an assault on the sacredness of human relationships.

> The Church calls today's men and women to love through the total gift of themselves. It is convinced that couples can find love while responding to the call to grow and flourish within the context of their Christian vocation: to be fruitful in all aspect of their lives.

In the Church's view, Christian couples must remain *open to life* in planning the timing for and the number of their children. *They are responsible for managing this procreative potential.* They must critically examine, in all generosity, the quality of the *conjugal and family environment* they can provide and their capacity to be open to new life. They must realistically assess their physical, financial and psychological resources in order to ensure that each of their children has the opportunity to grow in a loving, stable home environment.

All family planning methods are based on a set of values. The Church believes that natural methods express the indivisible link between loving union and the procreative potential of intercourse in the context of married love. For this reason, the Church sees natural family planning and not contraception as the morally acceptable choice. By discovering the *universe of meaning* contained within each sexual act, you will appreciate the breadth and depth of this link.[4]

As with every journey towards sanctification, yours as well, dear married people, is not easy. Every day you face difficulties and trials in being faithful to your vocation, in cultivating conjugal and family harmony, in accomplishing the mission of parents and participating in the social life. May you know how to seek in the word of God the answer to many questions which daily life puts to you.

Pope John Paul II, Oct. 21, 2001, to Christian families

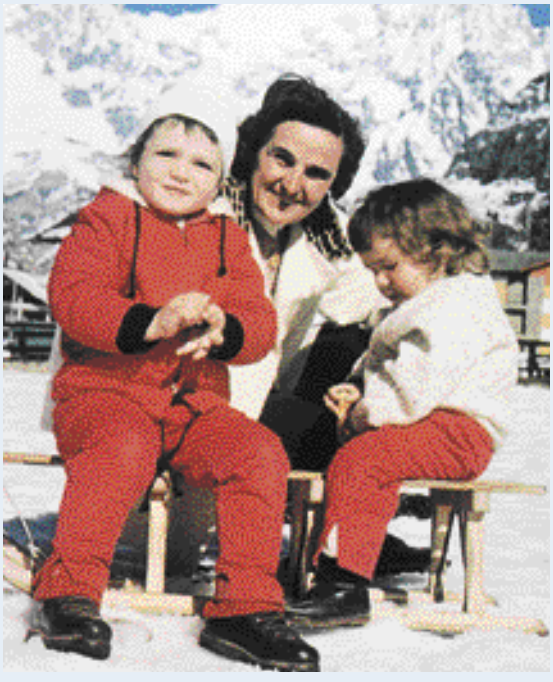
A witness to family love

Gianna Beretta Molla was born in Magenta, Italy, in 1922. While in high school and in medical school, she was involved with Catholic Action and with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, assisting the elderly and the poor. After completing her degree in medicine and surgery, she worked briefly at a medical clinic before enrolling at the University of Milan for specialized courses in pediatrics.

In 1955, she married Pietro Molla and 14 months later gave birth to a son. Two daughters soon followed. She was pregnant for the fourth time in 1961 when a uterine cyst was discovered, but she refused any treatment that would endanger the life of the fetus she was carrying even though she knew her own life was at risk. In April 1962, she gave birth to a daughter, Gianna Emmanuela, and died a week later at the age of thirty-nine.

She was beatified by Pope John Paul in 1994, and canonized a saint on May 16, 2004. Present at the canonization service were her widowed husband and three children.

From Catholic News Service



Abortion

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you."

Jeremiah 1.5
(See also Job 10.8-12 and Psalm 22.10-11.)

Abortion also has affected the size of the family. In 2000, Canadian women obtained 105,000 abortions. That is a staggering 32 abortions for every 100 live births![5] The understanding of marriage as a union of a man and a woman for mutual support and the creation of a family was dealt a blow when abortion was removed from the criminal code of Canada in 1988.

The decriminalization of abortion in Canada is based on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Article seven of the Charter states that everyone has the right to security of person and the right not to be deprived of this security. Unwanted pregnancy came to be seen as a possible deprivation of the security of person of the woman. Previously the mother and father of a child by law were obliged to protect the life and well-being of their child. Currently the father's right and obligation to protect the child is abrogated; he has no right to intervene. As John Haas, President of the National Catholic Bioethics Center in Boston, Massachusetts, says, "Increasingly, husband and wife are no longer seen as bound together for the benefit of society in the common enterprise of building a family with shared rights and obligations."[6] Partners in a marriage are addressed by the courts as individuals with individual rights. The relationship itself between a man and a woman *as a couple* is being gradually stripped of rights.

How are we to think of court decisions that give the legal right of life to a mother but exclude the right to life of the child in the womb? How are we to think of governments that attempt to redefine the meaning of marriage to include two people of the same sex? The following describes the understanding of the Catholic Church on the responsibility of the judiciary and the legislature on the matter of abortion.

> The inalienable right to life of every innocent human individual is a *constitutive element of a civil society and its legislation:*
>
> "The inalienable rights of the person must be recognized and respected by civil society and the political authority. These human rights depend neither on single individuals nor on parents; nor do they represent a concession made by society and the state; they belong to human nature and are inherent in the person by virtue of the creative act from which the person took his origin. Among such fundamental rights one should mention in this regard every human being's right to life and physical integrity from the moment of conception until death."[7]
>
> "The moment a positive law deprives a category of human beings of the protection which civil legislation ought to accord them, the state is denying the equality of all before the law. When the state does not place its power at the service of the rights of each citizen, and in particular of the more vulnerable, the very foundations of a state based on law are undermined.... As a consequence of the respect and protection which must be ensured for the unborn child from the moment of conception, the law must provide appropriate penal sanctions for every deliberate violation of the child's rights."[8]
>
> *CCC* #2273

Guiding questions

1. Check the Internet for the latest data on Canadian families.
2. What explains the current decrease in births in Canada?
3. In 1871 the average number of children in a Canadian family was 6.7. Currently the average is 1.1. Discuss.
4. What is the basic truth that the Scriptures (Jeremiah 1.5, Job 10.8-12 and Psalm 22.10-11) reveal about human life, from conception onwards?

Strong families: A portrait

Excerpt from "Strong families: A portrait" by Ben Schlesinger, The Vanier Institute of the Family.[9]

The family is alive and well… despite widely published reports that it is an outdated social institution. In fact, the family as an institution is remarkably strong. Dr. Carlfred Broderick [a psychiatrist and marriage and family therapist] says it is the toughest evolutionary human structure and will outlast every other organization. Clearly, the evidence shows that the family bears more of the burden of individual human survival, and also of the transmission of civilization and culture, than any other social structure.

Of course, some flesh-and-blood families are not as strong as the institution we call "the family." What makes some families stronger and healthier than others? Why do some function better than others? The literature on family strengths has many answers. Let's start by defining what researchers are looking for when they try to identify "family strengths."

Family strengths are relationship patterns, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills and competencies, and social and psychological characteristics that:

1. create a sense of positive family identity;
2. promote satisfying and fulfilling interaction among family members;
3. encourage the development of the potential of the family group and individual family members;
4. contribute to the family's ability to deal effectively with stress and crisis; and
5. contribute to the family's ability to be supportive of other families.

Strong families

In their book, *Secrets of Strong Families*, American researchers Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain identified six family strengths shared by the 3,000 "strong families" they studied:

1. Commitment
   Members of strong families are dedicated to promoting each other's welfare and happiness. They value the unity of the family.
2. Appreciation
   Members of strong families show appreciation for each other a great deal.
3. Communication
   Members of strong families have good communication skills and spend a lot of time talking with each other.
4. Time
   Strong families spend time – quality time in large quantities – with each other.
5. Spiritual wellness
   Whether they go to formal religious services or not, strong family members have a sense of a greater good or power in life, and that belief gives them strength and purpose.
6. Coping ability
   Members of strong families are able to view stress or crises as an opportunity to grow.

Summarizing some American studies, Strong and DeVault concluded that strong families:

- work for the well-being, or defend the unity and continuity, of their families;
- support each other;
- respect each family member for his/her uniqueness and difference;
- spend time together to build family cohesion;
- delegate responsibility;
- allow children to make mistakes and face the consequences;
- contribute to the well-being of their neighbourhood, city, country or world;
- have a spiritual orientation or a spiritual dimension (which may not be the same as religiosity).

5. The Church's teaching on the political and legal responsibility of civil leaders (see quotation from *CCC* #2273 on page 334) states that when a "law deprives a category of human beings of the protection which civil legislation ought to accord them, the state is denying the equality of all before the law. When the state does not place its power at the service of the rights of each citizen, and in particular of the more vulnerable, the very foundations of a state based on law are undermined...." Explain how a government policy that fails to protect the unborn members of our society affects all members of that society.

For the first time, a married couple is beatified together

VATICAN CITY, OCT. 21, 2001 (Zenit.org) - John Paul II fulfilled a long-held desire today when he beatified a husband and wife together, highlighting the fact that holiness is not restricted to religious and priests.

The new blessed are Luigi (1880–1951) and Maria (1884–1965) Beltrame Quattrocchi of Rome, who were married for fifty years and had four children, three of whom are still alive and attended today's ceremony in St. Peter's Basilica. Their two sons, Filippo and Cesare, were among the priests who concelebrated the beatification Mass with the Pope. Their daughter Enrichetta was among the faithful attending the Mass.

The Holy Father explained during the homily that the couple "lived an ordinary life in an extraordinary way." "Among the joys and concerns of a normal family, they had an extraordinarily rich spiritual life," the Pope said. "Daily Communion was at the centre, to which was added filial devotion to the Virgin Mary, invoked by praying the rosary every night, and reference to wise spiritual counsel."

"These spouses lived conjugal love and the service to life in the light of the Gospel and with great human intensity," he said. "They assumed with full responsibility the task of collaborating with God in procreation, dedicating themselves generously to the education, guidance and direction of their children in discovering his plan of love."

The Church has recognized officially the holiness of other spouses. But this was the first time that spouses were beatified together.

The beatification was the high point of the weekend celebrations organized by the Church in Italy to mark the twentieth anniversary of the publication of *On the Family (Familiaris consortio)*. The apostolic exhortation is John Paul II's most important document on marital life.

Saturday afternoon, 50,000 people met with the Pope in St. Peter's Square to pray, celebrate and witness. The Holy Father took the opportunity to appeal for marked improvement "in the planning of social policies" in favour of the family, and reminded the faithful that the family cannot be equated with any other form of living together….

At the end of the ceremony John Paul II … presented the family as a sign of hope in a world gripped by the fear of attacks and violence. "Indeed, the family proclaims the Gospel of hope by its very constitution, because it is founded on mutual trust and faith in Providence," he said. "The family proclaims hope, because it is the place where life springs and grows, in the generous and responsible exercise of paternity and maternity." "An authentic family, founded on marriage, is in itself good news for the world," the Pope concluded.

Guiding questions

The Holy Father said, "These spouses lived conjugal love and the service to life in the light of the Gospel and with great human intensity. They assumed with full responsibility the task of collaborating with God in procreation, dedicating themselves generously to the education, guidance and direction of their children in discovering his plan of love."

- Recall the ethical approaches that were introduced in Chapter 1: teleology, deontology and relationality. What would that ethical or moral foundation in the lives of the blessed Quattrocchis be in terms of these three models? Explain the quotation of the Holy Father from the perspective of each.

The Charter of Family Rights

This selection from the Apostolic Exhortation, The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, (Familiaris consortio), *shows the type of protection needed to preserve healthy families. As you read each of these rights, try to match it with one of the characteristics of healthy families shown on page 335.*

The ideal of mutual support and development between the family and society is often very seriously in conflict with the reality of their separation and even opposition.

In fact, as was repeatedly denounced by the Synod, the situation experienced by many families in various countries is highly problematical, if not entirely negative: institutions and laws unjustly ignore the inviolable rights of the family and of the human person; and society, far from putting itself at the service of the family, attacks it violently in its values and fundamental requirements. Thus the family, which in God's plan is the basic cell of society and a subject of rights and duties before the State or any other community, finds itself the victim of society, of the delays and slowness with which it acts, and even of its blatant injustice.

For this reason, the Church openly and strongly defends the rights of the family against the intolerable usurpations of society and the State. In particular, the Synod Fathers mentioned the following rights of the family:

- the right to exist and progress as a family, that is to say, the right of every human being, even if he or she is poor, to found a family and to have adequate means to support it;
- the right to exercise its responsibility regarding the transmission of life and to educate children;
- the right to the intimacy of conjugal and family life;
- the right to the stability of the bond and of the institution of marriage;
- the right to believe in and profess one's faith and to propagate it;
- the right to bring up children in accordance with the family's own traditions and religious and cultural values, with the necessary instruments, means and institutions;
- the right, especially of the poor and the sick, to obtain physical, social, political and economic security;
- the right to housing suitable for living family life in a proper way;
- the right to expression and to representation, either directly or through associations, before the economic, social and cultural public authorities and lower authorities;
- the right to form associations with other families and institutions, in order to fulfill the family's role suitably and expeditiously;
- the right to protect minors by adequate institutions and legislation from harmful drugs, pornography, alcoholism, etc.;
- the right to wholesome recreation of a kind that also fosters family values;
- the right of the elderly to a worthy life and a worthy death;
- the right to emigrate as a family in search of a better life.[10]

Formation in families

As we grow intellectually, morally, spiritually, emotionally, physically and socially, we are formed by many factors: family, friends, genetic make-up, media and our faith, to mention only a few. One of the distinguishing characteristics of adulthood is that our formation becomes more intentional. As we get older we have the opportunity to choose, to a certain degree, the type of person we want to become. For example, given our talents and character, we may choose to develop intellectually by going to university or reading certain types of books. This is the process of growth and formation.

The foundation of human and spiritual formation takes place in the family. Because infants and children have little experience to go by, they tend to imitate parents. They assume their ways of doing things; they pattern themselves according to their likes and dislikes; they take on their vision of the world. This formation takes place both explicitly and implicitly. Consider "When You Thought I Wasn't Looking." It consists of a series of examples of a child learning positive behaviours from a parent.

"When You Thought I Wasn't Looking" points to an obvious fact that may seem so simple that we might miss it. The actions of the adults in a family situation speak more strongly than words to the children in their charge. If the children learn values, behaviour patterns, manners, civic duty, community service from what their parents and caregivers do, then the same goes for daily prayer, attending Sunday Mass, feeding the poor, and being faithful to one another. On the other hand, malformation can also take place. If the adults in the family swear, cheat, and resolve conflicts through violent means, the children will also learn these same behaviours. Sociologists have long chronicled the phenomena of child abuse often being passed on from generation to generation. The child learns by example. As we approach adulthood, often the task lies in sorting out what lessons of childhood we want to retain from our parents and what lessons we want to relearn.

When You Thought I Wasn't Looking

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator, and I wanted to paint another one.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you feed a stray cat, and I thought it was good to be kind to animals.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you make my favourite cake for me, and I knew that little things are special things.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I heard you say a prayer, and I believed there is a God I could always talk to.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I felt you kiss me good night, and I felt loved.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw tears come from your eyes, and I learned that sometimes things hurt, but it's all right to cry.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw that you cared, and I wanted to be everything I could be.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I looked … and wanted to say thanks for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn't looking.

The family, a communion of persons

In matrimony and in the family a complex of interpersonal relationships is set up – married life, fatherhood and motherhood, filiation [relationship to parents] and fraternity [relationship to siblings] – through which each human person is introduced into the "human family" and into the "family of God," which is the Church.

Christian marriage and the Christian family build up the Church: for in the family the human person is not only brought into being and progressively introduced by means of education into the human community, but by means of the rebirth of baptism and education in the faith the child is also introduced into God's family, which is the Church.[11]

The first and fundamental structure for a "human ecology" is the family, founded on marriage, in which the mutual gift of self as husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and grow up.[12]

Faith formation

One of the rights of parents in the Charter of Family Rights, on page 337, is to raise the children in the faith. Parents are the primary educators of their children in the faith. The home becomes then the primary place where faith can be witnessed and formed. In the *General Directory for Catechesis*, the Church's document for the transmission of faith, we read:

> The witness of Christian life given by parents in the family comes to children with tenderness and parental respect. Children thus perceive and joyously live the closeness of God and of Jesus made manifest by their parents in such a way that this first Christian experience frequently leaves decisive traces which last throughout life. This childhood religious awakening which takes place in the family is irreplaceable. It is consolidated when, on the occasion of certain family events and festivities, "care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events." It is deepened all the more when parents comment on the more methodical catechesis which their children later receive in the Christian community and help them to appropriate it. Indeed, "family catechesis precedes... accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis." (#226)

Parents receive in the sacrament of Matrimony "the grace and the ministry of the Christian education of their children," to whom they transmit and bear witness to human and religious values. This educational activity which is both human and religious is "a true ministry," through which the Gospel is transmitted and radiated so that family life is transformed into a journey of faith and the school of Christian life. As the children grow, exchange of faith becomes mutual and "in a catechetical dialogue of this sort, each individual both receives and gives." (#227)

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

Luke 18.15-17

Interview with a family

The Speranza-Dodge family live in the suburbs of Toronto. This is an extended family consisting of a grandmother (Nonna), mother (Connie), father (Ted), and two teen daughters (Pauline and Michaela). (A "nuclear family" generally refers to a family unit consisting of mother, father and children. An "extended family" generally refers to a family unit that, in addition to the nuclear family, includes other blood relations, such as grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins, etc.) They were interviewed about their family:

In Search of the Good: What are the benefits of living in an extended family?

Michaela: Having three adults in the family is both a curse and a blessing. There are always adults around. Even if we wanted to get away with things we couldn't.

Pauline: Yeah, there's always someone looking over your shoulder. On the other hand, it is good to know that there's always someone there if you need them.

Michaela: In our family we get three generations' perspectives when we discuss issues, not to mention having family members born in three different countries. My Dad was born in England, my Mom and Nonna were born in Italy, and Pauline and I were born here in Canada.

Connie: Yes, it's good to get different views on things like politics and religion. But, it can also be an exercise in frustration trying to bridge the generation gaps.

Ted: We try to be patient with one another but on some issues we just have to agree to disagree. One thing that the kids have had to learn is tolerance … with three different views coming at them at times.

Connie: There have been difficult times when it's been a real stretch for us to see things from the perspective of each other. I guess that's part of parenting as well. If we overcome differences with patience and compassion then we are teaching some important lessons to our kids.

Nonna: For me, living like this is beautiful. I get to see my grandchildren grow day by day. Yes they can be a worry sometimes, but on the whole, I like being part of the family. It is better than living alone. Everyone needs a place. This is my place.

Pauline: I've learned so much from Nonna: stories about Italy, gardening, how to speak Italian. Also, if you want to get the most out of Church, you've got to be active in it.

Michaela: Yes, we're part of the Italian choir now. We used to be altar servers. Also, Nonna not only tells me that family is important, she lives that out. She's always trying to help us or her brothers and sisters. She's always on the phone to Italy with her brother.

Nonna: You know, as I get older, I depend more and more on Pauline and Michaela. They help me stay young. They help me with my English and explain things that don't make sense to me – like computers and cell phones. I'm always asking questions about things on television. They help me to understand things.

Family as domestic church

From the earliest days of the Christian community, married couples, families and their homes have played a major role. Christians first came together in each other's homes (Acts 2.46 and 5.42). They became house churches. However, there were drawbacks. Linking the Christian community too strongly to the patriarchal households of Greek and Roman culture was dangerous. Then as now, families tended to be a part of the class system of society, some being about influence, other families about status, still others about accumulating material goods and economic security. Extended families looked out for themselves, for their own offspring and for future generations rather than for outsiders. Jesus' message of salvation, however, put the kingdom of God ahead of the value and functions of kinship. The struggle for power and economic advantage of certain families could easily undermine the coming of God's kingdom. Many families put the worldly advantages of family allegiance above their allegiance to Christ and the kingdom of God. Understanding God's grace within themselves – the bonds of faith, the power of the Holy Spirit to make them one in Christ – was for many families too much of a challenge to family life as they knew it in ancient Rome.

Yet St. John Chrysostom in the fourth century said that "the household is a little church."[13] He saw the family as "a little church" because of the family's role in the formation of people. He saw that the primary responsibility for the spiritual and moral training of children was with the family. For St. John Chrysostom a Christian family was a family that cared for the poor and shared their property. He was clear, however, that this did not apply in reality to all families. As bishop of Antioch, he was quite harsh with those who showed off their wealth and disregarded the destitute of the city. He advocated compassion for the poor and a simple and modest lifestyle for the Christian family.

Today Chrysostom's idea of the family as a domestic church has returned. Pope John Paul II used the metaphor of domestic church to describe the Christian family in his Apostolic Exhortation *The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, (Familiaris consortio,* 1981). What would such a family look like? A domestic church is not the same as a local church or parish. But it is the fertile soil of the local church. To be in any way a church the family would have to be a sacrament, a symbol, of the risen Christ. For most families the risen Christ can seem hidden in the nitty-gritty of daily living. But in the joys and pains of life together a mark of Christ is left behind. The Creed signals four marks of the Spirit of Christ in the Church. If the family is to be "a little church" it will bear some of the characteristics of the large Church. It too will be in some way one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

1. *One*

Oneness in the Christian tradition does not mean being the same. Just as in God oneness embraces distinctions (the Trinity: one God, three Persons), so for the family to be one in Christ is to trust that each person is singular and distinct. A family that is an image of Christ is an exciting place to be. What holds it together is respect and appreciation of the other, and above all, love in its various meanings. Amidst the usual conflicts and pain of growing up and maturing, a family remains a bond and a commitment to the other which will not let the other go. Families are tenacious in their

God our Father,
source of unity
and love,
we look to Jesus,
Mary and Joseph
as the pattern of
all family life.
By following the
example of this
holy family,
in mutual love
and respect,
may we live in
peace with you
and one another
and come one day
to the joy of
our home in heaven.
Amen

love, like the fierce love of a mother for her child. The family is our best hope for the beginnings of love. And as all healthy love, it does not turn inward upon itself, but outward. As Pope John Paul II said, "Far from being closed in on itself, the family is by nature and vocation open to other families and to society and undertakes its social role."[14] A family is a place where one learns the love of neighbour, particularly of the poor, and service to others.

2. *Holy*

To be holy a family needs to be wholesome. Every family needs a spirituality. A family cannot live fully without an infusion of spirit. Families die when life is bland, when there is no celebration, when there is not this restless desire for something that is more and greater than themselves. Families need the restlessness of God's Spirit to fire them into life. This relation with God – the fullness of life – needs to be nourished and stimulated. A language that is not practised tends to be forgotten. So it is with our relation with God – if it is not celebrated as at Christmas, Easter, Sundays, birthdays and anniversaries, family life shrivels. Similarly a family requires prayer, not just to teach the children how to pray, but also how to pray together. It may take the form of reading the Bible and of praying in the morning and in the evening together. Because of the importance of meals for families, it is appropriate for a family to pray at meals. For Jesus the meal was one of the most significant signs of the kingdom of God.

3. *Catholic*

A family that is catholic is a family in which the whole world is somehow present. In its original sense, catholic means "universal" or "in keeping with the whole." (*CCC*, #830) If one brings Jesus into the home, Jesus brings the whole world with him. To be catholic today means to be open to other cultures and to all that is authentically human. As Pope John Paul II said in *One Hundred Years, Centesimus annus*: "To overcome today's individualistic mentality, a concrete commitment to solidarity and charity is needed, beginning in the family." (#49) A catholic family is for this reason a hospitable family.

The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, (Familiaris consortio) expresses this as follows:

> It is similarly desirable that, with a lively sense of the common good, Christian families should become actively engaged, at every level, in other non-ecclesial associations as well. Some of these associations work for the preservation, transmission and protection of the wholesome ethical and cultural values of each people, the development of the human person, the medical, juridical and social protection of mothers and young children, the just advancement of women and the struggle against all that is detrimental to their dignity, the increase of mutual solidarity, knowledge of the problems connected with the responsible regulation of fertility in accordance with natural methods that are in conformity with human dignity and the teaching of the Church. Other associations work for the building of a more just and human world; for the promotion of just laws favouring the right social order with full respect for the dignity and every legitimate freedom of the individual and the family, on both the national and international level; for collaboration with the school and with the other institutions that complete the education of children, and so forth. (#72)

4. *Apostolic*

A family that is apostolic is a family that keeps alive the work of Christ. It is a family that keeps the traditions that go back all the way to Jesus. Parents help each other to live the gospel and pass their faith on to the children and whoever lives with the family. Faith formation is integral to family life, whether this is done implicitly by the way the members of the family live, or explicitly by what is known as evangelisation or catechesis (religious education) [15]

Guiding questions

1. Discuss the statement of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centres of living, radiant faith." (#1656)
2. What would make a family a "domestic church"? Describe a family who according to you qualifies as a domestic church.

The family's role in nurturing vocation

If the family is the "domestic church," it is also the "fertile soil" of the local Church. It is within the family that its members grow to maturity and are nourished in their ability to discern their vocation in life. A family that is rooted in faith looks outward to the wider community, including the local Church. This communion of people gathered around the Eucharist, whose spiritual "Father" is the priest, becomes the wider "family of faith."

In his message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, May 14, 2000, the Holy Father said,

> I would like to meditate with you on the Eucharist, source of all vocations and ministries in the Church.
>
> In their encounter with Christ in the Eucharist, some discover that they are called to become priests, others to a life of contemplation, others to be that gift of love to the poor and weak, and others again to be a transforming presence, through the Eucharist, in everyday life.
>
> In the Eucharist one not only hears a personal call but actually receives the power to carry out that call.
>
> As the disciples on the road to Emmaus knew Jesus in the "breaking of the bread," so too, believers know him in the Eucharist. Eyes are opened. Hearts burn. Vocations are discovered.

To young people

The love of God will be your strength and your light and will unveil to you the mystery of your personal call. I know your doubts and your efforts. I see you lost at times. I understand the fear that assails you about the future. At the same time I remember my many joyous encounters with you. I know your sincere search for truth and love.

The Lord Jesus has pitched his tent among us, and through his Eucharistic presence he says to each one, "Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I shall give you rest" (Matthew 11.28).

My dear young people, you are able to receive from Jesus in the Eucharist the courage to be his apostles. The twenty-first century will be what you want it to be, what you will make it. Men and women are needed who believe in life.

To all believers

Every vocation comes from God through others – parents, teachers, pastors, vocation

The first vocation of the Christian is to follow Jesus

Family ties are important but not absolute. Just as the child grows to maturity and human and spiritual autonomy, so his unique vocation which comes from God asserts itself more clearly and forcefully. Parents should respect this call and encourage their children to follow it. They must be convinced that the first vocation of the Christian is to follow Jesus: "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." (Matthew 10.37)

Becoming a disciple of Jesus means accepting the invitation to belong to God's family, to live in conformity with His way of life: "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matthew 12.49) Parents should welcome and respect with joy and thanksgiving the Lord's call to one of their children to follow him in virginity for the sake of the Kingdom in the consecrated life or in priestly ministry. (*CCC* #2232-2233)

animators, people we meet or read about – through believers! There is nothing more uplifting than an enthusiastic witnessing to one's own vocation. Those who live their gift joyfully and nourish it daily with the Eucharist will be able to sow the seeds of vocations. It is through the Eucharistic presence that people become prophetic signs for the world.

Prayer

Mary, in you the mystery of the divine call was fulfilled. You are the image of what is accomplished in those who entrust themselves to God. You lived a generous "Yes" of joy and love. Help God's people to hear and answer the divine call…Amen. [16]

The Christian family grows together in faith

As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live.

Pope John Paul II

As young Catholics you are part of a generation that will shape the future of marriage and family life. Deep cultural shifts around marriage and family life may make some of the desired traits of a family difficult to realize. Nevertheless, growth as a family of faith is always possible. You will find it helpful to look at our Christian heritage. In summary here are five traits of a healthy Christian family life.

1. *Emphasize the relational*

A healthy Christian family should be built on a proper spousal relationship. Such relationships are characterized by faithfulness and openness to human life, shared dedication to the welfare of the children, equality, dignity, respect, celebration, intimacy, mutual understanding, compassion, and support. It is important to remember, along the lines of Emmanuel Levinas, that the other's appeal to me and my responsibility for the other are not contrary to the self. The other lies at the very heart of the self.

2. *Promote social responsibility*

One of the major tasks of families is to lead all to participate in the social life of society. This means promoting awareness of the health of the earth, participating responsibly in the economic life of society so that all can contribute to the general well-being of society, and fostering an active interest in political life. Families are indispensable for achieving the common good.

3. *Become a family in Christ*

With family bonds weakened in our time, there is a greater need to support families. It is important to remember what Jesus said about these bonds. The kinship aspect of the family – blood relations, family identity, family honour, extended family, economic interests – needs to be tempered by the new family that Jesus proclaimed. Family values are not absolute. Kinship attachments and rules – defending the family's name and honour at all costs – must be balanced with other family values, such as mutual support, reconciliation, growth in faith, care for one another and hospitality.

4. *Include the excluded*

Christians must always be mindful of God's preferential option for the poor. In educating children we should train their eyes to see the world in the light of the gospel. Families can be fighters for social justice, for the just treatment of workers, for equality for those who are at the margin. Our homes should be a welcoming place for the poor.

5. *Be an ethical and moral family*

The family is the place where the first ethical and moral training takes place. Here the parent or guardian is to be the primary witness. Both in their dealings with one another and in their discussion about local and global events, the adults in the family shape the children's capacity for moral reasoning. They can give witness to the ultimate value of the will of God in life. They can help the children to take the first steps in faith; they can show what it means to love God and love one another; they can be the sign of hope and trust. They can show how forgiveness and reconciliation take place.

Prayer for the family

Pope John Paul II

Lord God, from you every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.

Father, you are Love and Life.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ, born of woman, and through the Holy Spirit, fountain of divine charity, grant that every family on earth may become for each successive generation a true shrine of life and love.

Grant that your grace may guide the thoughts and actions of husbands and wives for the good of their families and of all the families in the world.

Grant that the young may find in the family solid support for their human dignity and for their growth in truth and love.

Grant that love, strengthened by the grace of the sacrament of marriage, may prove mightier than all the weakness and trials through which our families sometimes pass.

Through the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that the Church may fruitfully carry out her worldwide mission in the family and through the family.

Through Christ our Lord, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life for ever and ever.

Amen.+ [17]

Chapter review

Summary

- Family is a place where we never stop learning how to love other people. Christian families are called to grow, mature, and "to bear fruit."
- At its most basic level, the family is a "bearer of life."
- Canadian families have been declining in size over the past century due to sociological and economic reasons, and also because of the legalization of contraceptives and abortion.
- The Church believes that natural family planning methods express the indivisible link between loving union and the procreative potential of intercourse in the context of married love. For this reason, the Church sees natural family planning and not contraception as the morally acceptable choice.
- Despite the decline in size, the family as a social institution is alive and well according to sociologists, and is the toughest evolutionary human structure that will outlast every other organization.
- The family, which in God's plan is the basic cell of society and a subject of rights and duties before the State or any other community, finds itself the victim of society, of the delays and slowness with which it acts, and even of its blatant injustice. For this reason, the Church openly and strongly defends the rights of the family against the intolerable usurpations of society and the State.
- The foundation of human and spiritual formation takes place within the family. Parents are the primary educators of their children in the faith. The home is the primary place where faith can be witnessed and formed.
- The family as a domestic church would have to be a sign, a symbol, of the risen Christ. For most families the risen Christ can seem hidden in the nitty-gritty of daily living. But in the joys and pains of family life a mark of Christ is left behind. The Creed signals four marks of the Spirit of Christ in the Church: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. These marks ought also to characterize the family, the "domestic church."
- It is within the family that its members grow to maturity and are nourished in their ability to discern their vocation in life.
- Traits of a healthy Christian family life:
  - Relational
  - Socially responsible
  - Rooted in Christ
  - Inclusive
  - Ethical and moral

Glossary

catechesis: The means by which the Church through its faithful instructs its members in the faith, making it living, conscious and active.

compassion: The ability to "feel" for the other; to take a part in another person's suffering or pain; to be kind and merciful.

discern: To perceive clearly; to distinguish the right from wrong.

domestic church: The home as a "little church" where its members find life, are nurtured and formed. It bears the characteristics of the larger Church, being one, holy, catholic and apostolic in a manner appropriate to the family.

family: A family comes in many configurations. The "nuclear family" includes the mother and father and their children. The "extended family" includes the nuclear family and its blood relations, namely grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and in-laws.

formation: People mature, develop and grow as a result of the nurturing, education and opportunities that they receive, and in interaction with the environment in which they find themselves. This "formation" takes place in dialogue with their own free will and with the grace of God.

natural family planning: A method whereby a married couple adapts their sexual relations to the rhythms of the woman's fertility cycle.

sanctuary: A holy place; a place of refuge and safety.

solidarity: A coming or holding together of individuals into a community of common interest or action.

vocation: A divine call to a way of life, such as to the married state, or to priestly or religious life, or to the single life.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain how the family is the primary environment for the ethical and moral formation of all its members.
2. Describe the characteristics of strong families.

Thinking and inquiry

3. How does the family contribute to the common good of society?
4. Explain how the "domestic church" is fertile soil for the local Church.

Communication

5. Tell the story of a family that for you is a witness to Christian love.

Application

6. Using a medium of your choice, develop a guide for young families to help them develop the traits of a healthy Christian family.

"Render unto Caesar…" The search for the good and politics

CHAPTER 18

Jesus said, "Let me see the money you pay the tax with." They handed him a denarius, and he said, "Whose head is this? Whose name?" "Caesar's," they replied. He then said to them, "Very well, give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and to God what belongs to God."

Matthew 22.19-21, *The Jerusalem Bible*

The duty of a citizen: A Catholic perspective

In a statement prior to the 2004 elections the Canadian Catholic Bishops called on Canadians to exercise their political rights. In the statement it becomes clear how the Catholic Church in Canada understands the political duty of Catholics.

> Engagement in the political process is a constant civic duty, not only during electoral campaigns. We encourage Catholics to increase their awareness of the issues involved, to raise their concerns with the political candidates, to encourage strong civic debates, to run for political office, and especially to vote. We also thank everyone who is involved in running for or serving in political office, whether they belong to a particular faith community or not. Their commitment and service are generous contributions to the common good of our society.
>
> The Gospel does not give Catholics a specific program of social and political action. Nor does the Church *"set forth specific political solutions to temporal questions that God has left to the free and responsible judgment of each person."*[1] Each Catholic must exercise political discernment and prudential judgment. Within a democratic society, there exists a range of legitimate political approaches. At the same time that Catholic moral principles are clear and defined, they can be respected and advanced in many different ways in the political arena. Both in society and within the Catholic community, there exists a range of legitimate political opinions, attitudes, convictions and orientations.
>
> Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs
> Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, April 13, 2004[2]

Temporal: of worldly as opposed to spiritual affairs.

This chapter explores the responsibility to participate in political life. It will also examine the relationship between morality and politics. It will look at how this relationship unfolds within the context of the diversity of Canadian political society.

Focus your learning

Cognitive
What is the relationship of ethics and morality to political life?

Practical
What does it mean to be politically active?

Affective
How is living according to the gospel a political act?

Key terms in this chapter

allegiance
anarchy
authority
autocracy
citizen
constitutional
democracy
federal
leaven
political
sojourner

Key thinkers

Aristotle
St. Augustine
Kant
Levinas
Claude Ryan

The political setting of the gospel

Notice the political references in these verses from Luke's gospel:

From the fifth verse of chapter one: *"In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah."* (Luke 1.5)

From the first verse of chapter two: *"In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria."* (Luke 2.1)

From the first verse of chapter three: *"In the fifteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness."* (Luke 3.1)

Luke's intent is clear. He wanted the readers of his gospel to understand the political context of the story he was about to tell. Because the kingdom of God was breaking into human history, Luke drew attention to the political situation. Luke begins each of the first three chapters by identifying the political context into which the Messiah is born. There can be no escaping the power and rule of the state, not even for Jesus. That will remain so during his life, culminating in his death, when the state uses its power to execute him. And so it remains after his death, even though God vindicated Jesus in the resurrection. The Church, as the community of Jesus Christ, will through time have to contend with the power of the state in which she finds herself.

Jesus' message about the coming kingdom of God was not a political manifesto. Nevertheless, it had political implications. One needs only to think of Jesus calling Herod a "fox" (Luke 13.31-33), or his exchange with Pontius Pilate, who asks

> "Are you the King of the Jews?"… Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over…." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." (John 18.33, 36, 37).

Jesus did not ignore politics, even if the politics of this world were not his goal. Politics had also profoundly affected his parents and their decisions at the time of his birth. And politics ultimately helped to determine when and how he would die.

Politics – the highest form of charity

Claude Ryan, a Catholic Canadian statesman, describes politics as "the range of activities which relate to the governance of the temporal society." Politics, he goes on to say,

> is entitled to special priority in view of the universal character of its mission. It embraces the common good in its largest sense. Its object is the achievement of liberty, justice and peace for all. Because of that, it is, Pius XI once said, the highest form of charity in the temporal order. "Politics," he once stated, "is concerned with the interests of society as a whole; from this point of view, it is the highest form of charity, it is charity towards the city."[3] Hence the importance which politics is given in Catholic social teaching.[4]

> By resisting the pervasive temptation to expect nothing other than a power-Messiah, and choosing the life of the suffering Servant of God, Jesus made a choice which was the most striking decision for world history and for the political realm as well. He could foresee the political implications: being put to death, death on a cross which was inflicted on slaves and political enemies, and death imposed by the political power of the Roman Empire and the political abuse of religious authority. Jesus had acute judgment about his political situation. The fact that Christians confess One who is put to death by the Roman Empire must have political implications.[5]

Two thousand years later, the Vicar of Christ on earth, Pope John Paul II, has often been engaged in this struggle. By proclaiming the truth about the political situation in his own country of Poland, he has been recognized as playing a key role in the collapse of the Communist regime in 1989. Following this example, all Catholics have the responsibility to bring to their political circumstances a clear and effective witness to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the view of the Catholic Church, the direct exercise of political power through the holding of political office is to be undertaken by the laity, not by priests or members of the hierarchy. Ordained leaders of the Church are excluded from such positions in order to maintain the Church's unique role:

> The Church, because of her commission and competence, is not to be confused in any way with the political community. She is both the sign and the safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person. "The Church respects and encourages the political freedom and responsibility of the citizen." (*CCC* #2245)

Today, a faithful response to the gospel of Jesus raises many questions about politics. What role may a church or a religion have in the state? What is the obligation, for instance, of Catholic politicians? Does their allegiance lie with the state or with the Church? What role can churches play in the debate around abortion, stem-cell research of fertilized eggs, gambling, care of the poor? To what standard of ethics and morality ought we to hold the government accountable? How should Christians try to influence the government? How might Catholic politicians promote and uphold Catholic values in their legislation? These are rich, but thorny questions, which point to a delicate balance that must be maintained in the use of power. Furthermore, these questions pertain mostly to places where the political situation is relatively stable and democratic. What about the relationship of church and state in which the state is a dictatorship, a police state, or a theocracy? Today, Catholics live and bear witness to the Good News of Jesus even under these types of political situations around the world. Finally, what about Canadian politics and my Catholic faith? What is my civic or political duty from a Catholic perspective?

Guiding questions

1. Why was the political context of Jesus' life, death and resurrection important to Luke?
2. Jesus chose service over power in proclaiming the kingdom of God. What implications does this have for the political life of Christians? What implications does it have for all the world?

Allegiance to God and the state involves priorities

The title of this chapter – "Render unto Caesar…" – refers to an exchange between Jesus and a group of opponents on the issue of politics. Jesus and the people of his country were living under Roman military occupation. Some of the religious leaders asked him whether taxes were owed to a government which was generally hated and whose right to govern was based on military might. Here is an account of the exchange:

> [The Pharisees] sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away. (Matthew 22.15-22)

The question of taxes was more controversial in the time of Jesus than today. The Pharisees knew that if Jesus had said, "Yes, pay your taxes," he would have lost the support of the common people and they would have been able to arrest him without opposition. And if Jesus had announced, "No, don't pay your taxes," they would have had the public evidence they needed to bring him to trial before the Roman authorities. In setting this trap, the Pharisees had some crafty ideas to manipulate either the crowd or Roman law to their political advantage. The political and religious atmosphere was highly sensitive. The Roman Empire had not imposed its religion on Galilee or Judea and allowed them a measure of self-governance. For such "tolerance" local authorities were expected to keep social order and provide taxes to Rome. To understand the tinderbox that was Galilee and Judea at the time of Jesus is to appreciate the dilemma of the question posed to him.

What lesson are we to derive from reading about this dilemma? Catholic moral theologian Fr. Bernard Häring suggests: "Only those who honour God as God and accept his saving rule can fulfill their political obligation in the actual historical situation. Caesar will never get his due, nor will we ever understand the 'politics of the gospel' unless we try, above all, to understand what is due to God, who sends us his only begotten Son as Saviour of the world."[6] Fr. Häring is suggesting that not even Caesar can enjoy his proper due unless we give God first priority. The issue of allegiance to God or to the state was to return again and again even after Jesus' death and resurrection. In his letter to Titus, Paul urges Christians "to be subject to rulers and authorities" (3.1), and not to look down on them (2.15). In his letter to the Romans, he is even more explicit:

> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are a terror not to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good.… For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them – taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due." (Romans 13.1-4, 6-7)

For Paul the Roman authorities were, at the time of his writing, "God's servant for your good."

About thirty or forty years later, the writer of the Book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible, faced an entirely different political situation than in Paul's day. Written towards the end of the first

Domitian, Roman Emperor (AD 81–96)

century, the Book of Revelation took account of a Rome much more hostile to Christians. After the persecution of Christians by the Emperor Nero, a second and worse persecution was perpetrated by the Emperor Domitian (AD 81–96). The Book of Revelation was written to console Christians and to encourage them to endure with patience his political regime. The author of this last book of the Bible compares the Roman Empire to the "beast," the great blasphemer of God and the great seducer of people. Rome under Domitian's leadership stands as the supreme power opposing the power of God and of Jesus, the "Lamb." Many of the Church's early martyrs faced death in the Colosseum. But Domitian was able to terrorize some Christians into committing apostasy, that is, into denouncing Christ. With all sorts of tricks and miracles, this beast seeks to have people adore it and turn away from God. In the end a new heaven and a new earth will come down from heaven in which only the glory of God will shine.

The *Catechism* encourages those subject to authority to regard legitimate authorities as "representatives of God, who has made them stewards of his gifts." (#2238) But such loyalty also includes "the right, and at times the duty, to voice their just criticism of that which seems harmful to the dignity of persons and to the good of the community." (#2238)

Guiding questions

1. In the gospel story, "Render unto Caesar," does Jesus encourage or oppose political loyalty to the state? Explain.
2. According to the letters and other books of the New Testament, what do we owe to civil authority? How might changing political circumstances challenge Christian individuals and even communities?
3. According to St. Paul's teaching, how is the state a "servant for your good"?

"My kingdom is not from this world" (John 18.36)

All political communities have a story of their origin. The story tells how a community came to be and why it operates the way it does. For much of English-speaking Canada, it is the story of Confederation. Canada's story recounts how two peoples – the Lower Canada French, and the Upper Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Anglophone – came to agree to form one central government. These founding stories explain how Canada's government operates with a confederation of provinces. Whenever someone asks why Canadian governments operate the way they do, we point to the Constitution Act of 1867 and the subsequent Constitution Act of 1982. What then is the founding story for the way Christians, in all their diversity, view human life in a political community?

The story for Judaism and Christianity originates in paradise, and is found in Chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Genesis. The Man and the Woman, it states, were placed in a beautiful garden. The Man and Woman live in peace and harmony with each other and with nature. But this order does not prevail. The story of the garden, or paradise, also recounts how, after trying to usurp the power of God, the Man and the Woman are expelled from the garden. Access to the garden, or

paradise, is denied them and "at the east of the garden of Eden, [God] placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life." (Genesis 3.24)

This Judeo-Christian story of our origin explains an important aspect about human existence. *Human life is a life of exile from the garden.* Humans live in a situation that is far from being paradise. However, the memory of paradise and its harmony and order is ever present to our imagination. The garden, paradise, is our true homeland, a place of pristine beauty, harmony and peace. According to this vision of the Bible, we are in exile; we are not in our homeland. The peace, harmony and justice – even the abundance and the open and unashamed interaction with others – is only an afterimage of a lost origin.

This image of paradise – a kingdom of peace and justice – returns again and again in the Old and New Testament. Paradise was the hope of Israel. She trusted that one day she might return to paradise, and become God's new garden, a land of justice and peace, a land flowing with milk and honey. The image of paradise provided hope that God would dwell among them as once God walked in paradise in the cool of the evening. Israel built a temple to God so that God might have a permanent home among them. And on the temple mountain God was enthroned as its ruler and king. Israel cherished her hope of a return to paradise. With the Lord enthroned on this mountain, the peoples of the earth would come to the temple so "that [God] may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." (Isaiah 2.3) And with God dwelling among them "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (2.4) Life would be like paradise where "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy." (Isaiah 35.5-6)

In the time of the prophets, especially during the Babylonian exile, when the nation of Israel was captured and taken in exile to modern-day Iran, the story of paradise at humanity's beginning gradually changed into a prophetic story of the end-time. Instead of a return to a paradise lost, the prophets insisted that paradise would be restored in the "fullness of time." God promises through the prophets that one day man's exile away from paradise will conclude with unimaginable beauty, peace, justice and harmony with God. And God would do it through someone anointed by God – a messiah. This Messiah, which is a synonym for the word "Christ," was Jesus. The Messiah would inaugurate the fullness of time, God's kingdom. The message of the exilic and post-exilic prophets bore the hope that when the Christ, or Messiah, comes, he will establish peace and justice. The Book of Revelation presents a scene of this final time in which the visionary, John, "sees a new heaven and a new earth" coming down from heaven. (21.1) This would be "the home of God … among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." (21.3-4) Christians keep the hope of this paradise alive. It is central to their proclamation and to their vision of life. It was certainly on the mind of one criminal who was crucified with Jesus when he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23.42-43)[7]

Guiding questions

1. What image of our life together does the second creation story (Genesis 2.4-3.24) give? Is this hope still alive today? Where?
2. What did Jesus do with the image of paradise? Where did he see this paradise coming alive again?
3. What does Jesus' second coming, that is, the *parousia*, have to do with the direction of human history and the story of paradise?

Paradise and the parish

Excerpt from: Dennis J. Billy, "Moral Mysticism in a Parish Setting."

Everyone in the local *parish* setting has a deep inner yearning for God. It is part of human nature; we were made that way…. The parish is one of the primary places where those yearnings are recognized and dealt with constructively.

The word parish has deep scriptural roots. It comes from the Greek word *paroikia*, which in the Septuagint meant living in a foreign land without civil or domestic rights. [*Septuagint:* from the Latin *septuaginta*, meaning "seventy." A Greek translation of the Old Testament said to have been made about 270 BC by about seventy translators.] Later, the Jews used it to refer to their exile in Egypt and still later, to their entire life in this world, which they thought of as a stay in a foreign country. Early Christians used this same concept to refer to the earthly life of the Christian community and citizenship was in heaven (cf. 1 Peter 1.17). This root meaning of *parish* as *"sojourners in a foreign land"* must be retrieved from our tradition and embedded in our minds so that it becomes the word's primary meaning for us. Even though the term underwent development over time, taking on a primarily juridic meaning in the context of church administration, this root meaning still holds true today. If it has been forgotten by most Catholics, it needs to be remembered and proclaimed once again with great conviction…. As Catholics we relate to one another and to the world through a local parish setting. We live out our lives in and through the context of community. We seek to serve the world and love through our personal and communal witness. We seek to build up the kingdom here in our midst and strive so that peace and justice will one day reign in our little corner of the earth – and beyond. *We also have a sense, however, that this is not our real home, that we are being called elsewhere. We are IN the world, but not OF it. We are citizens of heaven and, at times, even get a glimpse of what that life will be like.*[8]

Guiding questions

1. What is the Greek root and meaning of the word "parish"?
2. The Hebrew people were in exile in Egypt until Moses liberated them c.1250 BC, and the Israelites were in exile in Babylon from 587 to 538 BC until Cyrus allowed them to return to Israel. The Christian community was exiled when the Roman emperors declared Christian allegiance a criminal offence. In what way does the author suggest that all human beings on earth are exiles?
3. Why does the author suggest that the understanding of "parish" as "sojourners in a foreign land" should be revitalized in our memory as part of our Catholic tradition?
4. At the very beginning of the article Dennis Billy refers to the yearning in the human heart for God.
   a. Was it Augustine, Francis or Freud who first described Christian spirituality this way?
   b. Was the idea of human nature tending towards its own fulfillment a presupposition in the philosophy of Kant, Levinas or Aristotle?
   c. Who can fill the deepest desires of the heart? Do you believe that your heart's desire will ultimately be fulfilled? Why or why not?
   d. How can your Catholic parish be the primary place where the yearnings of the human heart are recognized and dealt with? Explain.

St. Augustine's *City of God*

Territory is but the body of a nation. The people who inhabit its hills and its valleys are its soul, its spirit, its life.

James A. Garfield

The vision of God's kingdom has stirred the political imagination throughout the centuries in countries where Christianity was proclaimed. The Church is the historical sacrament of the kingdom – the keeper of its keys, as it were. As such, it has kept alive this vision of God's kingdom in these countries. Invariably this has led to a clash of two visions, two powers: the church and the state. Throughout the history of Europe thinkers have reflected on the relationship of church and state. It became urgent when the Christian faith became the dominant faith in the Roman Empire after the Edict of Milan in 313. A constant struggle between the spiritual and temporal power, between the church and the state, ensued. Since politics and religion were intimately connected, it was difficult to work out where the powers of one ended and the powers of the other began.

One of the first philosophers to reflect on this delicate balance of powers was St. Augustine. He wrote a book entitled *The City of God*. The immediate occasion for writing *The City of God* was the destruction of Rome in around AD 410. The fall of one of the mightiest empires the world has known left people horror-stricken. The reports that Rome was burning, that there was widespread looting and that defenceless people were being massacred in the street sent shivers of fear through the Mediterranean world. When St. Jerome, living in a monastery in Bethlehem, heard of the dreadful events in Rome, he wondered, "If Rome can perish, what can be safe?" The pagans blamed the Christians for the calamity. They held Christians responsible because the Christian way of life, they felt, was incompatible with the normal obligations of citizenship. The reasons, according to John Ferguson, a renowned professor of classics, were clear:

> The Christian refusal to meet evil with evil, and renunciation of violence meant that Christians had stood aside alike from military service and from the exercise of those magistracies [governing powers] which might involve capital punishment. Christianity, the argument ran, was politically and socially irresponsible.… Alongside this was the fact that the pagans had always seen Rome's destiny as a religious destiny. The *pax Romana* [Roman peace] depended on the *pax deorum* [the peace of the gods]. The Christians had turned men aside from the gods of the state, the ancient gods, and disaster was bound to ensue. It was obvious for all to see that the major calamities had come under the governance of those emperors who had forsaken the old gods and turned to Christianity.[9]

Augustine set out to refute these claims, first in two lengthy letters, then in *The City of God: Against the Pagans*. It took Augustine the better part of fifteen years to write *The City of God*. In the latter part of the book Augustine makes the distinction between the city of God and the city of this world. The distinction between these two cities also reflects the words of Jesus when he compared the narrow gate of life to the broad gate of destruction. "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Matthew 7.13-14) This distinction between the masses that take the way of destruction and the few who take the road of life became, in Augustine's writings, the two cities – the one wicked, the other holy. These cities, he said, coexist and intermingle with each other throughout history. But spiritually there is a large gap between them which will become clear on the day of judgment.

Society according to Augustine is in reality split in two. It would be easy to see that split between good and evil cities as a split between church and state. But this was not Augustine's intention. Those who seek to enter by the narrow path include many who are not part of the Church and those who seek the path of

One page of a fifteenth century edition of St. Augustine's *City of God* depicts a view of hell resulting from living a life focused primarily on worldly pleasures.

destruction include members of the Church. The state is a good because it is preferable to anarchy. Although the state has a larger stake in the city of the world, Augustine held that Rome was part of God's providence. As such, it helps to control many evils of the world. The state also demonstrates many virtues, such as self-sacrifice, courage, and order. For Augustine the ideal society is found in genuine community, not so much in institutions. For him the city of God was what people are looking for when they dream of real communities, of communities that support and nourish them. For him such a community was a community with God and with one another in God. (Book 19) What holds this community together is common love and worship. In this community alone will one find justice and peace.[10]

The contribution of Catholics in political society

If St. Augustine's vision in *The City of God* is correct, the central question for Catholic citizens becomes "How should I take part in political life? What contribution can I make to create a civilization of love?" The document from Vatican II *The Church in the Modern World* expresses it as follows:

> The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men [and women] of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts… The [Church] now present here on earth … is composed of men [and women]; they, the members of the earthly city, are called to form the family of the children of God even in this present history… It is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God... The earthly and the heavenly city penetrate one another… The Church, then, believes it can contribute much to humanizing the human family and its history through each of its members and its community as a whole. (#1, 40)

The Vatican Council saw it as the task of Christians to be a "leaven" in society – a humanizing force for society. As Christians one of our deepest-held values that we hold out to the world is the dignity of the human person. When the Church articulates what it brings to society – its leaven – it points to the dignity of the human person. The reason we, as Catholics and as a Church, involve ourselves in society is primarily "to protect and promote the transcendent dignity of the human person."[11] As Vatican II put it, "[The Church] is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendence of the person." (*The Church in the Modern World*, #76) But what does this mean in practice? It means protecting human dignity, promoting human rights, cultivating the unity of the human family and helping to give a sense of meaning to human activity.[12]

The Church's obligation is to deliver the same message into the political forum that it has announced for 2000 years to the whole world. (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, 1975, #9 and #48). That message is the gospel of Jesus Christ and that in him, God's kingdom

is breaking into human history to bring good news to the poor, liberty to the oppressed and forgiveness to the guilty. Sometimes this will have political repercussions that may negatively affect the Church and its members. A pluralistic society, like Canada's, has, by definition, many other groups, nationalities, religions and ideologies. But this diversity does not mean that the Church should remain silent or should restrict the message of the gospel to the private realm. Jesus' message is personal but never private. The Church is obliged to bring the message of Christ into every public forum. In many ways this is precisely what the Church has sought to do in the social encyclicals *(See Chapter 13)*. They are presented as a Catholic contribution to the public debate around human and social issues (work, private property, unions, ecology, etc.).

Of course, the mission to evangelize – to bring the gospel to – the nations has not changed. But within this universal mission, we are focusing here on the particular political interaction of Catholics and the state. In Canada this means discussing how Catholics are to interact with, critique, and contribute to the common good. Canada is multicultural and multi-religious. To live in such a diverse society means that Christianity and the Catholic Church is one of many voices in Canada. The politics of representative government in Canada exists to serve a pluralistic society. Many cultural elements of this pluralistic society, such as relativism, hedonism, consumerism and individualism, are loath to listen to the voice of opposition which comes from organized religion. One trend, popularized since the 1970s, is the privatizing of religion in society. Some politicians try to offer freedom of religion while at the same time preventing the voice of religion from being heard. But can a pluralistic society deny freedom of expression simply because the expression is one of moral or religious value? The political trend to privatize religion, or at least to relegate religion out of the public arena, affects all levels of government and political life. One example was the government order preventing any mention of Christ or Jesus at the prayer service at Peggy's Cove after the Swiss Air crash in 1998. A second example was the memorial service in Ottawa in 2001 for the 3000 people who died as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Not one prayer of any kind was offered. Many believers have been so exposed to the notion that religion is a private matter that they feel obliged to avoid any public witness to their faith. In such a society, what role must Catholics play in Canadian politics?

The Church exercises what Jesuit Fr. J. Bryan Hehir has called an "indirect engagement" in the political arena. The Church recognizes that its gift to society is its vision of human life and community, rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.. The Church contributes to humanizing society by drawing public attention whenever human and moral values are at stake. By doing so it becomes one means by which morality and moral discourse enters politics.[13]

People gather on Parliament Hill in Ottawa for a memorial service for the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks

Guiding questions

1. What role should the Catholic laity play in Canadian politics? Explain.
2. What role does the Catholic hierarchy of the Church exercise in relation to the political situation in Canada? Explain. Does their responsibility differ from the obligations of Catholic laity? Explain.
3. What values and beliefs can the Catholic tradition contribute to the common good in Canada?

Politics and the economy exist for people

Politics and the economy exist for people, not the other way around. All political and economic activity must be enlightened by moral principles. Economic choices and the ensuing policies must be judged by how well life, human dignity and families are protected and promoted. An economic and political "balance sheet" should indicate a priority for the care of persons living in poverty and the most vulnerable. All persons have a right to life and the necessities of life: food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, a healthy environment and economic security. All persons have a right to employment, fair wages, equitable social benefits, decent working conditions, and membership in a trade union.[14]

The state and power

Political power is fragile. In a system of representative government power rests in people – even more in the opinions of people. And nothing is more volatile and changeable than people's opinions. Power is, for this reason, not so much a power over, but a power in people. For what else is power than the ability to act, and what else is political power than the ability to act together? This power of people to act together is what makes a state what it is. That is probably why throughout political history people have gradually moved from autocratic rule to constitutional rule. Autocratic rule insists that an individual's authority and power are conferred not by a communal will to act together, but only by a higher power. This higher power was often considered to be God. By this assumption, kings and queens ruled by "divine right." Our time contests this divine right which allowed individuals to rule by a personal power without the consent of the citizenry. Autocracy has been replaced by constitutional rule. Constitutional rule recognizes the fundamental equality, in principle, of all the members of society before the law. Political power in a democracy is based on everyone's capacity and power to act and to act together. This is why such importance is given to the right and the *obligation* to vote – because ultimately, the power to act is in all human beings.

As we said above, political power is essentially the power to act together. Politics is not domination of one person by another, or, as sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) perceived it, the power to constrain people. If that were the case, politics would be no more than legitimate violence. The only change in the shift from autocracy to democracy would be that whereas formerly, one person had the right to constrain people, now this power would rest in the hands of a majority.

Political power in a system of representative government is not just the will of the majority. Even the will of the people can err ethically and morally. *Politics is about the common good and political power serves the common good.* Government is a way of organizing people so that they can make decisions together and work for a common good. Therefore, the first task of government is to enable people to work together towards the well-being of a society. Is there then no place for violence or constraint in political power? There obviously is. Political power also implies a police force, an army, a judiciary, penal laws and prisons. If politics has the power to engage people to work together, it also has the power to constrain. It also has a right to rule over others and to constrain those who are a threat to the common good. There can be no state without a government; there can be no government without a civil service and a bureaucracy to put its laws into effect; there can be no laws without a police force and judiciary. All these branches are connected with

The source of political authority

One of the paradoxes of political power is the distinction between political power and authority. If the power is in the people, where does the authority of the leader come from that allows him or her to govern? What gives the elected leader the right to make decisions for others and to coerce obedience?

Canada is not only a parliamentary democracy; it is also a constitutional monarchy. This means Canadians recognize the Queen as our head of state. The governor general carries out Her Majesty's duties in Canada on a daily basis and is Canada's de facto head of state. Like many other democracies, Canada has clearly defined the difference between the head of state and head of government. Despite being elected, a prime minister is only appointed into power through the approval of the acting head of state, the governor general. What this process demonstrates is that authority is not the same as power. The authority of the prime minister comes from a source other than the electorate.

Many consider the force or energy that emanates from powerful people to be a spiritual gift. The Scriptures state that in the end all authority comes from God. (Romans 13.1; see also *CCC* #2234)

government and are organized in a hierarchy in order to ensure accountability to the people they serve. All this is necessary for the proper functioning of the modern state. It is the challenge of the modern state to keep this government apparatus focused on the common good and not to manipulate the consent of the people. Putting a "spin" on truth in order to promote one's advantage or the power of one's group is as old as the question put to Jesus about the Roman coin. There are plenty of occasions today for the abuse of power. Governments can become arrogant and assume that they have an absolute right to govern. But in a healthy democracy the electorate has the final say. Governments can be defeated when they lose the consent of the people. It is the duty of the citizen to be vigilant and to hold the government to account when its ability to serve the common good is diminished.[15]

Guiding questions

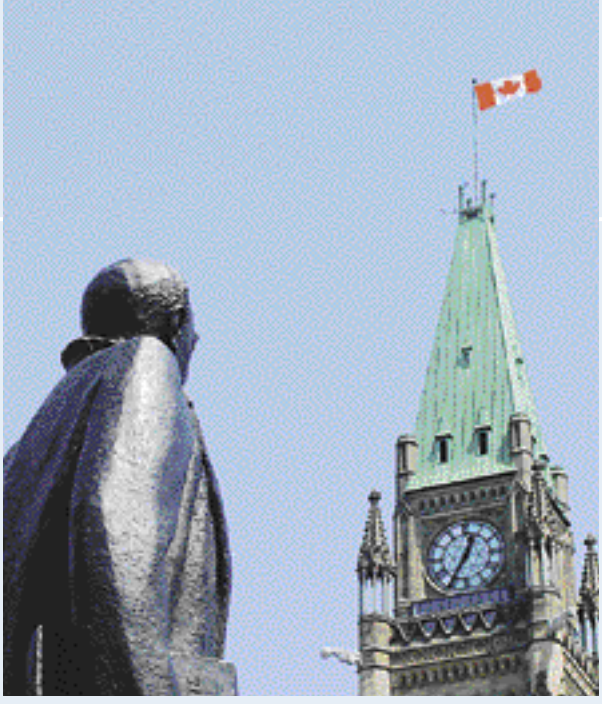
1. What is political power?
2. Why can politics also become coercive?

Politics and ethics

In Chapter 1 we saw that for Aristotle ethics was primarily political. Ethics was the political community in search of the good. Aristotle made no distinction between the city and the citizen. He would have stated unequivocally that politics must be ethical or the ethical must be political. But his position has, at times, been cast aside. Machiavelli (1467–1527), for instance, in *The Prince* insisted that politics had nothing to do with morality. Nonetheless, many philosophers, among them Hobbes, Kant and Hegel, have maintained the need for a link between politics and morality.

In Western democracies – Canada included – politics has undergone a major shift. Its link to ethics has become less immediate. In Canada politics is first of all directed to the public order and safety and the protection of freedom. *(See Chapter 11.)* This does not necessarily make politics indifferent to ethics. It is clear, however, that politics is not primarily oriented towards ethics. Governments do raise ethical questions, but always in the context of the public order. In other words, politics today is not about ethics and morality, but about the public order and the protection of legal rights and freedoms. *The ethical question is not the first question when politicians debate the issues of the day.* Philosopher Howard Kainz argues that, "Within these parameters, politics can absorb and tolerate a

Duties of civil authorities and of citizens



The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* outlines the following as duties of civil authorities and of citizens.

The duties of civil authorities:

2235: Those who exercise authority should do so as a service. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant." (Matthew 20.26) … No one can command and establish what is contrary to the dignity of persons and the natural law.

2236: The exercise of authority is meant to give outward expression to a just hierarchy of values in order to facilitate the exercise of freedom and responsibility by all. Those in authority should practise distributive justice wisely, taking account of the needs and contribution of each, with a view to harmony and peace. They should take care that the regulations and measures they adopt are not a source of temptation by setting personal interests against that of the community.

2237: Political authorities are obliged to respect the fundamental rights of the human person. They will dispense justice humanely by respecting the rights of everyone, especially of families and the disadvantaged.

The political rights attached to citizenship can and should be granted according to the requirements of the common good. They cannot be suspended by public authorities without legitimate and proportionate reasons. Political rights are meant to be exercised for the common good of the nation and the human community.

The duties of citizens

2238: Those subject to authority should regard those in authority as representatives of God, who has made them stewards of his gifts.… Their loyal collaboration includes the right, and at times the duty, to voice their just criticisms of that which seems harmful to the dignity of persons and to the good of the community.

Some of the civic duties presented by the *Catechism* are the following:

- To contribute to the good of society
- To love and serve one's country
- To submit to legitimate authorities and to serve the common good
- To pay taxes
- To exercise the right to vote
- To defend one's country
- To welcome the foreigner in search of security and livelihood
- To refuse obedience to directives of the civil government that are contrary to the moral order, the fundamental rights of persons and to the teachings of the gospel: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22.21) We must obey God above all.
- To refuse to resort to armed resistance to political authority unless the following conditions are met: (1) there is a certain, grave and prolonged violation of fundamental rights; (2) all other means of redress have been exhausted; (3) such resistance will not provoke worse disorders; (4) there is well-founded hope of success; and (5) it is impossible reasonably to foresee any better solution. (# 2239-2243)

great deal of private and even public immorality, depending on the threshold of sensitivity of the citizens."[16]

Yet, if politics is the power to act together for the good of all, it must be ethical. Constitutional governments work by means of the representatives of the citizens. In order to function well a constitutional government depends on the consent of the citizens. The representative in parliament speaks on behalf of the citizens he or she represents. This can easily lead to an ethical conflict. Imagine you are a political representative. What if the demands made by the people you represent are unethical? What if your constituents expect patronage, call for the reinstatement of the death penalty, lash out against the immigrant population, promote unreasonable fears of security, or demand racist legislation? Must you act according to the

A case in point: Abortion law in Canada

In 1988, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the existing abortion law on the grounds of being unconstitutional. In 1989, the government introduced new legislation (Bill C-43). The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), and numerous other groups, made submissions to the government on the proposed legislation. The bill passed the House of Commons in the spring of 1990, but was defeated by the Senate in January 1991. In response to the defeat of the bill, Bishop Robert Lebel, President of the CCCB, wrote the following letter. Notice the emphasis on "teaching, informing and persuading" in the letter. It is through education and persuasion that attitudes will change, and that support for a new law will develop.

> We deeply regret that after three years of debate and discussion, Canada is still without a law on abortion.
>
> Although the Canadian bishops insisted from the beginning that Bill C-43 was seriously flawed, it was preferable to continuing the legislative vacuum. The bill at least confirmed that abortion is a matter of public morality and a criminal offence.
>
> We urge the government to introduce immediately a bill that will provide effective protection for the life of the unborn.
>
> The lack of legislation on abortion does not alter our firm conviction and teaching that abortion is a moral evil because it destroys human life. We shall continue to teach this principle and attempt to inform and persuade public opinion of the sacredness of all human life.

wishes of your constituents? Must you push aside your own ethical convictions and adopt their causes? In constitutional politics, you may face a choice between acting according to your conscience, or face electoral defeat if you act contrary to the will of your constituents.

In the current cultural and political situation of Canada, Catholic politicians often face this moral dilemma. Whether it emerges in the debates around the treatment of the Aboriginal peoples, or in the targeting of the poor in the desire to lower taxes, ethics and politics are never apart. Politicians must confront moral decisions around abortion, assisted suicide, stem-cell research, cloning, in vitro fertilization and the death penalty. What is *the duty*, according to Kant, *the virtue* according to Aristotle, or *the responsibility* according to Levinas, of a politician in situations where ethical issues become part of the public forum?

Imagine once more that you are a politician in such a scenario. Your first task, in these circumstances, is to engage the community with information for moral and ethical discourse. If their consent is one of the grounds for your power as a politician, you must seek both the moral truth and the consent of the people on the issue. In doing so, you must employ rational argumentation and persuasion (the Catholic natural law tradition). In a pluralistic society, as stated above, you must make the case in a way that persuades society that the search for the good has moved your government to serve the common good. That is why, as a Catholic politician, you must seek to persuade politically in the language of reason and natural law.[17]

Politics demands ethical politicians or representatives who live out of well-reasoned convictions. But even more so, it demands ethical citizens. All participants in the political process are responsible for the good of all. The desire to live well together involves a commitment by the whole society to take responsibility for the institutions and values that make living well together possible. To be responsible means to care for and protect what has been entrusted to us. Political life in all its fragility requires everyone's care. Above all it requires that the bonds that tie a community or society together be strong.

Guiding questions

1. Why must politics be ethical?
2. What must politicians do when confronted with a legislative proposal which in their minds and consciences is immoral?

The right to life is clearly the primary human right. It should not, however, be approached in isolation from other complementary rights such as the right to work, the right to food, the right to shelter and the right to equality. It is our intention to encourage within the Catholic community the development of a comprehensive pro-life ethic that will demonstrate a common concern for the protection of human life and the promotion of human dignity. As a first step, workshop materials on abortion and nine complementary life issues have been prepared to facilitate study and action by parish, student and other discussion groups.

We call upon governments at all levels, as well as all our Christian communities, to address the social and economic factors that have been identified as contributing to abortion. We renew our support for the efforts of those who offer immediate and practical assistance to women and families faced with difficult or unexpected pregnancies and for those who are working to transform social attitudes and structures to make them truly hospitable to life. For our part, we shall continue to educate about the value and dignity of human life and to promote respect and protection of all human life at all stages of development.

+Robert Lebel
Bishop of Valleyfield
President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

A place for moral values in public debate

Excerpt from Claude Ryan, The Catholic Church and Contemporary Society*.*

Political society is not a mere instrument. It is a living body, made up of living human beings, each of whom has his characteristics, his values, his views about how he should relate to his fellow-citizens… It is simply inconceivable that citizens and associations should be expected to participate in the life of society without reflecting the values that they hold dear.

If a discussion arises, let us say, on marriage or the right to life, would it be correct to expect of a person who opposes divorce or abortion that he should feel compelled to remain silent about his convictions? And in the affirmative, why should not the same reserve be required of those who favor both divorce and abortion? It suffices to examine those questions in all their concrete implications to see the absurdity of the position according to which there should be no place for moral values in debates regarding public affairs in a free and open society.

Debates around matters of public interest almost inevitably raise moral questions. It is the right of responsible citizens to draw the attention of their fellow-citizens to those questions; it is their duty not to remain silent about them for fear of displeasing some people or being politically incorrect.

Let a decision taking into account as many arguments and interests as reasonably possible be made at the end of a debate. Let the decision be made in conformity with established democratic rules. But let not the public discussion of any matter of public interest be suppressed or stifled under the undemocratic argument that there must be no place for moral values in debates on matters of public interest.[18]

Pope John Paul II's challenge to youth at the seventeenth World Youth Day

(Toronto, July 28, 2002)

The world you are inheriting is a world which desperately needs a new sense of brotherhood and human solidarity. It is a world which needs to be touched and healed by the beauty and richness of God's love. It needs witnesses to that love. The world needs salt. It needs you – to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Salt is used to preserve and keep. As apostles for the Third Millennium, your task is to preserve and keep alive the awareness of the presence of our Saviour Jesus Christ, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, the memorial of his saving death and glorious resurrection. You must keep alive the memory of the words of life which he spoke, the marvelous works of mercy and goodness he performed. You must constantly remind the world of the "power of the gospel to save"! (Romans 1.16)

Salt seasons and improves the flavour of food. Following Jesus, you have to change and improve the "taste" of human history. With your faith, hope and love, with your intelligence, courage and perseverance, you have to humanize the world we live in, in the way that today's reading from Isaiah indicates: "loose the bonds of injustice … share your bread with the hungry … remove the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil … Then your light shall rise in the darkness" (Isaiah 58.6-10).

Even a tiny flame lifts the heavy lid of night. How much more light will you make, all together, if you bond as one in the communion of the Church! If you love Jesus, love the Church! … If, in the depths of your hearts, you feel the … call to the priesthood or consecrated life, do not be afraid to follow Christ on the royal road to the Cross! At difficult moments in the Church's life, the pursuit of holiness becomes even more urgent. And holiness is not a question of age; it is a matter of living in the Holy Spirit, just as Kateri Tekakwitha did here in America and so many other young people have done.…

No difficulty, no fear is so great that it can completely suffocate the hope that springs eternal in the hearts of the young. You are our hope, the young are our hope. Do not let that hope die! Stake your lives on it! We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures; we are the sum of the Fathers' love for us and our real capacity to become the image of his Son.

I finish with a prayer. O Lord Jesus Christ, keep these young people in your love. Let them hear your voice and believe what you say, for you alone have the words of life.

Teach them how to profess their faith, bestow their love, and impart their hope to others.

Make them convincing witnesses to your Gospel in a world so much in need of your saving grace.

Make them the new people of the Beatitudes, that they may be the salt of the earth and the light of the world at the beginning of the Third Christian Millennium!

Mary, Mother of the Church, protect and guide these young men and women of the twenty-first century. Keep us all close to your maternal heart. Amen.

Chapter review

Summary

- Engagement in the political process is a constant civic duty. At the same time that Catholic moral principles are clear and defined, they can be respected and advanced in many different ways in the political arena.
- Politics embraces the common good in its largest sense. Its object is the achievement of liberty, justice and peace for all.
- The *Catechism* encourages those subject to authority to regard legitimate authorities as "representatives of God, who has made them stewards of his gifts." (#2238) But such loyalty also includes "the right, and at times the duty, to voice their just criticism of that which seems harmful to the dignity of persons and to the good of the community." (#2238)
- What is the underlying image for the way Christians, in all their diversity, view human life in a political community? The Book of Revelation presents a scene of this final time in which the visionary, John, "saw a new heaven and a new earth" coming down from heaven. (21.1) Christians keep the hope of this paradise alive. It is central to their proclamation and to their vision of life.
- As Catholics we relate to one another and to the world through a local parish setting. We live out our lives in and through the context of community. We seek to serve the world and love through our personal and communal witness. We seek to build up the kingdom here in our midst and strive so that peace and justice will one day reign in our little corner of the earth – and beyond.
- For Augustine the ideal society is found in genuine community, not so much in institutions. For him the City of God was what people are looking for when they dream of real communities, of communities that support and nourish them. For him such a community was a community with God and with one another in God.
- The Vatican Council saw it the task of Christians to be a "leaven" in society – a humanizing force for society. In Canada this means discussing how Catholics are to interact, critique, and contribute to the common good.
- Jesus and his message, and that of the Church, is personal but never private. The Church is obliged to bring the message of Christ into every public forum.
- Debates around matters of public interest almost inevitably raise moral questions. It is the right of responsible citizens to draw the attention of their fellow-citizens to those questions; it is their duty not to remain silent about them for fear of displeasing some people or being politically incorrect.
- The world needs to be touched and healed by the beauty and richness of God's love. It needs witnesses to that love. The world needs salt. It needs you – to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Glossary

allegiance: The fidelity of a citizen to his or her government, or loyalty to another person or cause.

anarchy: A state in disorder and lawlessness due to an absence of government authority.

assimilation: The process whereby a minority group gradually adopts the customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture.

authority: The power by which one governs.

autocracy: Government by a single person having unlimited power, despotism.

citizen: A person who by birth or choice is a member of a state and pays allegiance to the government, and in return enjoys the rights and protection afforded by the state to such members.

constitutional: Established by or operating under a constitution; something that is controlled and monitored by the constituents, that is the people; a constitutional government receives its power by obtaining the consent of the people.

democracy: Derived from two ancient Greek words *demos* (the people) and *kratos* (strength). A form of government in which power is held by the people. The people exercise their power either directly or through elected representatives.

federal: Pertaining to a centralized government.

leaven: A substance, such as yeast, that causes dough to rise. As a metaphor, it refers to any influence in society that causes "ferment" and change in the way people think and act.

political: Having to do with the acts of living together in community, most often referred to as the affairs of government, politics and the state.

sojourner: One who stays for a temporary visit. For example, a citizen of another country visiting but not settling down.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain why Christians are called by their faith to participate in political life.
2. In what ways does the Church contribute to the political life of the world?

Thinking and inquiry

3. Explain how ethics is important within politics.
4. Write a "letter to the editor" of your local newspaper addressed to young adults explaining to them their right and their duty to vote and the importance of being politically aware and active.

Communication

5. Using your daily news media (newspapers, TV, radio, Internet), develop a creative presentation on the active participation of Canadian youth in the political arena.
6. Using the kingdom stories from one of the gospels, prepare an oral presentation on how Christians can help bring the kingdom of God into political society.

Application

7. Examine the use of and response to power and authority in your school. How might the vision of authority and power presented in your text contribute to improving relationships between the authority figures in your school and those for whom they have responsibility? What might change in your own relationship to authority and power?
8. Write an essay or poem entitled, "Building a civilization of love." Include how marriage, the family, and political involvement are all key components of this task.

End Notes

CCC refers to the Cathechism of the Catholic Church.

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