

HANDOUT: MORAL DECISION MAKING**LEGAL MODEL OF MORALITY.**

- ✚ Rules help maintain peace and harmony within the society.
- ✚ Morality became synonymous with the LAW.

Some limitations to this model.

- ✚ Scrupulosity and circumvention: overly scrupulous in following the law or trying to circumvent it.
- ✚ Relativism: the law has nothing to do with morality---if it feels right do it, if not--don't.
- ✚ A truly mature adult, however, comes to understand that while law is not the central component in morality it is a necessary component of it--it is a necessary balance to freedom.
- ✚ Society will always need agreed upon norms and values that uphold the common good and those norms must and do drive our values.

Other models of Morality.**The Love Model.**

- ✚ Rooted in Gospel mandate to love one another--the Two Great Commandments is the heart of the Beatitudes, the new Law Jesus handed down at his Sermon on the Mount.
- ✚ Love-based morality insists that the love Jesus taught us by word and example should drive our moral responses to all life situations.
- ✚ However, this model has its limitations. It is not always easy to determine what the most loving action is in a given situation.

The Discipleship Model.

- ✚ The discipleship model of morality is based on an intimate, reciprocal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- ✚ other Christians in community to establish the reign of God in their midst.
- ✚ Such a model is a welcomed change from the rigidity of the legal model.
- ✚ Much discernment happens within the context of community as it seeks to live out the Gospel in day to-day life situations.
- ✚ What is lacking are concrete answers to what is morally right or wrong.

The Inner Conviction Model or Moral Conscience Model.

- ✚ We joyfully accept personal responsibility for living according to accepted moral norms.
- ✚ In this inner conviction or moral conscience model, directives of the law guide us, but we choose to make a personal mature commitment to live by the Law's imperative.
- ✚ The law is not imposed; it is embraced.
- ✚ In this model the law drives our values and becomes the basis of our moral decision making--our moral conscience.
- ✚ We follow the law out of a mature commitment to live a life informed by moral norms that are freely embraced and lived.
- ✚ In this model people act in complete freedom of choice--the freedom to say "yes" to God.
- ✚ Conscience drives our entire approach to life---it helps us discover God's divine design for our lives.

- ✚ We develop a good conscience over time by creating the habit of good behavior.

HOW THEN DO WE FORM A GOOD, MORAL CONSCIENCE?

FORMING A GOOD CONSCIENCE

- ✚ God has placed a moral law in every human heart.
- ✚ Conscience is our ability to know what is right and what is wrong.
- ✚ Conscience helps us discern what we should do in particular circumstances .
- ✚ We make moral choices guided by our conscience.
- ✚ We either follow or we reject God's law.
- ✚ It takes a lifetime to form one's conscience.
- ✚ Every Catholic is required to form his or her conscience according to the Church's moral norms.

Scriptures assist us in forming our conscience. [CCC, 1786]

- ✚ Do our actions conform with the Word of God?
- ✚ Moral counsel of others helps us form our moral conscience.
- ✚ The authoritative teaching of the Church helps us form a moral conscience.
- ✚ Gifts of the Holy Spirit strengthen us to form a moral conscience.
- ✚ Examination of Conscience helps us form our moral conscience:

What constitutes a moral action?

Moral Acts

- ✚ Every moral action has three parts:
 - 1. what we do [the act];
 - 2. the intention---why we do the act;
 - 3. the actual situation of the act such as where and when it takes place, how the act is carried out, with whom it is carried out and the consequences of the act.
- ✚ An act is moral if the act is by itself a good thing to do—a good action. [Some things are intrinsically evil such as murder. The reason for doing such acts makes no difference---the act in and of itself is immoral.]
- ✚ An action is morally good if the action itself is a good action and if the person doing the act has a good intention.
- ✚ If the person carries out a good action, but has an evil intention or does it for an evil purpose, it is not a moral action because the person's intention for doing it was evil in the first place.
- ✚ We can never do something wrong or evil in order to bring about a good [US Adult Catechism, 312] The end does not justify the means.

CONSCIENCE IS THE HIGHEST ORDER.

- ✚ St. John Neumann reminded us that our conscience is the highest moral indicator.
- ✚ Human beings have the right to act in freedom according to their conscience. They may not be forced to act contrary to their conscience especially when it comes to religious issues. [CCC, 1782]

- ✚ It is possible that our conscience is not properly formed and thus remains in ignorance and in such a cases is subject to making false judgment about the morality of certain actions. [CCC, 1790]
- ✚ Faith, prayer and the Word of God enlighten our conscience.

CONSCIENCE IS NOT OPINION.

We can be fooled into thinking that our opinion constitutes our upright, moral conscience. This is false.

For us to simply say,

- ✚ I am going to do this act regardless of what the Church teaches, or
- ✚ I am not going to this act regardless of what the Church teaches, or
- ✚ I believe in this or that belief or teaching regardless of what the Church teaches or
- ✚ I do not believe in this or that belief or teaching regardless of what the Church teaches

WITHOUT....

- ✚ Entering into serious study about the issue—the reason for the teaching, the history, what is behind the teaching, theological opinions for and against an issue,
- ✚ Scouring the Scriptures for discernment,
- ✚ Calling on the gifts of the Spirit to open our minds and hearts to the Church’s position on a given issue or teaching,
- ✚ Honestly and openly trying to embrace the teaching,
- ✚ Examining the motives and reasons for believing or acting
- ✚ Prayerfully asking God to embrace the teaching,
- ✚ Seeking advice and counsel regarding the teaching.
- ✚ Pray, pray and pray some more.

If after that entire, extended process, a person still cannot in “good conscience” embrace a certain teaching of the Church [as long as it does not constitute Divine Revelation – that is, anything that is expressed or revealed in the Sacraments, The Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, the Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments, the hierarchy of truths] then an INFORMED CONSCIENCE is the higher moral code.

IMPORTANT:

- ✚ It should be extremely rare that a person would not be in accord with Church teaching on an issue if the previous process was fully, honestly entered into and adhered to.
- ✚ It is enjoined upon every Catholic to embrace all the teachings of the Church.