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MAKING MORAL DECISIONS

INTRODUCING CHAPTER 2

To make decisions, especially important ones, Christians need a decision-making process known as discernment. Discernment involves making keen and insightful judgments about some important choice. It is done in a prayerful way, always taking into consideration Christian values.

This chapter looks at the question of making moral decisions under a method known by the acronym STOP. Each letter of STOP is discussed, analyzed, and applied to some specific moral cases. The letters refer to:

- S**—Searching out the facts in a case or problem using the questions “what,” “why,” “who,” “where,” “when,” and “how.”
- T**—Thinking about the alternatives to the proposed problem and the consequences of each possible action.
- O**—Others must be considered: how our actions affect others and how more experienced people can help us make decisions.
- P**—Prayer is a vital dimension in Christian moral decision-making. It puts us in contact with the risen Lord and the Holy Spirit.

Additionally, some other essential elements of morality are covered in this chapter. Under “searching,” the moral object is discussed, the answer to the “what” question. Without determining the matter of the action, it cannot be determined whether an action promotes or destroys the good of humans. Related to the “why” question is the intention or motive for performing an action. Answers to the “who, where, when, and how” questions help reveal the circumstances of a particular moral act. The consequences of a particular act are also related to the circumstances.

In the “thinking” step, the students learn that there are always many creative alternatives to handling a moral decision. They also learn that they should never act without considering the consequences of their actions.

Morality inevitably is not concerned as much for self as it is with others. As Martin Luther King, Jr. put it, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is ‘What are you doing for others?’” The chapter asks the students to think about how they can be considerate and consultive of others, especially the Church and its Magisterium, the teachings of Jesus, and fellow Christians. Additionally, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is recognized as a means for growing in holiness and living a moral life.

Finally, prayer is what sustains Christian moral living. We must have a “living relationship,” as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it (2565), with the God who loves us if we are able to be holy and do the right thing.

The chapter also briefly covers a discernment model based in the method of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

ADVANCE PREPARATION

“Right Reason in Action”: **Extending the Section:** VCR or DVD player, television, and the film *Abandon Ship*.

“Search Out the Facts and Think About the Alternatives”: **Using the Section:** Four 3” x 5” index cards for each student; **Extending the Section:** A bible or New Testament for each student.

“Others and Prayer”: **Extending the Section:** Three paper or cardboard signs to post in the classroom that say *Agree Strongly, Disagree Strongly, I’m Neutral*. **Creative Learning:** tape or CD recording of “Here I Am, Lord” by Dan Schutte and a copy of the printed lyrics for this song for each student.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Right Reason in Action
The virtue of prudence, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, is “right reason in action.” Prudence helps us to discover goodness and choose the right means of achieving it.

Search Out the Facts
Making good decisions requires finding the facts. Catholic morality is grounded in reality—the way things are—and on how God intends them to be.

Think About the Alternatives and Consequences
Doing the right thing requires considering various alternatives and their likely consequences. We also need to take responsibility for our actions.

Others
Christian morality asks us to be truly sensitive to the impact of our actions on others. We must be considerate and seek the advice of people who have made wise choices.

Prayer
Christian moral living needs to be fed and strengthened by prayer. Simply put, prayer is the living, ongoing relationship we have with God.

CHAPTER TWO



Making Moral Decisions

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; on your own intelligence rely not.
Proverbs 3:5

Chapter Two Outline

Right Reason in Action
Search Out the Facts
Think About the Alternatives and
Consequences
Others
Pray

RESOURCES

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Crossin, John W., O.S.F.S. *Everyday Virtues*. New York: Paulist Press, Illumination Books 2002.

A wonderful little book on how to be virtuous in daily life.

DiGiacomo, James. *Do the Right Thing: A Guide to Christian Morality*. Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1997.

Excellent resource from a master teacher of youth.

Gula, Richard M., S.S. *The Good Life: Where Morality and Spirituality Converge*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999.

A wonderful overview of the themes of Catholic morality presented in a way that supports Christian living and spiritual growth. Good on virtues and contains some excellent spiritual exercises. Highly recommended.

Kohmescher, Matthew F. *Good Morality Is Like Good Cooking*. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.

A non-technical, easy-to-read introduction to Catholic morality.

Kreeft, Peter. *Making Choices: Practical Wisdom for Everyday Moral Decisions*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books: 1990.

Kreeft is an outstanding writer who thinks clearly and logically. Chapter 8 on abortion is worth the price of the book.

Maguire, Daniel. *The Moral Choice*. Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1978.

The classic work is about how to do moral reasoning. Inspired the "STOP Sign" method.

Cormick, Patrick T. and Russell B. Connors. *Facing Ethical Issues: Dimensions of Character, Choices, & Community*. New York: Paulist Press, 2003.

(continued on page 70)

Right Reason in Action

(pp. 48–50)

OBJECTIVES

The goals of this section are to enable students to:

- continue to think about the challenge and importance of making right decisions;
- understand prudence as “right reason in action”;
- learn the four steps of a moral decision-making process suggested in this chapter: **Search** out the facts, **Think** about alternatives and consequences, **consult** and consider **Others**, and **Pray** to the Lord for guidance.

USING THE SECTION

1. Ask students what they thought of the short story about Thomas Edison and his search for the right material for a light bulb filament in “Right Reason in Action,” which they should have read.
2. Carry the Edison discussion a bit further and ask students if they think searching for “the right answers” in the area of morality would be as hard as Edison’s search for the right filament material. Why or why not?



Thomas Edison in his laboratory

Right Reason in Action

It is reported that the brilliant inventor Thomas Edison used two thousand different materials in his effort to discover the right filament for the light bulb. They all failed. This caused his assistant to complain that all their effort was wasted, that nothing was learned. The great inventor disagreed, “Oh, we have come a long way and we have learned a lot. We know that there are two thousand elements which we cannot use to make a good light bulb.” Edison is known for the famous quote, “Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.” In his own way, Edison was telling the world that the search for scientific truth takes work. It is similar in the area of morality. We have to work hard to search for truth, and then we should act on it.

Perhaps one of the reasons we live in a world that has difficulty discerning right from wrong is that people do not

take the time to think. It is like a wealthy businessman who enrolled his son at an Ivy League school. When the father examined the college’s catalog of courses and the requirements for a business degree, he quizzed the Dean of Studies, “Does my kid have to take all these courses? Can’t you put him on the fast-track program so he can get out and join me in the business?” The dean replied, “Of course, he can speed up his course of studies. But a lot of his college experience depends on what he wants to make of himself. God takes twenty years to grow a solid oak, but only two months to produce a squash.”

Have you seen a squash lately? Let it ripen a bit and it gets awfully mushy inside.

How does one guard against “intellectual mushiness” in learning to do the moral thing? We do so by exercising the virtue of prudence (see CCC 1806; 1835) the virtue that helps us discover goodness and choose the right means of achieving it.

Following the ancient philosopher Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas described prudence as “right reason in action.” This moral virtue governs other virtues because it guides them by setting rule and measure. Prudence inclines us to lead good, ethical, moral lives of action. This cardinal virtue helps our conscience make correct judgments about right and wrong, about the good and evil in each situation, we encounter. Prudence shows us how to act based on clear-headed foresight.

In short, prudence is necessary for correct judgment. We can grow in this virtue by cooperating with God’s grace, through personal experience, and by making an honest evaluation of our mistakes. Prudence, like all virtues, forms our character and helps us to more easily make good choices and then act on them.

Consider the tragic story of the young nature photographer who, in May of 1981,

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WARM UP

1. Write the following moral questions so that the students can see them easily (on the blackboard, a flipchart, an overhead projector, or a PowerPoint presentation):
 - Is it okay to get drunk if you’re not going to be driving?
 - Is it okay to cheat on a test if everyone else is doing it?
 - Is it okay to lie to a parent if you know that your parent sometimes lies, too?
 - Is it okay to shoplift something that costs less than \$5?
2. Read the opening Scripture quotation from Proverbs 3:5 on p. 47. Ask students to write a short journal entry about a time when they—or someone they know well—placed trust in God. Ask a few students to read their journal entries aloud.

had himself flown into northern Alaska to photograph the natural beauty and mysteries of the tundra found there. For his task, he took with him five hundred rolls of film, filmaroma, and provisions.

Months passed. As his diary later revealed, his entries changed from those of awe into a living nightmare. In August he wrote, "I think I should have used more foresight about arranging my departure. I'll soon find out."

In November, he died of exposure in a desolate valley near an unmarked lake, 225 miles northeast of Fairbanks. When his death was investigated, it was discovered that although he made careful plans for most of his trip, he improbably failed to arrange for a pilot to come pick him up!

As St. Basil the Great taught: *Prudence must precede every action that we undertake, for, if prudence be wanting, there is nothing, however*

good it may seem, which is not turned into evil.

The English martyr Robert Southwell said, "Foresight is to be sought, for hindsight is deadly bought." And the popular saying, "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread" also reminds us to stop and consider what we are doing before making moral decisions. A method of moral decision-making heads well this sage advice. It includes four major steps:

Search out the facts
Think about alternatives and consequences
Others—consult them and consider how your actions will affect them
Pray to the Lord for guidance
This chapter will examine each of the steps in the "STOP Sign" approach to moral detail.

discernment
A decision-making process that attends to the implications and consequences of an action or choice.

DISCERNMENT

Some decisions are relatively easy to make; for example, what kind of soda to drink at lunch. Others are more difficult; for example, choosing which set of friends to go out with on a Friday night. Still others are potentially life-changing, such as what career to choose, whether to marry or not and if so, when. You will also need to decide whether your Christ and his values will or will not make a difference in your life.

For good decisions on big and important issues, a decision-making process known as discernment is needed. Discernment for a believer is a keen and insightful judgment about some important choice. It is done in a prayerful atmosphere, taking into consideration Christian values.

Here are some widely-recognized elements that go into the discernment and the decision-making process. For each factor, evaluate how you typically use this particular element in important decisions you make, especially on issues involving right and wrong. Use the following scale:

A—very present in my decision-making process

B—usually present

C—present about half the time

D—rarely there

E—never present

- 1. Gather information.** Before acting, I research issues well.
- 2. Weigher feelings.** I check to see if my emotions are clouding my judgment or speaking to my heart about the right course of action.
- 3. Open to growth.** I'm willing to learn new information, seek guidance from wise people, and correct my prejudices.
- 4. Use my imagination.** When stuck in a rut, I trust my imagination to suggest alternative courses of action.
- 5. Flexible.** I'm willing to look at the issue from another perspective, shifting from one part of the problem to another.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND SUMMARY

This chapter section is shorter than Sections 2 and 3 so that the steps in the "STOP Sign" method of moral decision-making can be kept together in two lessons.

This section introduces the meaning of the STOP acronym. Additionally, through the use of two stories, the text introduces the virtue of prudence. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines it, "Prudence is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it" (1806). St. Thomas Aquinas described prudence as "right reason in action." The students will learn that they can grow in this virtue by cooperating with God's grace, gaining personal experience, and honestly evaluating their mistakes.

Also included is an exercise in discernment and an introduction to the term's meaning as "a keen and insightful judgment about some important choice." Discernment is done in a prayerful atmosphere, taking into consideration Christian values. The students will do an exercise with some common elements that are a part of most discernment processes.

- After repeating or summarizing this section's quotes on prudence from Aquinas, St. Basil, and Robert Southwell, draw a Stop sign and write the four major steps of the "STOP Sign" method of moral decision-making so that students can see them well. Have students copy these definitions for future use and reference in their notebooks:

Search out the facts.

Think about alternatives and consequences.

Others—consult them and consider how your actions will affect them.

Pray to the Lord for guidance.

- Review some of the vocabulary terms, such as prudence on p. 48 and discernment on p. 49. Invite students to offer their own "home-made" definitions for vocabulary terms to see how well these concepts are understood.

CREATIVE LEARNING

- Invite students to draw their own cartoons—a cartoon strip or a single frame—illustrating the value of prudence and the dangers of not acting prudently—e.g., a person ice skating on a pond where a sign warns: "Danger: Thin Ice."
- Have students write a script for a ninety-second opinion piece for radio on why "the end doesn't justify the means." Editorials could focus on an event in history or a social injustice they see in their own school or community. For example, an essay might fault the closing of a homeless shelter because businesses wanting to open in the same neighborhood were afraid to have customers park near a shelter. Outside of class, have students record their ads on a tape or CD for classmates to listen to.
- Basing discussion on the feature, "Case: Courageous Sacrifice or an Old Fool?", have three students act as panelists as if for a TV program. Ask another student or two to act as interviewers. They should use the three questions at the end of the feature and questions they develop themselves. Allow fifteen to twenty minutes for the panel and follow-up discussion.

EXTENDING THE SECTION

1. Present **discernment** as a component in the process of decision-making. Assign the exercise on pp. 49–50 (may be duplicated from p. 288 of this TWE) to be done by students individually in class. As time permits, go through each step on the scale with the class. Call on volunteers to share how they responded.
2. To follow up discussion of the morality questions, show all or part of the video *Abandon Ship*. Have students write their reactions to the video using the worksheet “Abandon Ship” from p. 287 of this TWE. The movie depicts a famous legal case in American law, *U.S. v. Holmes*. It tells the story of a ship’s captain who decided to sacrifice the lives of some victims of a shipwreck on a life raft. He did so in the face of severe criticism by some of the passengers and at risk to his own life. The lifeboat could hold no more than fourteen people. Twenty-six people survived the shipwreck. The situation became desperate when a severe storm arose. There was no immediate hope of rescue; on the contrary, it looked as if help would not come at all.
3. Offer students a choice for a journaling assignment—either the assignment for this chapter section on a difficult decision they had to make on p. 50, or the assignment on the Oscar Wilde quote on p. 57 at the end of the next section.

8. **Hard work.** Some decisions take effort. I avoid oversimplification. I try to clear up prejudgments. I investigate the consequences of various actions.
9. **Courage to be myself.** I don’t always follow the crowd, pushed along by the way the wind is blowing. I can stand on my own two feet. I take responsibility for my actions because they are mine.
10. **Learns from past experiences, mistakes, and personal weaknesses.** I know my strengths and weaknesses. I know what can slow me down, and I am willing to take steps to overcome or compensate for my limitations. When faced with a decision similar to ones I’ve made, I’ve learned from past setbacks as well as former triumphs.
11. **Prayer.** When faced with tough decisions, I turn to the Lord for his help and to the Holy Spirit for inspiration and encouragement. I recognize that I am not essentially alone and know that with God on my side, I will be able to make good decisions.



FOR YOUR JOURNAL

Write of a difficult decision you recently had to make. Reflect on which factor was the key for you to arrive at a decision. Judge whether you were prudent or not in the decision-making process.

Search Out the Facts

(CCC, 1757–1761)

Any good decision requires using your God-given intellect to dig out the facts, so that your decision can be both informed and real. Catholic morality is based on reality, on the way things are, on how God made them and intends them to be. It is not based on wishful thinking or on the whims of current fancy. As Rudyard Kipling put it in “The Elephant Child”:

*I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I know):
Their names are What and Why and How
And How and Where and Who.*

Kipling had it about right. The foundation of all knowledge we acquire comes from answering questions beginning with who, what, when, where, why, and how. These reality-revealing questions unearth the three major aspects of every moral action: the moral object (what), the

intention or motive (why), and the circumstances (who, where, when, and how). The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, “The object, the intention, and the circumstances make up the ‘sources,’ or constitutive elements, of the morality of human acts” (1750).

MORAL OBJECT (CCC, 1751)

We cannot begin to decide whether something is moral or not until we know the nature of our proposed action. The simple question that begins with what helps tell us what is the content or “matter” of our moral decision. A what question helps reveal to us whether the matter of our action is good or bad, that is, if it is directed to our true good or is harmful and destructive of what it means to be a person made in God’s image.

Take the example of a high school junior who gets out of her way to drive a friend to school. This act of driving a car is a good matter because it is directed toward the good of another person; it is helping the friendman achieve the desirable human goal of acquiring an education. On the other hand, take the example of a

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RESOURCES

Bibliography (continued from page 67)

- A follow-up to their earlier volume, this book applies their method of integrating character, choices, and community to topics like the economy, war and violence, medicine, sexuality, and the environment.
- O’Donnell, John, S.J. *A Faith You Can Live With: Understanding the Basics*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1999.
- Salzman, Todd A. *What Are They Saying About Catholic Ethical Method?* New York: Paulist Press, 2003.
- Examines the Basic Goods Theory of Catholic ethical reasoning in light of the revisionist positions on the scene today. Part of Paulist’s WATSA series.
- Sloyan, Gerard S. *How Do I Know I Am Doing Right?* New York: Pflaum, 1976.
- We hope you can find this book. Especially read chapter 8 on conscience and the Church. Sloyan asks a series of excellent questions to determine if one is doing right or not.
- Sparks, Richard, C.S.P. *Contemporary Christian Morality: Real Questions, Candid Responses*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1996.
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- Spohn, William, S.J. *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* New York: Paulist Press, 1983.
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Think About the Alternatives and Consequences (pp. 57–60)

OBJECTIVES

The goals of this section are to enable students to:

- learn to use their God-given intellect to search out the facts prior to making a decision;
- recognize that the moral object—what we are doing—is the decisive element in morality;
- perceive the importance of the moral intention—why we are doing something—in making a moral decision;
- know that answers to questions that begin with *who*, *where*, *when*, and *how* help to reveal the circumstances of a particular act;
- realize that doing the right thing also involves thinking about alternatives and consequences before making a decision.

high school senior who creates a fake ID so he can buy beer illegally. This action is basically dishonest, a form of lying. It distorts the integrity of a person made in God's image and likeness.

In most cases it is relatively easy to discover if what we propose to do conforms or does not conform to our true good. Human reason—using our intellects—helps us recognize and judge which actions correspond to our true good, which ones make us the kind of people God intends us to be. And objective norms of morality, like the Ten Commandments, express the rational order of good and evil, attested to by conscience (CCC, 1751).

Some actions are intrinsically always evil and, therefore, wrong because they go against God's will and destroy human good. These actions can never be justified. According to Jesus, these prohibitions allow no exceptions:

If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments . . . You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness. (Mt 19:17–18)

Other examples of actions that are always wrong are perjury, rape, and blasphemy (uttering hateful or defiant words against God). Murder, the killing of an innocent person, is always seriously wrong. It is a great assault on human dignity, contrary to the good of humans and God's will. A particularly condemnable form of murder is abortion, the unjustified killing of unborn human life.

An answer to the what question reveals that geneticists today have concluded that at conception a unique human being comes into existence. An unborn fetus is a human being with dignity and worth precious in the eyes of God.

We need now more than ever to have the courage to look the truth in the eye and to call things by their proper name, without yielding to convenient compromises or to the temptation of self-deception. . . . Especially in the case of abortion there is widespread use of ambiguous terminology, such as interruption of pregnancy, which tends to hide abortion's true nature and to attenuate its seriousness in public opinion. Perhaps this linguistic phenomenon is itself a symptom of an unconscious of conscience. But so

word has the power to change the reality of things: Provised abortion is . . . deliberate and direct killing. . . . (Catechism of the Church, 2262)

Without determining the matter of our action—what we are doing—we cannot determine whether an action promotes or destroys the good of humans. We must ask this question to make informed, conscientious decisions on moral issues.

Therefore, what we do is incredibly important. God calls us to become fully human by loving him above all and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Our actions give flesh to our love, through them we become the precious child of God that we truly are. Actions—what we do—make up the content of the moral object. They are the pivotal element in judging if something is moral or immoral, in determining if something is for our good or is harmful, if something is according to God's plan or contrary to it. Actions consist of some of the following elements:

- Actions express who we are; for example, a teen who regularly visits her grandmother reveals herself to be a sensitive, loving person.
- Actions also make or form us into the persons we are growing to be; for example, a person who cheats regularly is transforming himself or herself into a cheater.
- Finally, actions impact the world around us, doing good or bringing about harm. Thus, a boyfriend who encourages his girlfriend to abort their unborn child is



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WARM UP

1. Making moral decisions often requires creativity. As this section points out, it demands looking at more than one alternative and critiquing the consequences of each possible decision. Ask the students to brainstorm several alternatives for the following situations. Write them on the board, flipchart, overhead projector, or PowerPoint presentation. If time is short, let the class pick which situation they would like to analyze.
 - You are struggling with Calculus half-way through the semester.
 - A friend who drove you to a party has been drinking.
 - Your friends want you to go out after you have promised to babysit.
2. Share the old saying "actions speak louder than words" with the students. Have them take ten minutes to write a short theme explaining how they have found this saying to be true or untrue. Invite two or three students to read their themes to the class.

USING THE SECTION

1. Write the definition of **moral object** on the board (or flipchart, overhead projector, or PowerPoint presentation). The moral object is the matter of the human action. Refer students to look again at the text section "Moral Object" (pp. 50–52). Then, use examples from this section to illustrate how actions can be good or intrinsically evil.

moral object

The moral content of an action that suggests whether the action is directed toward the true good.

participating in murder. An abortion kills an innocent, precious child of God.

The moral object is the decisive element in morality. As Pope John Paul II wrote

in *The Splendor of Truth*, "The morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the object 'rationally chosen by the deliberate will'" (76).

Two Rules of Morality

- Your acts must promote the true good of humans or they are wrong. If your reason is clouded as to what truly promotes the dignity of humans made in God's image, flee.
- Make sure your actions always conform to objective norms of morality like the Ten Commandments. These norms indicate what actions to do (like worshipping God and honoring your parents) because they conform to our true good or what actions we should avoid (like killing, adultery, stealing, lying, and hating) because they weaken or destroy what it means to be made in God's image.

An added bad intention (such as vengeance) makes an act evil that, in and of itself, can be good (such as forgiving). (CCC, 1753)

Intention

The aim or objective of a course of action.



Give your reasons for whether the following actions are moral or immoral. Judge them to be moral if they promote the true good of human beings and are in accord with God's will; judge them to be immoral if they are contrary to human good.

- hastening the death of an aged, terminally ill cancer patient
- refusing to pay taxes
- telling people what you think they want to hear rather than what you truly believe
- posing for a pornographic magazine
- passing a law that imposes penalties on couples who have more than the number of children dictated by the government
- poking fun at a classmate who exhibits effeminate behavior

INTENTION (CCC, 1752-1753)

The answer to the why question gets to the motive or intention for performing an action. It helps us discover the end, purpose, or reason for doing something. Why you did something (your intention) is an essential element for judging the morality of an action. Because intention resides in the will of the person (subject) acting, it is often referred to as the subjective dimension in morality.

Our legal system recognizes the importance of intention when it distinguishes between first- and second-degree murder and manslaughter. First-degree murder involves the free, premeditated, and willful killing of a person. Second-degree murder involves intent to kill, but without premeditation and deliberation. Manslaughter, on the other hand, involves the unlawful killing of someone but without premeditation or malicious intent. An

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND SUMMARY

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out, "the object, intention, and the circumstances make up the 'sources,' or constitutive elements, of the morality of human acts" (1750). A morally good act requires that the object, the end, and the circumstances all be good together.

The text under the first step of the "STOP Sign" method for moral decision-making, "Search Out the Facts" (pp. 50–57), introduces the moral object (the content or matter of a moral decision), intention (why a person does something), and its related points and circumstances (e.g., when or where the action took place). Several exercises and a case study help to support the material in this section.

The text under "Think About the Alternatives and Consequences" (pp. 57–60) covers the second step of the "STOP Sign" method. Doing the right thing is often complicated. This step asks the students not only to explore many possible ways of handling a moral situation, but to also think about the consequences of any decision they might make before they make it.

Actions like smoking, shoplifting, and premarital sex are handled in relation to this step. A case study involving ways to deal with a difficult work situation also helps the students to think of creative ways to handle difficult decisions and to consider the various consequences for whatever choices they might make.

example would be inattention while driving that results in an accident that kills a pedestrian.

Intention is targeted to the goal of an action, what good (or evil) I want to happen. Why am I doing this? For example, say you missed Mass last Sunday. Why? Was it because of laziness, to spite your parents, or because you were suffering the ill effects of partying the night before? Or did you fail to make the 12:30 Mass because you stopped to help an elderly lady fix her car, or you were called into work at the last minute, or you came down with the flu? Your motive or intention is a significant factor in judging the morality of the objective act—in this case, missing Mass.

Intention can include a series of actions that are geared to the same purpose. For example, the bank robber drives his vehicle to the scene of the crime, gets out of his car, walks into the bank, fills out a fake deposit slip, joins the teller line, walks to the teller's station, and then drives a gun to demand money. All these actions are motivated by one overriding purpose: the theft of money. The burglar's motivation directs all the previous seemingly harmless actions, like driving a car or walking into the bank building.

One action can also be motivated by several intentions, some of them mixed. For example, suppose I give you a ride to school. I do so for two reasons. First, you are a friend who deserves my help, and I want to give it. Second, you are a very capable math student, and I want you to help me study for the final exam. There are two rules for governing intentions: (1) keep the intention good, and (2) remember that the end does not justify the means. More information on each of these rules follows:

1. *Keep the intention good.* For something to be morally good, both your action (what you do) and your intention (why you do it) must be good. Note how a bad intention can contaminate even a seemingly good act, thereby making it wrong. For example, a person gives money to a worthy



cause, but the motive is to buy political favors. Although the act may benefit a particular politician's favorite charity, the donor's intention here is morally wrong (buying votes and political patronage). The bad intention contaminates the good act, making it wrong for the person doing it.

Jesus insisted on good intentions for all of our actions, even our religious duties. For example, Jesus taught that we should give money to the poor anonymously, not for the motive of getting the praise of others. He said we should fast and pray out of sincere hearts, not to draw attention to ourselves. In other words, Jesus would have us ask ourselves: "What's your motive? Do you genuinely love God and others?" Or are you doing these good religious practices to show off?

2. *The end does not justify the means.* Simply put, for an action to be moral, the means must be moral. My good intentions do not make an act good if the means I use are evil; that is, if they are contrary to the good of humans. What I do, the means,

MEANS

A method, course of action, or instrument by which something can be accomplished.

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2. Dig deeper into this concept—moral object. Remind students that determining the nature of the moral object requires answering the questions "What action is involved?" and "Is the action good or bad?" Have students name several moral actions that are intrinsically evil (e.g., abortion, murder, stealing, adultery, etc.). Have them also apply these questions to current events—things that have happened locally or nationally that they've heard about.

E

EXTENDING THE SECTION

1. Divide the class into small groups of three or four for the mind logo activity "Moral Actions: Yes or No?" on p. 52. Give the groups fifteen to twenty minutes to discuss the six bulleted actions and decide if they are moral or not. Students delegated from the groups should be ready to give reasons for their judgments when the class reconvenes.
2. For extra credit, invite three to four students to work in a teaching group to present a mini-lesson to the whole class on either the topic of **intention** or **circumstances**. Each group should review the material in the text, repeat the definition, recap what the CCC says about intention and circumstances, and perform short skits to show what the term means in real life.
3. Have students pair up in class to alternate in asking each other the *Review and Reflection* questions at the end of these two sections, "Search Out the Facts" on p. 57 and "Think About the Alternatives and the Consequences" on p. 60.

(continued on page 74)

EXTENDING THE SECTION

(continued from page 73)

4. Assign students to small teams of three or four to construct cases in which the intention and circumstances are good but the action is wrong. Share a few examples of your own. (e.g., the case of a destitute family looting a store for food and a tent after losing their home in a hurricane.) Before the groups develop their own cases, have students try out their skills in naming the object, intentions, and circumstances in the following case:

Lori took her math final in the first period. At lunch, she runs into her best friend, Julie, who says she didn't have a chance to study for the test because she had to take her mom to the hospital the night before, following an accident. Julie really needs to get a B on the test if she is going to have any chance to get a college scholarship. Her family is very poor, and Julie needs the money in order to attend college. Julie asks Lori to tell her some of the problems given on the test or to at least help her compose a cheat sheet with the formulas she can take with her to class. For Lori, determine:

- the moral object
- the intentions
- the circumstances

After the groups have written their short cases, have someone from each group briefly share one case.

5. Have students record in their notebooks or journals several creative alternatives to pressing moral problems. You may wish to use commonly suggested moral problems such as alcohol abuse, premarital sex or nursing home neglect. As a follow-up to this assignment, have the students do as homework the questions under the feature "What Should Grace Smith Do?" on p. 58.

(continued on page 77)

must be good; they must fit the end or purpose for which I am doing something.

Therefore, I may not cheat (the means) to get good grades (the end). I may not lie (the means) to help someone get a good job (the end). Doctors may not perform dangerous medical experiments on unconscious patients (the means) to develop a vaccine for the AIDS virus. No matter how good the intention, we may not perform evil acts to achieve a good result. Violating this traditional, Christ-approved principle leads to the breakdown of morality.

not made for purely selfish reasons or out of convenience, but out of a desire to protect certain important values such as her own health or a decent standard of living for the other members of the family. Sometimes it is feared that the child to be born would live in such conditions that it would be better if the birth did not take place. Nevertheless, these reasons and others like them, however serious and tragic, can never justify the deliberate killing of an innocent human being. (The Gospel of Life, 94)

Why? Once again, it is worth stating—a good intention cannot justify morally evil acts. And abortion is always morally evil.

The deliberate decision to deprive an innocent human being of his life is always morally evil and can never be justified either as an end in itself or as a means to a good end. (The Gospel of Life, 97)

Take another case, that of dishonesty. People cheat on tests to get higher grades. A high grade certainly seems like a good end, but it cannot justify evil means. Intentions are critically important. It is always important to have a good reason for doing something. But good intentions can never transform an essentially evil act into something good. If the act is contrary to human good, then the intention cannot change that fact.

CIRCUMSTANCES (CCC, 1754)

The answers to questions that begin with who, where, when, and how help reveal the circumstances of a particular moral act. The consequences of a particular action are also related to the circumstances.

The circumstances of an action are also secondary. Circumstances can increase or decrease the moral goodness or evil of an act. For example, stealing is wrong. Stealing the last dollar from a poor person, however, is much more serious than stealing \$10 from a millionaire. In the first case, you might be



Take the case of abortion. People have many good reasons they hope will justify this attack on innocent human life. They want to spare the child a life of pain or suffering if it has some genetic deformity. They fear they cannot support another child without making older children suffer. They want to protect their reputations or their partner's reputation. The list of good intentions is endless. But none of these reasons outweighs the right to life of a precious child made in God's image and likeness.

It is true that the decision to have an abortion is often tragic and painful for the mother, just as for the decision to rid herself of the fruit of conception is

What Is the Motive?

Here are some issues. Consider if the case is moral or not. Use this procedure:

1. Decide if the moral issue is good.
2. Determine if the situation is good.
3. **Readily, judge if the issue is moral (M) or immoral (I). Write the appropriate letter on the lines. Share your reasons.**
 1. To protect property values, a neighborhood association compels with local financial leaders to keep Hispanics out.
 2. To control costs, a company lays off a certain percentage of older workers.
 3. To boost everyone's grades, a math teacher curves a tough test.
 4. To open the state medical school to members of historically excluded minorities, the admissions office looks beyond just undergraduate grade point averages and medical school admissions scores.
 5. To punish their teen for lying about his whereabouts, his parents take away driving privileges for two months.
 6. To deter drug use and the possession of weapons, the school administration randomly searches student lockers without permission.
 7. To bolster farm prices, the government says farmers lefty subsidies not to grow crops, despite the world hunger problem.
 8. To save for a cat, a student takes a twenty-hour-per-week job knowing that her grades will really suffer because of it.
 9. To relax from a tough week at school, a student smokes a few joints on Friday night.
 10. To beef up a résumé for college applications, a student agrees to volunteer at a hospital once a week.

gully of placing the poor person in serious jeopardy, especially if that dollar represents food and, therefore, life. In the second case, the millisecond might not even miss the 110. Theft is wrong in both cases, but more seriously wrong in the first case.

Circumstances can also diminish or increase a person's responsibility or blameworthiness for a particular action. Let's say you came to a scene of an accident and failed to help because you panicked and simply forgot the first-aid training you learned in health class. Your act of omission may well result in a life-threatening situation for the accident victim. However, the circumstances, in this case your overwhelming fear and panic, undoubtedly lessen your blameworthiness for this particular action.

Take this same case and put a trained doctor at the scene of the accident. His knowledge and past experience minimize, if not extinguish, all fear in cases like this. He slows his car down enough to assess the situation, deciding that it would take too much time to help. He judges that he will be late for his golf round. The who involved in this case really makes the failure to act much more serious. This particular selfish doctor may be morally (if not

legally) responsible for a death should the unfortunate accident victim die.

Circumstances sometimes make no difference in judging the morality of a case. For example, if someone steals your iPod at school or at work, where it is done does not affect the moral evil of the case at all, nor does it diminish or increase the responsibility of the thief. A theft has taken place, and the act of stealing is wrong. However, at other times, where I do something can make all the difference in the world. Yelling the word "Fire" might appear to be morally neutral. But screaming it in a crowded movie theater as a prank might result in panic that injures many people. Here the circumstance of place makes all the difference.

The same is true of the when question. Time may not affect the goodness or evil of a case at all. For example, there is little difference in the evil of the theft of your wallet whether it took place at 10 a.m. or at 2 p.m. In both cases, you are without your wallet. In other situations, time can make all the difference. Criticizing a good friend's miserable performance right after her soccer game, and within an hour of when she found out her boyfriend broke up with her,

3. Address the issue of searching out facts as the first step in moral decision-making. Read and then unpack the quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on p. 50. Revisit the who, what, where, when and how approach of searching out facts. Let students know that part of the search for facts must include learning about moral laws, such as the Ten Commandments. In a nutshell, this is why studying morality is so important.

RESOURCES

Bibliography (continued from page 70)

- Stevens, Edward. *Developing Moral Imagination: Case Studies in Practical Morality*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997. Shows how different philosophical positions approach different moral issues. Provides Ayes@ and Ano@ responses but also a third way of provocative thought toward the issue, what Stevens calls PO. Challenging and unorthodox in approach. Teachers will benefit by reading this work.
- Stivers, Robert L., Christine E. Gudorf, Alice Frazer Evans, and Robert A. Evans, *Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989. Good application of the case-method approach to a number of moral dilemmas.
- Wilkie, Dr. and Mrs. Jack C. *Abortion: Questions and Answers*. Second edition. Cincinnati: Hayes Publishing Co., 2003. A must for your own personal library.



HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

1. Assign the For Your Journal prompt (on p. 60) about a decision that students are considering as a homework assignment.
2. Have students read the next two sections of the chapter, "Others" on pp. 60–63 and "Pray" on pp. 63–66 for the next class period.



felicit theft (cheating is a form of theft) and bearing false witness. Honest people actually follow what their consciences dictate—to be truthful and authentic. They know all too well that dishonesty breeds dishonesty; cheating turns people into cheaters.

CONSEQUENCES

We should never act without considering the consequences of our actions. While consequences or outcomes are important to consider, they are neither the only nor the decisive factor in the morality of actions. The moral object is the decisive factor—that is, what we do as well as how it does or does not contribute to our ultimate good. Nevertheless, we should look at the possible effects of our proposed actions. They can help us determine if something is morally good or evil. Take the issue of whether to smoke cigarettes or not. By now almost everyone knows that nicotine is a highly addictive and poisonous drug. Cigarette smoking contains almost four thousand chemicals, at least forty-three of which cause cancer. The American Cancer Society reports some frightening statistics about smoking and its effects:

In a recent summary of studies involving 18,000 students at 61 high schools, over 70 percent of the respondents admitted to one or more instances of serious test cheating. Sixty percent admitted to plagiarizing, while 50 percent said they use the Internet to lift materials without citation.³ A Rutgers survey that found that about half the students did not consider that they were cheating when they copied questions and answers from a test.⁴

What Should Grace Smith Do?

Grace is a hard-working, honest, and efficient secretary for her school's principal. She has learned that the principal, who seems to be generally a person of good character, has recently changed the grade of a star athlete—a high school senior. He fixed the grade so the team standout would not be benched for the upcoming championship game because of academic negligence.

- Has the principal done anything wrong?
- What should Grace do?
- What alternatives does she have? Think creatively.
- What would result if Grace does nothing?

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RESOURCES

Print Resources

Abortion: Questions and Answers.

The famous Willke book online.
www.ohiolife.org/qa/qatoc.htm

"A Framework For Ethical Decision Making"

A good guide from the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University. Good supplement to the "STOP Sign" method. This is the site of the Ethics Connection, a wonderful resource with lots of good articles.
www.scu.edu/SCU/Centers/Ethics/practicing/decision/framework.shtml

McDonald, Michael. "A Framework for Ethical Decision-Making: Version 4 Ethics Shareware."

A good supplement to the "STOP Sign" method. Worth reading.
www.ethics.ubc.ca/mcdonald/decisions.html

MacDonald, Chris, Ph.D. "A Guide to Moral Decision Making."

Some helpful steps that could supplement the "STOP Sign" method. Short and sweet.
www.ethics.ubc.ca/chrismac/publications/guide.html



In a recent year, more than 22 percent of high school students and 4 percent of middle school students smoked cigarettes. White and Hispanic students smoked cigarettes the most.

Almost half of Americans who continue to smoke will die as a result of the habit. Currently, about 438,000 people die in the United States each year from tobacco use.

One out of five deaths is related to smoking, killing more Americans than alcohol, car accidents, suicide, AIDS, homicide, and illegal drugs combined.

Cigarette smoking is involved in 30 percent of all deaths from cancer! Facts like these should be enough for us to conclude that cigarette smoking does not contribute to the true good of humans. Consider the consequences of shoplifting. It is the number one reason why small stores go out of business. Around 10 percent of people who come to stores shoplift.

Market analysts estimate that shops boost their prices by the same 10 percent to cover shoplifting losses.

Take another issue that is common in today's society that is often encouraged by popular culture. That issue is premarital sex, which is often promiscuous. Sexual indulgence outside of God's plan for humanity brings much human misery such as the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies that often lead to abortions, emotional pain, and the erosion of the family. Further, the lack of self-control before marriage contributes to infidelity after marriage. There are many negatives that result from violating God's will for human sexuality, that is, an exclusive male-female union of love and the sharing of life within the context of a committed marriage.

When considering consequences, an excellent question to ask is: "Would I be willing to allow everyone in a similar situation to act this way?" If you answer no, then what you propose to do is most certainly wrong. Consider:

- What if everyone cheated on tests?
- What if everyone cheated on his or her taxes?
- What if everybody disobeyed traffic laws?
- What if everyone lied?



Visit the American Cancer Society web page at: www.cancer.org. Research the ill and busy about the bad effects of smoking. First-out steps you can get involved in the fight against cigarette smoking. Write a letter, send an e-mail, make a phone call, or meet your representative face-to-face. Alternatively, write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper on some issue before Congress that deal with the health and welfare of young people.



Obnoxious Boss

Rarely are we faced with just one alternative in our decisions. By using our minds and imaginations, by examining our values and the consequences of our proposed actions, we can choose the most loving, Christian, and moral course of action. What if you found yourself in the following situation? What would you do? What should you do?

Your boss at the local fast-food restaurant is always on your case. He consistently gives you the rotten clean-up job, criticizes your performance in front of the other employees, and even questions your integrity. It has gotten to the point where you hate to go to work. Even your coworkers have commented on how unfair the boss has been toward you. You have tried talking to him, but he never listens to you directly in the eye and ignores most of what you say.

One of your best friends works with you. He suggests that you get even with the unfair employer. He said he will help you in a ploy to slash his taxes.

Briefly describe three moral alternatives to the tire-slashing plan and the consequences for each.

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RESOURCES

Internet Resources

American Cancer Society

Good source for facts and figures about cancer.

www.cancer.org

"Approaching Ethics"

Describes various ways to look at ethical issues.

www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/approach.html

A Framework for Ethical Decision Making

A good guide from the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University. Good supplement to the "STOP Sign" method. This is the site of the Ethics Connection, a wonderful resource with lots of good articles.

www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/framework.html

"Ethics and Morality"

Overview of various approaches to ethical theory today.

http://cs.clark.edu/~hum101/Humanities_101/ethics_and_morality.htm

How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Dilemmas of Ethical Living

An online introduction to a book by Rushworth M. Kidder.

www.globalethics.org/pub/toughchoices.html

(continued on page 86)

Others (pp. 60–63)

Pray (pp. 63–66)

OBJECTIVES

The goals of this section are to enable students

to:

- see how their proposed actions might affect others;
- understand why it is important to seek advice from other sources while making a moral decision;
- commit themselves to prayer as part of making a moral decision.



REVIEW AND REFLECTION

Why is it important to consider alternatives and consequences in thinking about the actions you may take?



FOR YOUR JOURNAL

Write about a decision you are currently trying to make. List several alternative courses of action. Then, describe the various consequences that you think may result for each course of action.

There are two good rules to apply when considering the consequences of proposed actions. (1) Do only those things that you think would be morally acceptable for all people at all times. (2) Always respect others as persons of incommensurable worth who are made in God's image.

Luther King, Jr., put it, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"

BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHERS

We must always ask how our proposed actions will affect others. And we must look to, and heed the advice of, those who are wiser than us.

For example, consider the buying habits in our consumer society. It may seem harmless to buy the latest CD or purchase the most desirable pair of sports shoes or attend the coolest concert. But all of these actions affect others. Consider these possible results of unchecked shopping:

- if we never deny our whims for consumer products, we may become selfish, materialistic people who lack compassion for others, especially the poor. A wise person once observed that we do not really grow up until we take some responsibility to help others and contribute to their welfare from our own resources.

- Are we aware that the shoes we buy may have been created in a sweatshop where workers toiled in oppressive conditions for subhuman wages?

- What about the concerts we attend? Our money enriches these media stars.

Others

You are walking to your car in the mall lot. Suddenly you see a man knocked to the ground by a car backing out of its parking space. He appears to be severely injured. You and half a dozen other people rush to the scene. You are standing next to the driver of the car who is looking down on the injured person. He turns to you and says, "It's been a terrible day for Bob Smith!"

You ask, "Is that the name of the poor guy who has been hurt?"

"No," the perpetrator says. "I'm Bob Smith."

"Poor" Bob Smith? This guy is so self-absorbed in his own problems that he is totally oblivious to the injured pedestrian. In contrast, Christian morality is very sensitive to the impact that our actions have on others. Christianity recognizes that as human beings we live with others, and as Christians we live for others. Martin

Read the following passages and questions. Then, write a second question for each passage.

Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29–37)

- Do I ever go out of my way to help someone in need?

Lazarus and the Rich Man (Lk 16:19–32)

- Who is the Lazarus in my life?

Sheep and the Goats (Mt 25: 37–44)

- Who is someone I know who hungers and thirsts for love?

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REVIEW QUESTION ANSWER

Looking at alternatives is important because rarely is there just one possible way out of moral dilemmas. Considering consequences is important so that we can take responsibility for our actions, as most of our decisions affect others.

WARM UP

1. Ask students: If you had a major decision to make, who is one person you would most likely wish to consult? Have students share their answers and explain why they named this person.
2. Read aloud this section's opening text about "Bob Smith." Without naming names, ask them if they have met other people who are similarly self-centered. What about those who really live for others? Invite students to briefly describe these individuals, too.

Are they worthy of it? Do we share their values? Do they share ours? Do we agree with their lifestyles?

None of these examples is meant to make you feel guilty. They merely point out that our actions affect others in many ways. When people are involved,

we need to take extra care to guarantee that our actions mean what we want them to mean and that they do not hurt others... or ourselves.

What do all the following sayings have in common?

"Pursue character building, reputation and take care of each!"

"Give others the credit that is due them."

"Honesty is the best policy."



Business refugees waiting in a makeshift shelter.

"Pursue character building, reputation and take care of each!"

"Give others the credit that is due them."

"Honesty is the best policy."

BE CONSULTIVE OF OTHERS

One common thread in several of these sayings is that "no one goes it alone." It's worthwhile to consult with people who have made tough decisions before and to take their advice. Apertions or sayings like these are a result of this wisdom. Brilliant doctors seek second or even third opinions in tough cases. Golf pros seek the guidance of brilliant teachers to hone their skills. Talented singers go to voice coaches to improve their range. Seeking advice in the moral life is also the wise thing to do. The Church has several such guideposts that are of help when making moral decisions.

The Church and its Magisterium

(CCC, 2032–2040; 2049–2055)

Christ gave the Church the right and duty to teach moral principles, including those concerning society. He also entrusted the Church to make judgments concerning human affairs that deal with the fundamental rights of persons and the salvation of people. The Magisterium of the Church, that is, the Holy Father and the bishops, are the authentic teachers who have Christ's authority to "teach... the truth to believe, the charity to practice, [and] the beatitude to hope for" (CCC, 2034).

Jesus gave them the gift of infallibility, ensuring that the Holy Spirit would preserve them from error in matters

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USING THE SECTION

1. Have students review points made in the text on p. 60 about how our shopping affects others. Ask students to respond frankly. Do they agree that too much shopping is selfish and that it hurts others somewhere down the line?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND SUMMARY

An undeniable fact about human life is that humans are social beings. We are dependent on others for our life, education, employment, and for most aspects of everyday living. We not only live *with* others, we live *for* others as well. Consequently, in making moral decisions, other people—the "O" of the "STOP Sign" method—should hold a key place in our making decisions to do right or wrong.

One element is to consider how our actions will affect others. An example to consider is smoking cigarettes. Not only do cigarettes impair one's own life, they also affect the health of those around the smoker. A second element is that others should be consulted prior to making moral decisions. The Church has several guideposts that are of help when making moral decisions. These include the Church and its Magisterium; the teachings of Jesus; help in the sacraments; including reconciliation; and fellow Christians.

The "P" in the "STOP Sign" method signifies prayer. Prayer is a powerful and necessary way to get God's help in searching out his will for us. In simplest form, prayer is putting oneself in the presence of the Lord. This section offers several definitions of prayer and teaches students to seek God whenever they need help.

2. Share this story with the students:

A little boy was trying to lift a heavy box. He could not even budge it. His father happened to walk by and stopped to watch his son's struggle. The boy exerted all his energy and then some, but still could not get the box to move. Finally, the father asked him: "Are you doing everything possible to lift the heavy load?" The boy yelled out in frustration, "Yes, I am!" The father countered calmly, "I don't think so. You haven't asked me to help you."

Ask students whether they find it easy or difficult to seek help from others.

of faith and morals without which the truths of the faith cannot be preserved, explained, or observed (CCC, 2036). This authority of the Magisterium to teach also extends to the precepts of the natural law and reason because observing them is necessary for our salvation (CCC, 2036).

For our part, we have the right to be instructed in God's saving precepts because they "purify our judgment and, with grace, heal wounded human reason." But we also "have the duty of observing the constitutions and decrees conveyed by the legitimate authority of the Church" (CCC, 2037).

Forming our consciences only after considering the good of all, and paying attention to the moral law as taught by the Church's Magisterium, is a proven way to discern and do God's will. Drawing on the Catechism of the Catholic Church, this text will present the Church's moral teachings, especially as they relate to the Ten Commandments.

The moral teachings of Jesus Christ are found in the New Testament, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. The pope and the bishops help us understand the meaning of these teachings and how they apply to the choices we face today.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is also a priceless resource in helping us to consult with wise and holy mentors. Many Catholics through the centuries have found regular recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation an invaluable help in living the moral life and growing in holiness. A sensitive confessor can give you helpful and practical advice on how to make wise choices.

Fellow Christians, Elders—parents, grandparents, teachers, and counselors—are great sources of wisdom in the moral life. Their experience can be a great source of guidance in doing right; they can help you sort out your values; for example, in the areas of sexual morality, substance abuse, and career choices. Remember an old Chinese proverb, "To know the road ahead, ask those coming back." A close friend can also be a good source of advice as you struggle with your decisions. A friend can be a sounding board. A good friend can also preserve you from self-deception and level with you when you need to hear the truth.

It is always good to talk over decisions with a person who won't criticize you needlessly, one who is willing and able to help, one who believes in you and only wants the best for you.



THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN CONSIDERING HOW OUR ACTIONS AFFECT OTHERS

1. Would I want what I am doing done to me? Jesus offers the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Lk 6:31). If your answer is no, then don't do it!
2. Would I be proud to do this in front of my mom (or dad, or younger sibling)? If not, then don't do it.
3. Would I want my decision and action broadcast on the evening news? Would you be proud to do this proposed action in public? Would you be willing to share it on TV for the world to see? If you are ashamed of your decision, then don't do it.

Apply these three questions to several moral cases or dilemmas. What would be the right thing to do in each instance?

E

EXTENDING THE SECTION

1. Place two signs on opposite ends of the room, one saying "Agree Strongly," the other saying "Disagree Strongly." Place a third sign near the middle of the room that says "I'm Neutral." Have students line up along the opposite side of the room, ready to move—in an orderly fashion—to the sign best representing their position about each statement as you read them. Add other questions if you wish. Call on volunteers to explain their answers before moving on to the next question.
 - I seek out my parent when I am faced with a difficult problem
 - Everyone is out for themselves
 - I know Church teaching regarding certain behaviors—for example, sexual behavior—and I strive to follow it
 - I would stick up for an unpopular classmate who is being treated unjustly
 - I would sacrifice a career with money for a career that serves others.
2. Introduce the mind logo activity "Three Questions to Ask When Considering How Our Actions Affect Others" on p. 62. Before students begin this on their own, have them suggest three different moral cases or dilemmas to use in this exercise. Write the cases where students can easily see them. Allow fifteen to twenty minutes for this activity. When students are done, ask: What effect could these questions have on someone making a decision about this issue?
3. Assign the "My Advisor" feature on p. 63. Have students pursue this topic further by doing the For Your Journal exercise on p. 63 which asks them to describe the qualities of a person who would make a good adviser for them.

(continued on page 83)



REVIEW AND REFLECTION

1. Describe the qualities of a person who is a good source of moral wisdom.
2. Define Magisterium. Why must Catholics heed its teaching in the areas of faith and morals?
3. State The Golden Rule in your own words.



FOR YOUR JOURNAL

After completing the My Adviser exercise below, write a short paragraph describing the good qualities of someone who would be a good adviser for you.

My Adviser

Write the initials of someone who:

- _____ is a positive person, one who believes most problems can be solved.
- _____ genuinely loves you, cares about your growth and well-being, and has your best interests at heart.
- _____ is a prudent person who will tell you the truth.
- _____ is a Christ-like person, kind and compassionate, and desires to be close to Jesus.
- _____ gives you freedom to make your own decisions, but only after encouraging you to look over all sides of an issue.

The person who embodies most of these qualities for me is:

Pray

Christian moral living is sustained by prayer. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines prayer as "the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is God beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit" (CCC, 2560). This is a definition of prayer that focuses on the "being relationship" we must have with a God who greatly loves us. This living relationship empowers us to live a moral life.

Jesus himself prayed often. For example, he retreated to the desert after his baptism, he prayed before choosing his apostles, and he withdrew to the hills or seashores after he performed miracles. A notable example of Jesus praying was during his dark hours in the garden of Gethsemane, where he asked his Father to give him the strength to follow his will. Finally, Jesus prayed from the cross, forgiving his enemies.

Further, Jesus taught us the importance of prayer. He instructed us to pray

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3. Summarize the guideposts the Church offers for help in making moral decisions. Write the following on the board, flipchart, overhead project, or Powerpoint presentation. Elaborate briefly on how an individual Catholic or Christian can benefit from these guideposts.

Guideposts for Making Moral Decisions

- The Church and the Magisterium
- The teachings of Jesus in the New Testament
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation
- Fellow Christians



REVIEW QUESTION ANSWERS

1. Answers will vary; for example, a positive, loving person, Christ-like, not afraid to speak the truth.
2. The Magisterium is an authentic teacher within the Church, comprised of the Holy Father with the bishops. Catholics must heed the teachings of the Magisterium. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would always guide and preserve the Church.
3. The Golden Rule is "do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

E

EXTENDING THE SECTION (continued from page 82)

4. Have students carefully reread the feature "Responding to Challenges" on p. 65. As they read, have them identify and copy one sentence into their notebooks or journals that speaks to them meaningfully about prayer.
5. Assign the two sets of Review and Reflection questions on pages 63 and 65 as a written review of these two sections.
6. Have students count off by fives. Refer to the Catholic Life in Action feature on p. 67. Let students break down into their numbered groups to choose and then discuss one of the five projects that apply principles from the chapter. Allow a week for the groups to complete projects and submit a group report on their findings.
7. In one of the last class sessions on this chapter, use the Review Questions to prepare the class for the Chapter 2 Test.

CREATIVE LEARNING

1. Have students work in small groups with a video camera to do short documentaries about three people and how they pray. Students should interview fellow students, family members or members of their parish or faith community. Suggest the following interview questions: 1) Do you pray before making an important decision? 2) If you do pray, how do you pray? Why? 3) Has prayer ever helped you in making a decision to do the right thing? Explain. Reserve time during the last class session on Chapter 2 to watch these documentaries on prayer.
2. Have the students sit in a circle. Play the song "Here I Am, Lord" by Dan Schutte. Discuss the lyrics and message, explaining that it is based on 1 Samuel 3. In this chapter, young Samuel, a future priest and prophet, hears God calling him. Prayer is also listening to God.
3. Have students research and write a profile of a current cultural celebrity (e.g., musician, athlete, movie star) and this person's beliefs about God, religion, faith, life, etc. In a written report or with a poster board presentation, students should show how their own personal beliefs compare and contrast with those of the celebrity.

For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.

—St. Thérèse of Lisieux



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often—both alone and with others, to be persistent in our prayers, to pray with forgiveness and trust in our hearts, and to pray with childlike simplicity. He told us that God would answer our prayers, "For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (Lk 11:10).

Most important, Jesus taught us the perfect prayer, the Our Father, or the Lord's Prayer, which is known as "the summary of the Gospel!" Two notable features of this prayer are that Jesus invites us to call God "Father" and that he asks us to petition that God will be done. If God is our Father, then we are brothers and sisters to each other. So we should be who we are and act toward others as siblings worthy of respect and love. Second, we should really seek to do God's will which is our eternal happiness. We achieve happiness by doing what is good for us. Our own personal wills may be more attracted to the pleasurable, to the immediately satisfying, to that which is not really good for us. Praying the Our Father can teach us morality by strengthening our resolve to do God's will, for which we pray.

Another important and traditional definition of prayer is "conversation with God." Conversation has two parts: talking and listening. In the talking part of prayer, we praise God for his goodness; we thank God for his wondrous gifts; we express our sorrow over our sins; we pray for other people; and we ask God for various favors and graces. In the listening part of prayer, we can be certain that God will

always hear our prayer for divine assistance to live a moral life. He will send us the Holy Spirit to empower us to live as God's children.

If you, then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! (Lk 11:13)

We must follow up the talking part of prayer with the listening part. Traditionally, Catholics believe that God can guide us through our minds, feelings, imaginations, emotions, and memories. But we need to slow down, "to let go and let God." When we quiet down, we may discover God sending us new ideas, possible solutions to our problems that we have not considered before. Or we might find our hearts strengthened by the Holy Spirit to do what our instinct tells us is the right thing to do. Often we know the moral response to a given situation, but we lack the firm resolve to do it or are tempted by peer pressure to go against what we know is right. Prayer can strengthen our hearts and wills to do right, for example, by being honest when "everyone" else is cheating.

Prayer teaches us to turn to the Lord for help. Prayer can teach us that God's love is present all around us: in our religious leaders, who stand ready to teach and guide us; in parents and teachers, who want only the best for us; in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance; in the Bible, which speaks to us of God's truth; in our friends, who call out the best in us. Prayer can remind us that all of these are wonderful signs and sources of God's continuing love and concern for us.

Responding to Challenges

QUESTION: What is the value of prayer? It seems like a waste of time. The only thing to be worth while, we should be able to see and measure the results.

ANSWER: In the famous novel *The Little Prince*, by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the fox tells the Little Prince in his simple secret, the key to really understanding human existence, "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eyes."

"Think of the essentials that cannot be perceived by the eye: the air we breathe sustains physical life; hidden computer code drives the programs we use on our PCs, which in turn are governed by electricity (also invisible to the naked eye). Our mind produces thoughts and ideas, both of which are non-material and cannot be seen. And then there is love—that mysterious and powerful quality that is rooted in the human heart.

In his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (God Is Love), Pope Benedict XVI meditated on the truth that God is Love. God, too, is invisible, but he created everything that exists (including the material world) from nothing. He created human beings—composite creatures made up of spirit (soul) and body—who are capable of sharing God's own life, that is, capable of loving.

Prayer and love are inseparably linked. Prayer is not a useless activity because it is through prayer that we encounter God, who is Love. Prayer is a God-connection.

The Christian who prays...

... seeks an encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ, asking God to be present with the consolation of the Spirit to him and his work. A personal relationship with God and an abandonment to his will can prevent a Christian from being demeaned and save him from falling prey to the teaching of fanaticism and terrorism!

Prayer enables us to love our neighbor. Because we meet God in prayer, God can unite our wills to his, affecting even our feelings, helping us to learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend. ... If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God. ... Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me.⁹

Prayer is very practical because it enables us to meet Jesus Christ, who tells us of his great love and empowers us to see our neighbor as someone worthy of our love. What greater help could there be to living a Christian life or a life rooted in morality?

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REVIEW AND REFLECTION

What is prayer? How can it help us to make moral decisions?

4. Continue to explore the issue of consulting others. Point out that many sayings (also called proverbs) are passed down from one generation to the next. Ask students which sayings in the list on p. 61 they see as useful advice. Are there any that they would disagree with?

REVIEW QUESTION ANSWERS

The *Catechism* defines prayer as "the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit" (2565). Prayer can help us listen to God and help God guide us through our minds, feelings, imaginations, emotions, and memories.

5. In small groups, have students write the three assigned prayers, doing the For Your Journal project on p. 66 together.



FOR YOUR JOURNAL

Compose three one-sentence prayers that ask help for living a moral life or making the right decisions. Address one prayer to Jesus, a second prayer to the Holy Spirit, and write the third asking the Blessed Mother to add her prayers to yours.

DISCERNMENT

In his *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignace of Loyola taught an effective way to discern God's will. The following ways to choose right are based on his Exercises. Prior to using each way, put yourself in the Lord's presence. Describe how you would respond to either of these meditations based on a correct moral decision with which you are struggling.

- Imagine a friend your age, with similar talents and interests, coming to ask you for your advice on this very problem. You really want to help this person. What would you say to help him or her search out the facts and reflect on the alternatives, consequences, and other people involved? Apply this same advice to yourself!
- Picture yourself on your deathbed or standing before Jesus right after your death. What do you wish you would have done concerning this decision? Now do the right thing.



CASE 1: THE SENATOR'S CONTRIBUTION

A famous Catholic senator wants to donate a considerable amount of money to the Catholic elementary school he attended as a child. However, though he claims to be personally against abortion, the senator is a vocal and strong pro-abortion advocate (he so-called "pro-choice" position). His gift will significantly help poor children gain access to a good Catholic education.

Debate: Should the senator accept this money? Why or why not?



CASE 2: THE CRYING BABY

The classic television program *MASH* closed its highly successful run with this crying moral problem: Hawkeye—one of the doctor-heroes of the show—was on a bus with some fellow surgeons and a few nurses. He informed the driver of the bus that some enemy soldiers were approaching, and the bus should be hidden by the side of the road. As enemy soldiers began to walk past the bus, an infant on the bus began to cry.

Debate: What should the mother do in this situation?

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RESOURCES

Internet Resources (continued from page 79)

Josephson Institute of Ethics "The Seven-Step Path to Better Decisions"

www.josephsoninstitute.org/MED/MED-4sevensteppath.htm

Media Ethics Online

Links to various sites stressing journalistic ethics. Good source for finding ethics cases, especially:

<http://spj.org/ethicscasestudies.asp>

www.stlouisspj.org/ethics.htm

Some Moral Dilemmas

You might be able to use some of these as discussion starters.

www.friesian.com/valley/dilemmas.htm

MacDonald, Chris, Ph.D. *A Guide to Moral Decision Making*.

Some helpful steps that could supplement the "STOP Sign" method. Short and sweet.

www.ethicsweb.ca/guide

"Right Versus Wrong: Knowing the Difference"

Short article from the Institute for Global Ethics.

www.becal.net/toolkit/bds/reading.html

Why Not Love Them Both

The famous Dr. and Mrs. J.C. Willke book online.

www.abortionfacts.com/online_books/love_them_both/why_cant_we_love_them_both_17.asp



HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

1. Have students read the first two sections of Chapter 3, "Law As A Guide to Freedom". These two sections are "Look to the Law" on p. 72 and "Freedom and Responsibility" on pp. 73–78.

Catholic Life in Action

1. Review these ten rules taught in this chapter. Which three are the most helpful to you personally? Explain why.
 - a. Your life's most precious treasure is the soul of humans or they are saving.
 - b. Make sure your actions always conform to objective norms of morality like the Ten Commandments.
 - c. Make sure you have good intentions.
 - d. Good intentions do not justify evil actions.
 - a. Circumstances themselves cannot change the moral quality of acts; they can make neither good nor right an action that is in itself evil.
 - e. Actively in those areas that you think would be morally acceptable for all people at all times.
 - f. Always respect others as persons of incomparable worth made in God's image. Never do anything that would treat a person as a thing, as a means to your end, for your own gain or profit.
 - g. Do unto others as you would have them do to you.
 1. Ask yourself, "Would I be proud to do this in front of my mom?" If not, don't do it.
 2. Ask yourself, "Would I want everyone to know how I arrived at my decision and how I acted on it?" If not, don't do it.
2. After considering the STOP sign method and the ten rules stated above, how would you solve the following two cases? (or down some notes to suggest your approach. Discuss your solution with your classmates.)
 - What is an important decision you are facing right now?
 - Review your daily schedule. Find a good time and place to talk to the Lord for ten minutes each day for the next three weeks, especially over this decision.
3. This chapter discussed some of the consequences of shoplifting. Discover the price of shoplifting in your area of the country by interviewing the security managers of department stores or malls to find out how much shoplifting costs them. Ask about what they do to prevent it.
4. St. Francis of Assisi once said, "Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take with you nothing that you have received—only what you have given: a full heart, enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice, and courage." This quote challenges us to put the Golden Rule of love of neighbor into action. In the coming month, individually or in small groups, do one of the following:
 - Have a clothing collection drive. Donate the clothing to a local shelter.
 - Organize a community clean-up day in your school's neighborhood.
 - Volunteer to tutor younger students at your school or a nearby grade school.
 - Offer to do yard work or shopping for an elderly neighbor.
 - Collect toys for kids in the hospital. Distribute them in person.
 - Help prepare or serve a meal at a homeless shelter.

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