

MORALITY, CONSCIENCE AND FREEDOM

- **Individual conscience is formed through (1) Natural Law, (2) Divine Law, and (3) Church Teaching on faith and morals.**
- **Natural Law of right and wrong is written in our hearts. For example, the deliberate taking of defenseless human life is never a morally good act. According to modern scientific evidence, human life begins at conception.**
- **The Divine Law of God is found in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. For example, the Ten Commandments in the Old Covenant and the Eight Beatitudes in the New Covenant are part of Divine Law.**
- **Church teachings on faith and morals known as the *Magisterium* are part of the living tradition of the Catholic Church. For example, such Church Teachings as the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception defined in 1854 is a part of our Deposit of Faith not found in Natural Law or in Scripture.**
- **The living tradition of the Catholic Church continues in every age so that moral questions arising in our world today which are not part of Natural Law and could not have even been envisioned when the Scriptures were written can now be properly investigated by the teaching authority of the Catholic Church in order to render a definitive response on such a moral question. For example, direct moral teaching on the uses of technology in our modern medical procedures regarding human life cannot be found in Natural Law or in Scriptures. In such instances, the Church must bring to bear the principles already known from Natural Law and from Divine Law in the Scriptures, apply them to new moral questions, and then teach us what is to be our objectively moral response.**
- **The integrity of the Catholic Church's moral teachings lies in the internal consistency of its teachings. There are no contradictions or relativism in its teachings. For example, the moral teaching of the Catholic Church is that all human life is sacred from the moment of conception to natural death. Consequently, the Church cannot teach that although abortion is evil, euthanasia is good. Consistency in its moral teaching on human life extends to the whole of human life and contributes to the objectivity of its moral teachings. The Church teaches objective moral truths.**
- **The Catholic Church instructs us in this objective truth through faith and reason to inform us of what is moral according Natural Law, Divine Law and Church Teaching, and so that we may conform our acts to a properly formed conscience. It is the responsibility of each individual to form his or her conscience through proper study of these objective moral teachings of the Catholic Church. This study is needed in order to properly apply**

these truths to one's particular situation. If difficulties arise in this area one needs to seek counsel and wisdom from a pastor, church leaders and professions who have respect for moral teachings of the Catholic Church. And finally, prayer to the Holy Spirit asking for guidance to search deep within our hearts is also needed before one makes a final decision on how one ought to act morally applied to one's particular situation. This entire process safeguards individuals from just looking for a loophole under the guise of making a conscience decision at variance with the objective moral teachings of the Catholic Church. After a person has conscientiously gone through this entire process first, they may be able to make a moral choice.

- **Just as it is the role of the teaching authority within the Catholic Church to inform us of objective moral teachings, so it is our role as ministers in the Catholic Church to inform those whom we serve. The responsibility of each adult is to become informed and to act morally. Therefore, we ministers present the morality of Natural Law, Divine Law and Church Teaching. However, we cannot take away anyone's individual free will to act according to one's conscience any more than God takes away our own freedom to act, whether morally or immorally. It is certainly our hope and desire that all those whom we are serving will act from a well-formed conscience, but the moral freedom to choose and to act is a gift God gives to each individual. God does not force anyone to act morally. Neither can any of us. Free will is essential for an act to be considered moral. Lack of one's free will mitigates the moral culpability of actions. When we inform others of the Church's teachings, we use moral persuasion, not coercion.**
- **When an individual makes a moral decision, they ought to make it with all of the objective moral teachings available from the Catholic Church at the time of their decision. Sometimes the speed of technological developments exceeds the Church's ability to make its official response with an objective moral teaching concerning newly arising moral questions in today's world when the individual needed this information to make a moral decision. In such cases, the individual cannot be held culpable for making an immoral decision since they could not have had such knowledge at the time of their decision. Even if the official teaching of the Church in the future differs from the individual's former decision, their decision had been made with the best or only information that had been available to them at that time. Sometimes, if an individual is not aware of the Church's teachings at all concerning the moral question or is unaware that they are obliged to take the Church's teachings into consideration before they were to make their moral decision, they too cannot be held culpable. In all such cases, these individuals were acting in good faith. Going forward however, once they are aware of the information available, all individuals are responsible.**

- **In vitro fertilization is a prime example.** The good end (gift of children) cannot justify the immoral means of separating the procreation of human life from the conjugal act of love. It results in another moral dilemma by preventing or destroying the human life of the remaining frozen human embryos not used in the technological process. Choose moral alternatives.