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ON THE THRESHOLD

Part 3
Ethics and Ethical Issues

**RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION
PROGRAMME**

FOR CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND



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YEAR 13 TEXTBOOK

ON THE THRESHOLD

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMME

FOR CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

NCRS
National Centre for Religious Studies

Published by: National Centre for Religious Studies
Catholic Centre
PO Box 1937
Wellington 6140
New Zealand

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First published 2010

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Imprimatur: Most Reverend John A. Dew, DD
Archbishop of Wellington

This book is approved by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference as the official textbook for Year 13 Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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NCRS would like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance given by many individuals and groups in the preparation of this book. In particular, NCRS would like to thank Directors of Religious Studies and religious education teachers who participated in scoping and reference groups. Their energy and expertise has been vital in bringing this text to completion.

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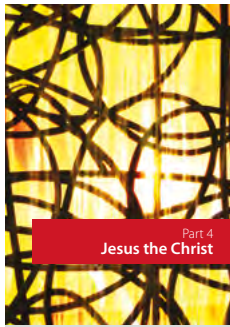
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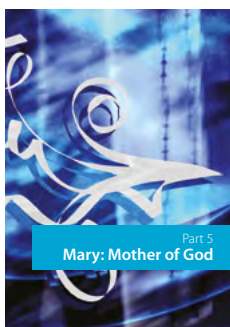
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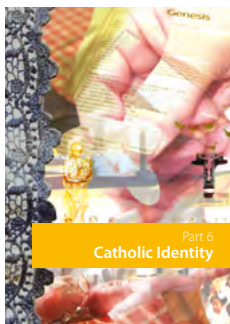
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Part 3

Ethics and Ethical Issues

Its voice, ever calling them
to love and to do what is good
and to avoid evil, tells them
inwardly at the right moment:
do this, shun that.
Church in the Modern World

Do to others as you would
have them do to you.
Luke 6: 31

3.1 What is Ethics?

Introduction

Human beings are mysterious creatures. Unlike other animals humans live in multifaceted situations where people relate to one another, other animals and the created world through a myriad of situations and ways. Human beings are not governed by instinct. Instead they have free will, reason (the ability to think) and a conscience to govern their own behaviour. Humans are social beings; relationships with others are an extremely important part of human existence. For these reasons and in order that all may be safe and happy as individuals and in communities, it is necessary that humans think and behave in ways that will realise our potential as social beings called to live in communities and as stewards of the God-given gift of life.

The actual word 'ethics' is from the Greek ethos, a concept that encompasses, 'habit,' 'custom' 'character' so has a sense of 'a way of doing something,' namely coming to a decision. Simply put, ethics is the way humans relate. One meaning of ethos refers to a particular custom or way of doing things; another meaning refers to the character of a person. We call a person honest if he or she regularly tells the truth. The person habitually tells the truth, that is he or she is in the habit of telling the truth. In this example ethics includes both the action of telling the truth, the practice of telling the truth and the character of the person as truthful.

Ethics could be described as the process of having a conversation to decide what to do in a difficult situation. Ethics and morality are words which are often used as synonyms. However, if ethics is the conversation regarding the choice, morality is the voices contributing to the conversation. Thus morality is highly influenced by the experience of the speaker, the historical context that the decision is being formulated within, the cultural background brought with the voice and the religious tradition that has formed the speaker. In the case of ethical situations this voice may not be that of an individual but of a group such as the Catholic Church, thus there is often reference to a Catholic Morality or a Liberal Morality or Māori Morality.

Definitions

Ethics has been defined as follows:

- It is rational reflection on and about human behaviour.
- It is the study concerned with what people ought to do – their right and wrong conduct.
- It concerns people's duty; that is, the rules or standards, behaviour and attitudes that social custom, law or religion demands.
- It is also the study of moral choices in general as well as in specific cases and situations.
- It is a theory of moral values as well as a set of principles of right or good conduct.



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The Trinity: The foundation of the moral life

The way that Christians relate to one another is modelled by the Holy Trinity. The community of the Trinity demonstrates to humanity the mutual love and support that each individual is called to have with others. It is in God and in the relationships among the persons of the Holy Trinity that we find our goals as human beings, as individual human beings and members of a community, for example, family, church, society. Within the Trinity relationships are determined by divine love. This means that the framework for Christian ethical principles is love. In a person's daily life, love is the expression of ethics as the individual grows in the likeness of God and is in an active effort towards being in right relationship with all creation.

Each of the persons of the Trinity is a gift of self to the others and lives entirely for them; this is a loving communion of persons. For the Christian, made in 'the image and likeness of God' the very heart of being human is to be in loving communion. This is how humans strive to be ethical by desiring that their actions promote and support the loving communion of creation.

Jesus answered, 'The first is: . . . you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these'.

(Mark 12:29–31).

This summary of the Law from Mark's Gospel does not focus on rules, theories, prohibitions, philosophy, or ethical theories and systems. Instead it draws our attention simply and unambiguously to all our relationships: with God, ourselves and others. It tells us simply that when these relationships are loving ones, when we take the Trinity as our model, then we are doing what is right.

There were many people who thought that Jesus showed no respect for laws, rules and social conventions. In one sense they were right. Jesus always put people and the needs of people before the rules. He touched lepers and made them feel accepted. He healed people even on the Sabbath because he realised that they were coming to him out of their desperate need for help. He ate with tax collectors and prostitutes, and he went into the houses of Gentiles because he respected, and responded to, their dignity as human beings. He accepted the weakness and sleepiness of his friends who could not keep awake with him on the night of his arrest. When Peter denied knowing him, Jesus did not love or value Peter less.

Ultimately the standard by which we will be judged is simple: to what extent do our thoughts, words and actions show that we love people as Jesus loves them (Matthew 25:31–46).

A Response of Gratitude

The Trinity models the community of love which is outward focused. God loves humans unconditionally. God, creator of all, gifts humanity with life. Christian ethics is a response of gratitude for this unsolicited, overwhelming love of God. This gift makes each person special, unique and inclined towards the giver God with a sense of gratitude. Appreciation of this divine gift is shown by people's choices in how they uphold the sacredness and dignity of all life – in how they make choices to be in a good relationship with all of God's creation.



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It is easy to think that ethics is about doing things the right way so that we do not get punished by God. However, God loves us unconditionally and is not limited in love by human ideas of fairness. Gratitude for this bountiful gift is what motivates the Christian to act ethically, to act as God does. While a Christian response to a particular situation may be guided by norms and principles the starting point is always the realisation that all life is a God-given gift.

The Common Good

Christian ethics is not just focused on the actions of individuals. It is also concerned with how we live as a society and promote the Common Good. By their nature human beings are social and while the human person is at the centre of social life the person is not an isolated individual. People belong to a number of communities. The choices and actions of individuals and the communities to which they belong must support the Common Good. This is achieved by establishing and maintaining those conditions that protect the well-being of all in the community without excluding any individual or group.

Catholic Social Teaching aims to promote the rights and obligations of both the individual and groups at all levels of society. The Church calls for people to be just in their personal lives and also in the social, economic and political areas of life. The obligation to be just springs from the reality that we are made to live in relationship with God, self, others and creation. Social justice requires changes to be made to unjust social, political and economic structures and systems which create and support major evils, such as poverty and the destruction of the environment.



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3.2 Approaches to Ethics

Origins of Ethical Thought

The systematic study of good behaviour began with the Greek philosopher Aristotle (400–320 BC). He based his work firstly on the earlier thinking of Socrates (469–399 BC) and Plato (427–347 BC). Socrates maintained that people behaved badly out of ignorance so that if they were taught about what is good and right they can then act morally. Plato said that a good person is one whose life is directed by a mature and educated reason. Aristotle himself taught that moral or right actions are those that bring about the most positive consequences for human life. He believed that happiness is the purpose of human life and that this is achievable by a life of moderation and right action guided by human reason.

Within the western world the influence of Greek and Roman philosophy together with the Jewish Christian heritage have had a considerable and lasting influence on the development of ethics. The advent of Christianity brought with it strong moral teaching based on the Torah (the Jewish Law) and on the life and teaching of Jesus.



Plato

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Twentieth Century Influences

Particular situations in a given society influence how ethical thought develops. In the twentieth century on an international scale, the Holocaust has had a significant impact on the way ethics are considered. After World War II many issues were heightened, including discussion about the culpability of those people who did nothing wrong, i.e. those who did not murder or turn in people to the Nazis but who also were not proactive in standing up against the injustices that were occurring.

One of the significant moments in defining ethical thought in New Zealand was the case of the study of cervical cancer at National Women's Hospital in Auckland. Women became part of a study of the best treatment for cervical cancer without their consent. This included women who developed early cancer and were not treated adequately for it. This case raised serious ethical issues in a number of areas. One concern was the lack of informed consent. Another was that medical researchers carried out unnecessary and painful procedures on women who were treated like guinea pigs with no forum to question what was occurring. The exposure of this research programme resulted in significant changes in the procedures of ethical committees in New Zealand hospitals and academic institutions.

Changes in medical technology have also raised debate about ethical issues concerning human life from its conception (Assisted Reproductive Technology) to its natural end (Palliative Care).

The Importance of Ethics

An ability to reflect ethically is important because life is full of difficult decisions that need to be made whether a person wants to or not. It is obvious that people cannot do exactly as they please; some decisions are likely to be stupid, dangerous, selfish, mean, unfair or unreasonable. This is the purpose

of ethics: to give us a reliable framework of ideas about right and wrong and about how to decide the best course of action when we have to deal with difficult decisions.

Ethical Approaches

There are many approaches to ethics. These include:

- *Subjectivism* – is where the individual is seen as having the ultimate right to make judgments according to their own freedom and conscience. No-one else has the right to judge what an individual chooses to do.
- *Situation ethics* – here the choices are made in terms of behaving in a spirit of love. As long as the intention of the act is to love then it is morally acceptable.
- *Relativism* when making a decision there are no norms that everyone can be judged upon because the morality of an act depends on cultural context and circumstances.
- *Nihilism* – those working from this ethical approach believe that life has no meaning at all and consequently there is no point to morality or ethical behaviour and no need for it. Good and evil are largely meaningless ideas. In this view anything goes because there is no difference in either doing something or refraining from doing it.
- *Virtue ethics* – use of human freedom to pursue the good and choose to do good. There is an emphasis on what makes a good person in character rather than what makes a good action. What a person does shapes him or her over time.

Every ethical approach can be attributed to one of three types of ethics.

Deontology (An emphasis on action)

This is sometimes called legal paradigm. The basis of these types of ethical approaches is that the law is the most important thing. Only those acts done from a sense of duty have a moral value. The law must be followed under all circumstances and not matter what the consequences. The right thing must be done. If a stance is taken that to neglect or break one of the rules is always wrong then the type of ethics is deontological.

Consequentialism (An emphasis on consequences)

At the other end of the ethical continuum utilitarianism stresses that it is the action itself that must be judged as good or bad. No matter what happens as long as the final result of the action is positive for the community, even if widely accepted rules are broken it is a good act. A good example of this is taking a position where torture is considered acceptable if the information gained saves people from dying. These types of positions reason for the most good for the most people.

Relational responsibility (An emphasis on relationships)

Catholic ethical principles are between the two extremes. Believing that a legalist approach neglects the particular of experience and history but that some things are always morally reprehensible, Catholic moral theologians take the position that faith and reason are both important aspects of ethical thought. John Paul II stated that *reason and faith cannot be separated without diminishing the capacity of men and women to know themselves, the world and God in an appropriate way* (Faith and Reason: Fides et Ratio, 16).

An example of deontology

At the Nuremberg trials Nazi officials were charged with committing war crimes. These were ordinary men, not monsters yet they ordered the deportation of civilians, used slave labour and persecuted and murdered people on the basis of religion, politics or race. The argument of the defendants was that they had no option but to obey Hitler's orders, which had the force of law in the German State. This meant in their eyes all though there had been mass killings there were no murders. This was a deontological defence. Most defendants were found guilty and the principle was reaffirmed in International Law that following orders given by superiors is no defence against war crimes.

An example of consequentialism

In the Dachau Concentration camp prisoners were used as human guinea pigs to ascertain what happened to the human body during high altitude flying. The rationale for these cruel experiments was that the discoveries helped save the lives of German pilots and that the prisoners were already condemned to death. This was a consequentialism based argument. On the liberation of Dachau the government of the United States confiscated the results and made use of the experiments for the US Air Force.



S. OWEN

From a Catholic perspective the elements of ethos, habit, custom and character, come together. Put simply by being good we do good, by doing good we become good. This is the cycle of virtue ethics.

Freedom From or Freedom For?

Human beings have the free will to choose their actions. Human freedom had two effects. It affects the immediate choice under consideration and it also has a deeper effect on the person's moral character. For example, a person chooses to tell a lie to protect themselves from embarrassment (the immediate choice); if this becomes a regular choice the person may be forming himself or herself as a dishonest person.

Human freedom is not primarily concerned with freedom from constraints but the freedom to make life giving choices that mirror the image and likeness of God. The extent to which a person mirrors God to others reflects the way they exercise their freedom in accepting God's grace so that they might love as the community of persons within the Trinity loves; generously and creatively.

Natural Law

Through natural law, human beings attempt to grasp the mind of God and his will for humanity and the world. Natural law presumes that the Creator ordered the world for the good of all creatures and placed within the hearts of human beings an ability to understand that order to some degree and to exercise their freedom consistent with it. The Tradition has always suggested that natural law is based primarily on human reason.

The Essential Moral Handbook, K. O'Neil & P. Black, 2003.

Sources of Catholic Ethical Principles

Catholics have a particular way of looking at ethical issues that is based on the following:

- **Revelation.** In the Catholic tradition there are two primary sources of revelation, Scripture and Tradition.
 - **Sacred Scripture.** Catholics believe that Scripture is the inspired Word of God. Scripture is an authoritative source of moral teaching in that it expresses in some way God's will about how humans should be and act. Catholics also believe that Scripture needs to be interpreted correctly according to the living Tradition of the Church.
 - **Sacred Tradition.** The Catholic Church has particular teachings about ethical issues which need to be considered when making decisions. By knowing what the Church believes and teaches about a particular issue the person is making a concerted effort to inform his or her conscience.
- **Natural Law.** Natural Law is the innate understanding of the human person about what is right or wrong. It is a sense that human beings know when an action is wrong.



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3.3 Christian Anthropology

For the Christian, the key to ethics is how we understand ourselves and how people see each other as human beings. The understandings we have about human flourishing reflect the understandings we have of what it means to be human. The basis for this Christian understanding is to be found in Scripture and Tradition.

Christian anthropology begins with key understandings about human nature:

1. God exists.
2. Human beings are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1).
3. By using their intelligence humans know what is naturally right (Natural Law).
4. Human beings are capable of sin (The Fall).
5. In Jesus, God has restored the fullness of life for all people (Redemption).
6. Jesus Christ showed us what it is to be fully human (Revelation).
7. Jesus taught the Law of Love (John 13:34; Matthew 22:34–40).
8. The Christian life is one of Faith, Hope and Love (Theological Virtues).
9. The Church teaches about moral and ethical issues (Tradition).

1. God exists

Catholics believe in the existence of a loving God who gives himself completely and freely. God created and loves all that exists. God invites into communion with God and one another.

2. Made in God's Image and likeness

Catholic ethics is concerned with human beings. In the first account of creation we read,

*God said, Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...
God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them,
male and female he created them.
(Genesis 1:26–27).*

Unlike any other created being we have been given qualities that belong to God: intellect, will, authority, and we are destined by virtue of God's grace to share in God's divine nature. Therefore, if we are to be true to our human nature, our ethical behaviour should mirror the goodness of God.

Human Dignity

An important principle for Catholic ethical thought is that each and every human person possesses human dignity. The meaning of the phrase 'human dignity' is not easy to explain. To put it as simply as possible, human dignity is the importance, high honour, respect and worth that belongs to a human person – regardless of age, gender, race, education, possessions, etc – simply because he or she is human. In the Christian context it also means the status that belongs to each human person because we are each made in God's image and likeness. We know about this dignity from both Scripture and reason.

This means that anything to do with ethics must consider the human dignity of all the people who are, or are likely to be, involved. For example, we regard bullying as unacceptable, unethical behaviour. We do this because bullying



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does not respect people's dignity, because it attempts to humiliate, hurt or dominate others. Bullying also diminishes the human dignity of the bully. Our dignity as human beings requires that we be neither abused nor abusers.

3. Use of human intelligence to know what is naturally right

Human beings have the rational capacity to come to a knowledge of right and wrong, and to make choices accordingly. This awareness is called Natural Law.

4. Human beings are capable of sin

While human beings have free-will, a result of The Fall (Genesis, chapter 3) is that human nature, without being totally corrupted is diminished in its natural powers. The consequence of this is that the relationship which God intended to exist between people and their Creator, people and each other, and people and creation, is broken. Catholics call these broken relationships sin. This capacity to sin distorts our ability to judge between right and wrong and consequently human beings need divine guidance.

5. In Jesus, God has restored the fullness of life

Jesus' life (incarnation), death and resurrection (redemption) rescues all people and all creation from sin, and reconciles humanity with God. Human beings are called to be like God and strive for goodness in their lives.

6. Jesus showed humanity how to be fully human

Through his life, death and resurrection Jesus shows us what it is to be fully human. Our lives, lived in the love of Jesus, can also be sources of goodness and life for humanity and creation.

I have come so that you may have life and have it to the full.
(John 10:10).

7. Jesus taught the Law of Love

Love is the animating principle of Christian ethics; in other words, love makes ethics a living thing not a theoretical, abstract idea. Jesus gave us the law of love,

I gave you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved love you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.
(John 13:34).

Jesus also gave us the Golden Rule,

You shall love your neighbour as yourself.
(Matthew 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28).

Love is the key that unlocks the way to understanding God, to understanding why we were created, to understanding that when we love and act in love we are being true to our nature and true to our Creator. To behave ethically, therefore, is to put love into action so that whatever we think or do or say will be whatever is best for ourselves and others, whatever maintains and strengthens the relationship between God and ourselves. *God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them* (1 John 4:16).

This love is not an idea, a good feeling, nor is it about being nice to people. This love is what Jesus demonstrated in his human life – from the moment he was conceived in Mary's womb to the day he returned to the Father. His whole life is the example of how to live in love; he shows us what it is to be fully human.

8. The Christian life is one of Faith, Hope and Love

In Jesus, Catholics have an example of a life lived in faith, hope and love. Catholics believe in the existence of a good and loving God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. They hope for eternal life in the kingdom of God. Because God has loved us we are able to love others.

9. The Church teaches about moral and ethical issues

Catholic ethical thinking emerges from reflecting on moral issues in the light of the teachings of Jesus and the living Tradition of the Church community. The Church teaches with the authority of Jesus. Catholic ethical teaching is continually addressing contemporary issues facing individuals and society. These teachings are found in a number of places including papal encyclicals, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and in the statements of bishops.

One of the key areas of ethical concern in recent years is around the belief in the human dignity of the person which is under threat by abuses of technology and selfish actions of individuals and groups. Thus The Church has developed a way of expressing the need to support and enhance the dignity of the person across a variety of situations in statements on the consistent ethic of life.

A Consistent Ethic of Life

There needs to be a considered consistency of the responses that an individual makes in respect to different areas of their life. It is not consistent to be anti-abortion for example and then to murder someone, even if they are abortion doctors. Cardinal Bernardin (1928–1996) of Chicago, when talking about this need for consistency in ethical decisions, labelled this focus of the pre-eminence of human dignity as the Consistent Ethic of Life.

This way of thinking emphasises the connectedness between all aspects of life and challenges the human tendency to act in a spasmodically ethical manner. This way of consideration calls the individual to respect life in the womb, the life of a criminal, the life of someone dying, in fact the life of everybody no matter who they are or what they have done.

Jesus and how he treated everybody particularly the vulnerable and those not considered of value to society, is at the heart of the consistent ethic of life. There is a challenge in the consistent ethic of life about how the individual acts in their day to day encounters with others. For example, what people say and how they talk to people reflects their basic attitude to life.

The consistent ethic of life also calls people to care for the natural world in its own right and because it sustains and nourishes human life.

We believe that a Consistent Ethic of Life must be promoted. This places the sacredness of creation and the need to protect and enhance all human life, and the life of our planet on which we depend, as a basic and central moral point of reference.

This can act as a counter to the culture of violence which surrounds us. Just as a kahu embraces all that is good and wholesome so the Consistent Ethic of Life forms a canopy of non-violent moral teachings embracing all dimensions of life.

New Zealand Catholic Bishops
Conference
A Consistent Ethic of Life:
Te Kahu-o-te-Ora 1997



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3.4 A Māori Perspective

Ko tōna mea nui he tapu.

(One's greatest possession is tapu.)

An understanding of Te Ao Māori can add greatly to the effectiveness of what we – Catholic people living in Aotearoa – do and how we worship God. It also adds insights that can contribute significantly to our efforts to live ethical lives.

Tapu is an extremely important concept in Māori spirituality. It is variously translated as sacred, holy, forbidden, restricted, set apart. These English words are helpful to understanding tapu. A second and closely related concept is mana. This word is often translated as prestige, authority, power, influence, status, spiritual power. The relationship between the two is so close that sometimes the words are used interchangeably.

All interactions between people and God, people and people, people and creation, involve tapu and mana. This has implications for people's ethical or moral behaviour. Whatever respects tapu and enhances mana is good and right, whatever violates tapu in any way or diminishes mana is evil and wrong.

There are important links that we can make between the Māori world view (Te Ao Māori) and the world view of Catholic teaching.



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Tapu

Tapu comes firstly and most importantly from God (Te Atua). God is the being who is tapu or holiness itself. All the tapu of the entire creation comes from God and belongs to God. Everything, therefore, is tapu - sacred, holy, sanctified, blessed – because all things are created by God, especially human beings who have been created in God's image and likeness.

Tapu also comes from our connections to people (tangata). These connections are those that belong firstly to our genealogy or whakapapa – what connects us to our ancestors, ngā tipuna, and ultimately to Te Atua. Tapu also comes from our belonging to, or associations with, particular people or groups of people.

Thirdly, tapu comes from our links to the land (whenua); to the particular place where we belong and which belongs to us – our turangawaewae or homeland.

There are two important senses or ways in which Māori understand the concept of Tapu.

Tapu in its primary and more important sense is 'being with potentiality for power'. In other words tapu is, firstly, the major characteristic of our existence, our very being. If we were to lose our tapu we would cease to exist and so, for example, the dead still have tapu because they continue to exist. Secondly, it is from their tapu that persons and things derive their spiritual power or mana. In a child, for example, this mana is potential, not yet fully developed. Unlike tapu, mana can be gained or diminished or even lost during a person's lifetime.

In its secondary sense tapu is the extension of the primary tapu of persons and things. It is in this secondary sense that certain things are restricted or

forbidden. For example, a cemetery is a tapu place because the primary tapu of the people buried there extends to include the place itself. The restrictions of tapu in this secondary sense are intended to control the interactions between persons and things, including the environment, so that primary tapu is acknowledged and not violated. For example, visitors to a marae have their own tapu as do the people of the marae. Visitors (manuhiri) are not free to wander onto the marae as they feel like it because that would violate the tapu of the tangata whenua. Instead the ritual of the powhiri is followed: tangata whenua call and invite the manuhiri onto their marae; the manuhiri respond to the call; words of greeting and welcome (whaikorero) are exchanged; manuhiri and tangata whenua share the hongiri; food is shared. The ritual of the powhiri acknowledges and respects the tapu of both manuhiri and tangata whenua and allows them to interact freely and safely with each other.

Mana

Mana is usually translated as the prestige, authority, power, influence, status, spiritual power that someone or something has. Mana and tapu belong together because whatever has tapu will also have mana. This mana may be dormant or undeveloped as in a baby or it may be dynamic and active. As people grow and begin to act their mana will be enhanced or diminished according to the choices that they make and their interactions with the tapu of others.

When people through their attitudes and actions respect and acknowledge their own tapu and the tapu of others, their mana increases. For example, when people show respect for themselves and for other people by being consistently friendly and helpful, their mana will increase. As their mana grows, their tapu with all its potential is being affirmed. With their increase in mana so their power to influence events and to do great things increases. An example is a saintly person like Suzanne Aubert (1835–1926) whose mana grew so great through her actions for orphans and poor people in New Zealand that she was able to achieve great things in her life and, when she died, thousands of people in Wellington turned out for her funeral and lined the streets.

Three Principles of Action

Tapu and mana are not static, theoretical qualities – they are real and active. Tapu is expressed and mana is enhanced through the attitudes and behaviour people choose to follow. Therefore, because what we do and how we do it are so important there are certain principles of action which, if we follow them, allow us to address tapu and mana in positive and constructive ways. These principles are tika, pono and aroha.

Tika (justice)

Whatever is correct, right, proper and worthy to be done is tika. Tika means to carry out our duties and obligations to God (Te Atua), to ourselves, to others and to creation. It involves doing what is just and ensuring that justice is done. Tika requires us to find out and know what is right whether it is a matter of natural law or traditional custom or teaching. Above all, tika requires us to do all we can to respect tapu and to avoid whatever violates tapu or diminishes mana – whether it is our own or another's.



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Pono (integrity and truthfulness)

This principle acts in two ways: firstly it challenges us to act with tika and, secondly, it challenges us to ensure that our actions reflect aroha. It is one thing knowing what is right to do but it is another matter entirely to do the right thing truthfully and with integrity. For example, if we damage someone's property then tika demands that we apologise and repair the damage; but pono demands that we apologise gracefully without any delay and that we repair the damage not simply to what it was like but as good as new.

It is also pono that insists that we do what is right even when nobody is around to notice or when we are tempted to avoid doing the right thing because it is too difficult or demanding, or because we are too tired or busy or whatever. For example, it is right – tika – that we should pray to our Creator but integrity and truthfulness – pono – ensures that our prayers are genuine, honest and a regular part of our daily life.

As these examples show, the principle of pono also encourages us to ensure that our actions are not just right but kind, generous and for the good of others.

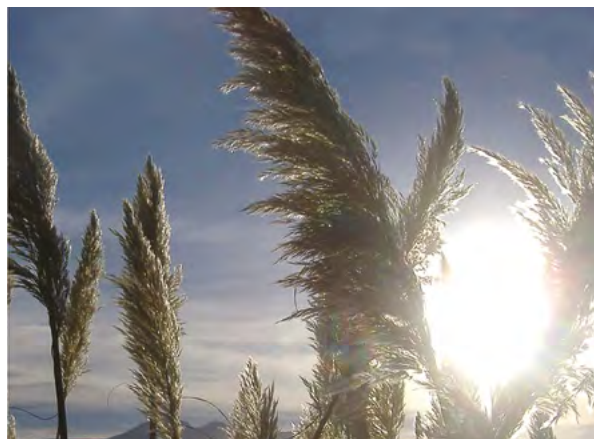
Aroha (compassionate love)

Catholic ethics sets as its standard the love Jesus shows. Aroha is this type of love. Like tika and pono, aroha is not a theoretical ideal but rather it is what we actually do, what we show through our thoughts, words and deeds. Aroha extends to include everybody and everything in creation; it is not limited to family or friends. It is what makes life joyful and ultimately it is what enables us to fulfil our potentiality, our tapu, and to be united with Te Atua from whom all good things come.

Ethical Implications

In this Māori view, ethics – the principles of right and good conduct – has at its heart tapu and mana. Right and good conduct requires people to act with tika, pono and aroha so that tapu is respected and mana is enhanced. Anything else is less than right and good and leads, at worst, to serious violation, evil and destruction. Ultimately, moral conduct is about the ways in which we relate to Te Atua, God, who is the source of all tapu.

Catholic ethical teaching focuses our attention on our belief, from Scripture, Tradition and reason, that God has created us in his image and likeness. Because we believe that God is love, we know that God has created us in love to love and be loved. We are called to reflect and share God's life; we



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are called to live up to our potential by respecting and acknowledging the image of God in ourselves, each other and the whole of creation.

3.5 A Moral Person

Being made in God's image and likeness does not make us perfect. Human beings have a soul, intellect and freewill to make their own decisions. People do not always live up to this ideal but have the disposition to do the right thing and to act justly. It is desirable to be a moral person.

A moral person is a person:

- who is fulfilled and content,
- who reflects on and appreciates his or her life in all its diversity,
- who is both willing and prepared to face up to and to deal with the challenges, problems and sorrows that are an inevitable part of human existence,
- who can escape the prison of selfishness that turns people in on themselves and makes them mean, petty and narrow-minded.

Virtues and Integrity

When people consider ethical issues they are also asking questions about their own character such as 'what kind of person do I want to be?' and 'What kind of life do I want to try to live?' Humanity's ability to use complex language indicates the reasoning power that humans have and by just looking at the created world there is ample evidence of the human ability to control and remodel the world. Most people have some control over their lives and develop the habits that enable them to live good and productive lives. The development of good habits is essential in that they predispose people to make sound ethical choices.

Virtues are habits that both enable people to distinguish between good and apparent good, and relate to the created world in positive ways. The virtues that an individual brings to a particular situation greatly influences the way in which they see and react to what is going on and its consequences. Virtues are always established and developed within a community that is sometimes referred to as the community of influence and includes the faith community that a person may belong to. The way in which a person is able to relate to others is reflective of the virtues that they hold prominent.

By repeatedly choosing good actions an individual builds up their virtues which become a network of behaviour that is referred to as a person's character. Through developing a positive character a person develops their integrity and personal wholeness because they are making life giving choices. A person with integrity has the ability to act with freedom and without the need to have outward signs of achievement and approval. They are able to make choices based on what is the good and right thing to do.

For a Christian their integrity develops through the practice of the three theological virtues; faith, hope and love. They are called 'theological' virtues because they take us into the heart of God, whereas the other virtues are acquired through practice or habit.



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The Theological virtues	Faith	Trusting in God to provide guidance and for all human need. A belief that God will be present no matter what the circumstances.
	Hope	Being confident that God will help the individuals and the community to make a good future for everyone.
	Love	Choosing to love unconditionally all people and is expressed in action not just word.
The Human Virtues	Prudence	Practical wisdom that enables a person to choose the right action. Right reason.
	Justice	Being fair to all people. Right action.
	Fortitude	Courage to do what is right even when to do so is hard. Standing up to peer pressure and other influences.
	Temperance	Balance and moderation in a person's behaviour. Observing appropriate limits.
The Gifts of the Holy Spirit	Wisdom	The ability to discern God's purpose and will.
	Understanding	The ability to comprehend how a person must live his or her life as a disciple of Jesus.
	Right Judgement	The ability to seek and accept wise advice from appropriate sources including Church teaching.
	Knowledge	The ability to realise the basic meaning and message of the teachings of Jesus.
	Courage	The ability to be strong when making difficult decisions and standing by them.
	Reverence	The ability to honour and respect human dignity.
	Wonder and Awe	The ability to appreciate profoundly God and creation.

The Characteristics of a Moral Person

Although human beings are unique individuals there are similarities in what characterises moral people.

Responsible

Moral people are responsible and accept responsibility for their words and deeds. Their sense of responsibility extends beyond their own private concerns to include family, friends, society and the world at large. They are people who contribute to the common good in very many ways. As the word indicates, moral people do not ignore or avoid things; they respond to others, to situations, to needs, to their concerns as well as the concerns of others.

Open-minded

To be open-minded is to reject actively whatever seeks to limit oneself or other people. Moral people reject discrimination and prejudice. They are tolerant of others' opinions and beliefs whether they share them or not.

They do their best to avoid bias. They are persistent and often courageous in opposing whatever restricts or diminishes the dignity of others.

Well-informed

Moral people take time and trouble to become well-informed so as to avoid the limitations imposed by ignorance. They question their own and other people's attitudes and actions; they look for answers even in awkward, unpopular or controversial situations and issues. They are willing to share their knowledge and insights with others in the interests of truth and understanding.

Reflective

Moral people recognise the importance of thinking carefully and deeply considering the best ways of living life and interacting with others and the world. As we saw in Chapter 6, dealing effectively with ethical issues necessarily involves careful thought and consideration. In order to live a moral life we have to learn to reflect on and to evaluate the decisions we make so that our integrity and our sense of what is right and wrong can develop fruitfully.

Obedient to conscience

A well-developed and informed conscience is the mark of mature and independent people. It allows them to conduct themselves with integrity and to achieve the status of truly free human beings exercising their God-given talents. Moral people listen to their conscience and allow it to guide their decisions and their conduct. Furthermore, they take pains to ensure that their conscience is well-formed, strong and active.

It is important to note that these characteristics are not limited to a certain type or group of people. The possession and exercise of these traits is available to every human being regardless of his or her race, religion, language or culture.

Our Catholic Faith

Unless we have a strong and clear sense of the origin, meaning and purpose of life there seems little to justify spending time and energy on behaving rightly. If there is no such thing as objective truth or goodness, if evil and sin are meaningless myths, then there is no reason for people to behave morally; in fact, the whole idea that certain conduct is moral or immoral ceases to have any importance at all. Reason suggests that such a world would be dangerous, unpredictable and ultimately destructive. In reflecting on this dilemma it is possible to understand the relationship between religion and ethical conduct.

The Catholic Church teaches that there are objective, unchanging, reasonable certainties. It also maintains that truth, goodness, faithfulness, love and all the virtues are objective realities. In other words, it makes no difference whether we and others believe in things like truth and goodness or not – they exist, regardless. In the Christian tradition, these objective realities are ultimately found in God from whom they all flow. God is truth, God is goodness, God is love.

Ethical conduct in the Christian context is precisely that sort of conduct that one would expect from a being created in God's image and likeness. When humans conduct themselves truthfully, honestly and with thoughtful consideration for all other created persons and things, they are doing what



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God does – being truly people of God. This is what ethical conduct makes possible. It is through this sort of conduct that human beings express and realise innate human dignity, tapu and mana, and become the sorts of people that they were intended to be from the beginning of creation.

Ethical Living

The whole of human history has been the story of our combat with the powers of evil, stretching, as our Lord tells us, from the very dawn of history until the last day. Finding themselves in the battlefield, men and women have to struggle to do what is right, and it is at great cost to themselves, and aided by God's grace, that they succeed in achieving their own inner integrity.

(Pastoral Constitution on The Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes, 37)

The ethical life, living as a moral person, is not always easy. It needs understanding, courage, and perseverance. Christianity in the Catholic tradition provides an understanding of the ethical life that is firmly rooted in the realities of human existence and in the realities of God's revelation.

Community Support

Christians are not ethical people in a vacuum. Although individuals make decisions the impact may be far-reaching and some of the information that they use to make their decision will be from the community's wisdom. Although making an ethical decision is complex there is a body of expertise and experience within the Church that can act as a wise guide. Catholic social teaching and other ethical teaching found in such communications as papal encyclicals provide guidance and help in decision making. As the world changes so too does Catholic ethical teaching, although the key ideas can be found in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* which acts as a collection point and authoritative reference book.



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3.6 Making Ethical Decisions

The Catholic Church believes and teaches that the human person is made in the image and likeness of God with intellect, free-will and the power of self determination. All people are called to discern and make responsible human judgments. Ethical judgments require a systematic and coherent understanding of the issues involved. An important part of this process is conscience.



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The Importance of Conscience

The Christian tradition has always stressed the important role that conscience plays in our moral life. In modern times this importance has been stressed in Catholic teaching; a typical statement is the following from The Church in the Modern World: *Gaudium et Spes*,

Deep within their consciences men and women discover a law which they have not laid upon themselves and which they must obey. Its voice, ever calling them to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells them inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For they have in their hearts a law inscribed by God.
(paragraph 16).

Conscience is where the individual is alone with God and where God's voice can be heard. This is not to say that people can do anything as long as they think it is right and feel OK with it. Conscience is the complex voice of human values and convictions that direct a person to making wise choices with integrity. An ethical decision needs to be made using an informed, developed conscience. This requires a proactive attitude towards forming conscience.

What is Conscience?

Conscience is the capacity of human reason that makes judgements about right and wrong. It is the ability to reflect on possible courses of action and to work out the correct decision to make in a given circumstance. Conscience directs our choices; it is the voice of our values and convictions. In using their conscience people are able to understand principles of ethics, apply these principles in a given circumstance and to make a judgement about their actions.

An Informed Conscience

An informed conscience is not about making a choice of this action over another based on one's sincere beliefs without consultation with a broader community of wisdom, nor is it about just doing what the Church or some other external body says to do.

Conscience is about making a reasonable judgement about a situation with full knowledge about its nature and consequence. The human conscience is formed in a number of ways:

- **Sacred Scripture.** The Word of God.
- **Sacred Tradition.** Church teaching. By knowing what the Church knows

and teaches about a particular issue the individual is making a concerted effort to inform their conscience.

- **Natural Law.** The innate understanding of the human person about what is right or wrong.
- **Values of family and culture.** Family and culture influences the importance that individuals place on certain aspects of life and what view of life a person has. These in turn mould how people see right and wrong.
- **Christian values.** As well as the values absorbed from their family and culture the individual absorbs a sense of right and wrong from the religious upbringing that they have. For Christians this is centred in Christ and the values that Jesus demonstrated in word and deed.
- **Catholic views about human dignity.** The consistent ethic of life is a strong expression of how Catholics view the dignity of the human person and the Church's understanding of people as spiritual beings with the freedom to choose for the good in rational and creative ways.

The Primacy of Conscience

Catholic teaching emphasises the primacy of conscience as the ultimate guide for making ethical decisions. Once a person's conscience is informed it must determine his or her actions. However, the judgement of conscience does not necessarily guarantee that a person is doing the objectively right thing.

People are obliged to follow their conscience in all circumstances and cannot be forced to act against it.

(John Paul II, World Day of Peace, 1999).

Conscience is not a feeling

Conscience is not a feeling. The fact that the person feels that something is right or wrong, or that they experience happiness or unease as the result of a particular action does not necessarily mean that their conscience is telling them something. Feelings, whether pleasant or unpleasant are morally neutral and in themselves are not reliable indicators of the ethical status of particular actions.

The exercise of Conscience

The exercise of conscience is a process whereby a person is led to make a judgement about the right course of action. It concludes with the self-evaluation of the action.

- a. Desire to know the good – proactive
- b. Discernment of the particular good – alternative and reasons
 - i. Analysis of the situation
 - ii. Gathering of information and seeking wise advice
 - iii. Reflection on consequences
- c. Judge the right action – do this, shun that
- d. Self-evaluation – post action reflection

Making Choices

In any issue involving ethics and morality, we are wise and sensible when we allow our conscience to prompt our conduct and when we act upon those promptings. Every day we have to make decisions. Most of these decisions are probably not morally significant. However, we need to be aware that our attitudes and behaviour may well involve questions of ethics. For example,



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a single argument with someone is unlikely to be morally wrong, however, if we find ourselves constantly arguing with people then it is time to consider whether such behaviour is morally justified.

During the course of our lives, apart from routine daily decisions, we will need to make important decisions affecting our lives and those of others: educational and career choices; who we will choose as our friends; whether we will commit ourselves to the single life, marriage or religious life; how we will treat other people; and so on. Typically these are not spur-of-the-moment decisions and they do involve questions of right and wrong.

Human action

Human beings have the ability to make decisions about their actions. There is a distinction to be made between a human act and the act of a human person. Human acts are freely chosen actions for which the person carrying out the act may be morally responsible. An example may help the distinction. A person driving a car unintentionally skids on gravel and hits an oncoming car. This is clearly the act of a human person, where the driver may not be held morally responsible. If the driver was intentionally speeding (a human act) and failed to take a corner and hit an oncoming car this is the act of a human person, where the driver may be held morally responsible. The distinction is that the human act is an ethical response where the person has freedom and knowledge.

Ethical Issues

An ethical issue is a situation in which there are important and far-reaching questions about right and wrong. For example, confidentiality is an important ethical element in doctors' work because it involves the relationship between doctors and their patients and the right of patients to privacy and dignity. However, this confidentiality could become an ethical issue if the parents of a teenage patient asked his or her doctor for confidential information about their child.

Ethical issues are always going to be difficult to resolve. It is easy to give a quick answer to issues like that of doctor/patient confidentiality mentioned above. In reality ethical answers or decisions are not easy to make; they require careful thought and reflection. This is where a basic set of guidelines can be very helpful.

Guidelines indicate to us the way to go. They alert us to considerations that we might forget or be tempted to ignore. They also allow us the opportunity to reflect before we act. The following five guidelines or steps are neither new nor original but they are clear and practical and assist us in applying a Christian perspective to making ethical decisions.

A Process of Ethical Decision-making

- Step 1 – Define the issue
- Step 2 – Seek advice, information and guidance
- Step 3 – Reflect honestly on the proposed action itself and its consequences
- Step 4 – Pray for God's guidance
- Step 5 – Decide and act



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What does each step involve?

Ethical issues nearly always involve our emotions and they can give rise to very strong and often conflicting feelings in the people involved. It is important, therefore, to follow a step-by-step process which acknowledges people's feelings but does not allow those feelings to dictate our choices and actions. At each step there are questions to be considered.

Step 1 – Define the issue

We cannot begin to make an ethical decision or to take effective action in an ethical issue until we know what the whole situation involves. Therefore, the sorts of questions we need to ask at this stage are these:

- What exactly is the issue under consideration? What is happening? When? Where? How? Why? What do I need to know? Some issues are more easily understood than others.
- How morally important is the decision? Some issues are more serious than others.
- What values are involved? E.g. Trust, fairness, respect, loyalty...?
- Are two or more values in conflict?
- Who has a stake in the decision? Be honest and open-minded here.
- What are the relationships between all the parties, including me?
- Do these relationships bring special obligations or expectations?
- What are my motives for acting one way or another?
- Are rules or laws involved; if so, what are they and how do they apply to this situation?

Step 2 – Seek advice, information and guidance

There is a proverb that says 'Two heads are better than one'. Ethical decisions are not simply matters of personal preference; they involve important matters of right and wrong. They also influence and affect the relationships between ourselves, God, others and creation. For these reasons, common sense and wisdom urge us to gain advice and support from others especially when we are dealing with ethical issues. The sorts of questions we need to ask at this stage are these:

- Who are the people who could help me in my decision?
- Is confidentiality involved?
- How would my family advise me to act?
- What would my friends and community say I should do?
- How would Jesus advise me – what would he do or say?
- What does the Bible say about this situation? For example, how could the Ten Commandments, Beatitudes, Golden Rule, the Great Commandment help me to make a good decision?
- What is Church teaching in this matter?
- What are all the possible choices I could make in this situation?
- What options are available to me and to other involved people?
- Do I know of any similar situations? If so, what action was taken and was it a good decision?
- Might I have to disregard a rule or law? Could I justify following or disregarding a rule or law?
- Who has the knowledge and experience to advise me in this situation?
- What is my conscience telling me?

Step 3 – Reflect honestly on the proposed action itself and its consequences

Sometimes, although we may be reasonably certain that a particular course of action is right, we are unwilling to carry it out and we may wish to settle for something easier or less threatening. This is where honest reflection is important and honesty requires us to take a good, hard look at the likely consequences of our decisions. These are the sorts of questions to ask ourselves:

- Have I made a creative and positive effort to deal with this situation?
- What are the likely positive consequences, short- and long-term, of my decision?
- What burdens may result from my decision – for myself and others?
- If there are alternatives, which one could have the best overall consequences for everyone?
- What is my gut feeling?
- If I carry out this decision, would I be comfortable telling my family or teacher or clergyman or my mentors what I have done?
- Would I want children to take my conduct as an example?
- Is this decision one which a wise, informed, honourable person would make?
- Can I live with this decision?
- Will this decision respect people's human dignity?
- Does this course of action treat everyone equitably and morally?
- Does this course of action advance the common good?
- Is this the most loving response I could make in this situation?

Step 4 – Pray for God's guidance

The will of God, what God wants, is that we should love and serve God faithfully and wholeheartedly and that we should also love everyone else in the same way as we look after ourselves. Whenever, then, we are faced with challenges to doing this, God is there to support and encourage us. This is why this step is an important part of a decision-making process. Remember Jesus' words: *In all truth I tell you, anything you ask from the Father he will grant in my name* (John 16:23).

Consider these questions:

- How is God present in this situation?
- How is God with me as I work out what I should do?
- What help do I need from God? Do I need to pray for courage or patience, or...?
- Have I asked the Holy Spirit to help me to a wise decision?
- Have I honestly tried to do what God wants?
- Am I relying on God and trusting in God's support?

Step 5 – Decide and act

There is a familiar saying: 'Walk your talk'. It is not enough to think about an ethical issue. It is not enough to work out what the right course of action might be. The whole point about ethics is to make sure that we actually DO the right thing, that we ACT. The purpose of the preceding steps is to enable us to reach the point where we can make a decision and carry it out with the confidence that we are doing the best we can.

- What will my decision be?
- Why do I think that this is the best decision I can make?
- How and when will I carry out this decision?
- Get on and do it.

This process was summarised by Joseph Cardijn (1882–1967) the founder of the Young Christian Workers as 'See, Judge, Act'.

Finally

We should, of course, never wait to the last minute before dealing with an ethical issue. We need to be well prepared for the big things that we have time to consider deeply. However, we also need to be prepared to deal with the little things that crop up regularly like the way we treat our friends, what we do at parties, how much effort we put into our work and so on. Ethics requires us to be consistent, that is our moral standards, actions, and values should not be contradictory. An important part of our moral development is to uncover inconsistencies in our lives and to modify our behaviours so that they are consistent with our moral standards. This means that we do our best every day to lead ethical lives so that doing good becomes a habit, a normal and valued part of our way of living.



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3.7 Applying Ethical Principles

In this section we will examine ethical issues in order to illustrate how to apply the process outlined previously and to clarify how and why such issues are ethical.

Case Study One: Climate Change

Almost every day the media draw to our attention some new fact or statistic that indicates a radical change in our world's climatic behaviour. Our world environment is changing. Although experts may disagree on the details, the general consensus between scientists and knowledgeable people is that the predictions are accurate. The scale of the problem is very great and specific predictions of what will happen in the decades to come cannot be made with complete certainty. What is certain is that widespread change is a reality.

We do not have the luxury of waiting until we have definite facts and precise predictions. Waiting will simply make the known problems worse and more difficult to deal with in the long run. The time for thinking about action is long gone. Now is when we should be taking active steps to cope with climate change and to minimise its negative effects.

Step 1 – Defining the issue

Harmful substances

Until recently, carbon dioxide was thought to be the main contributor to climate change. There is evidence that other substances are also harmful.

- Black Carbon Soot, produced by burning coal and diesel fuel, reduces the amount of cloud cover in the sky. Clouds reflect 40 to 90% of the sun's radiation (heat rays) away from earth, so fewer or thinner clouds let more radiation through to warm the earth.
- Sulphur Hexafluoride (SF₆), an inert gas with industrial, domestic and medical uses, has a heat-trapping potential at least 20,000 times greater than carbon dioxide. Its ratio in the atmosphere is considerably lower than CO₂ but is increasing and its atmospheric lifetime is more than 1,000 years.
- CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons) are gases used in aerosol sprays or refrigerants. They are the atmosphere's biggest heat trappers and break down ozone molecules as well. CFCs have been banned from use in many countries but still linger in the atmosphere.
- Nitrous Oxide (N₂O) is a gas found naturally in Earth's soils and oceans but its use in fertilizers, chemical manufacturing, and car emissions has increased its amount in the air. N₂O both traps heat and reacts to form NO which destroys ozone molecules.
- Methane (CH₄) is a natural gas emitted by livestock, rice paddies, and wetlands. The use of methane in natural gas and oil production has caused its amount in the air to soar. Methane traps 20 times more heat than carbon dioxide.
- Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) is a natural gas released in the atmosphere by animal respiration and the burning of wood. But the use of CO₂ in factories and refineries has led to a 30 percent increase of the gas in the atmosphere over the last 150 years.

The combined effect of these substances on our global and local environments gives cause for grave concern.



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Warnings

As long ago as 1994 hundreds of top researchers from more than 80 countries agreed that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas pollutants represent the most important forces that are currently altering the world's climate and overwhelming other forces that can cool the globe.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned in its Climate Change 2007 report that food production will be affected; for example, the growing of plants for bio-fuel production rather than food crops. The resulting changed conditions of trade may well exclude or penalise poor countries as well as increase the risks of disease and poor health due to malnutrition.

The same report advised that in New Zealand climate change is very likely to threaten natural ecosystems, with the extinction of some species. Many ecosystems can be assisted to cope with the effects of climate change by eliminating or reducing non-climatic stresses such as water pollution, habitat fragmentation and invasive species. However there are areas of great concern; for example, increasing urban and rural demand for water has already exceeded sustainable levels of supply.

The report also points out that there are two important dimensions to dealing with climate change. The first is to find ways of lessening the effects of change and to try to slow down rates of global warming. The second dimension is to find ways to adapt to the reality of change. In Australia and New Zealand, we are spending far more money and effort on the first than on the second. Sustainable development for the future needs a better balance between the two, especially as climate change is now so far advanced that any efforts to reduce its effects will take many years to show significant results.

The reality

We cannot be indifferent to environmental questions. They affect every human individual and every creature on our planet now and in the future. The urgent challenge for us is to promote strong ethical approaches to safeguarding our environment; it is our human duty to look after the world that God has given us.

In 2001 John-Paul II told people at a general audience that if we look at our planet, we immediately see that we have disappointed God's expectations. People, especially in our time,

have without hesitation devastated wooded plains and valleys, polluted waters, disfigured the earth's habitat, made the air unbreathable, disturbed the hydrogeological and atmospheric spheres, turned luxuriant areas into deserts and undertaken unrestrained industrialization – humiliating the flower-garden of the universe. We must encourage and support the 'ecological conversion' which has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading. Human beings are not behaving as the Creator's stewards, but as autonomous despots, who at last are beginning to understand that they must stop at the edge of the abyss.

Step 2 – Seeking advice

There are numerous international and local agencies nowadays that offer information, advice and suggestions to people and to groups. The Church is one of those agencies and has, at various times, drawn attention to the relationship that exists between human beings and the rest of creation. Since the late 19th century attention has been drawn more and more to people's interactions with the environment and the effects of those interactions. More recent times have seen an increasing concern about environmental issues.

John-Paul II

John-Paul II made many statements about the importance of “ecological concern” as an essential element in Catholic social teaching. Some quotations from his statements are printed below.

Man often seems to see no other meaning in his natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption. Yet it was the Creator's will that man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble “master” and “guardian”, and not as a heedless ‘exploiter’ and ‘destroyer’. The development of technology and the development of contemporary civilization, which is marked by the ascendancy of technology, demand a proportional development of morals and ethics. . .
(The Redeemer of Man: *Redemptor Hominis*, 15)

. . . Certain elements of today's ecological crisis reveal its moral character. First among these is the indiscriminate application of advances in science and technology. Many recent discoveries have brought undeniable benefits to humanity. Indeed, they demonstrate the nobility of the human vocation to participate responsibly in God's creative action in the world. Unfortunately, it is now clear that the application of these discoveries in the fields of industry and agriculture have produced harmful long-term effects. This has led to the painful realization that we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations. . .
(World Day of Peace Message, 1990)

. . . In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. . . Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him. . .
(On the Hundredth Anniversary: *Centesimus Annus*, 37)

If in his Providence God had given the earth to humanity, that meant that he had given it to everyone. Therefore the riches of Creation were to be considered as a common good of the whole of humanity. Those who possessed these goods as personal property were really only stewards, ministers charged with working in the name of God, who remains the sole owner in the full sense, since it is God's will that created goods should serve everyone in a just way.
(The Coming of the 3rd Millennium: *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 13)

. . . man has a specific responsibility towards the environment in which he lives, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity, of his life, not only for the present but also for future generations. It is the ecological question-ranging from the preservation of the natural habitats of the different species of animals and of other forms of life to “human



John-Paul II

ecology” properly speaking – which finds in the Bible clear and strong ethical direction, leading to a solution which respects the great good of life, of every life.

(The Gospel of Life: *Evangelium Vitae*, 42)

Catechism of the Catholic Church

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has numerous statements about creation and the relationship between people and the world. It reminds us of our duty to respect *the integrity of creation* (paragraphs 2415–18). Its commentary on creation (paragraphs 299–349) emphasises the beauty and magnificence of all that God creates as well as the interdependence and solidarity that exists between all creatures and should be protected.



Benedict XVI

Benedict XVI

Benedict XVI's encyclical: *Charity in Truth: Caritas in Veritate*, draws attention to important aspects of the ecological issues facing us. The document affirms the need for people to commit themselves to an ethic of life. Acceptance of life strengthens moral fibre and makes people better able to help each other. By cultivating openness to life, wealthy peoples can better understand the needs of poor ones, they can avoid using huge economic and intellectual resources to satisfy the selfish desires of their own citizens and they can promote instead actions that are morally sound, marked by solidarity and respect for the fundamental right to life of every people and every individual (paragraph 28).

The encyclical draws attention to the connections between ethical issues. The deciding issue in protecting the environment is the overall moral climate of society. When society adopts a lack of respect for human life then the conscience of society will protect neither human life nor the life of creation. Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person; when we focus on saving the environment and trample on human beings we reveal a serious contradiction which *demeans the person, disrupts the environment and damages society* (paragraph 51).

Commitment to life

Human destiny ultimately depends on our ethics and how much they are centred on life. Such ethics always seek to expand, to safeguard and to transmit life. The future of all life on earth lies in our hands and the choices and decisions we make will influence whether life for ourselves and our planet will fulfil its full and true potential.

An urgent task today is for people to be reconciled with all creation, and to carry out faithfully our responsibility to respect and care for God's gifts. We must examine our lives honestly and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed creation through our actions and our failures to act. God calls us to turn away from wrongdoing and to behave in new, life-giving ways.

Step 3 – Reflecting on the consequences

Human greed, violence and selfishness have a destructive impact on people and the environment. Wherever sin and its consequences in the world have fractured our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others, and with the whole of creation, reconciliation is needed. We also need to change our ways of seeing the world, of thinking and behaving responsibly to protect earth's finite natural resources.

Consequences

If we don't act ethically	If we do act ethically
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • other people are left in need • limited resources will continue to be wasted • other people's rights and well-being will be trampled on • shortages, famines, ecological disasters will continue and worsen • lower levels of nutrition, health and medical care will occur • richer people and nations will grow richer at the expense of poorer people and nations • there will be increasing global tensions connected with resources like oil and water, and issues like economic migrants and refugees • increasing loss of land to erosion, rising sea levels, salination, desertification and pollution will happen • increasing floods, mud slides, altered weather patterns with their associated hardships for people will occur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we will need to live more simply, moderately and with more self-discipline • non-renewable resources will be protected and the use of renewable resources increased • resources will be shared more fairly between individuals and nations • the common good will be advanced • the life of future generations will be assured • economic and political structures and systems will be more responsive to the needs of people and the planet

Our personal choices – for example, recycling, waste avoidance, composting, tree planting, car-pooling, responsible water and energy use – are important, but so too are the ways in which economic and political systems are structured. We are challenged to analyse the social structures that force millions to live in squalor, burdened by crippling debt, while a tiny minority accumulate vast wealth from exploiting earth's resources. Although such structural changes need international organisation and cooperation, we each have a responsibility in our own individual lives to make a difference and to carry out our duty to protect the world and to advance the common good.

Step 4 – Pray for God's guidance

Prayer can take many forms but ultimately prayer is our conscientious effort to enable ourselves to focus our minds and hearts on our God who loves and understands us more than we can ever know. It is also very obvious that an issue like climate change is far beyond our individual power to solve – we can do nothing without the help of each other and especially of God. Some formal prayers are printed below.

Serenity Prayer

*God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.*
Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971)



NCRS

Hymn of the Universe

I live at the heart of a single, unique Element, the Centre of the universe, and present in each part of it: personal Love and cosmic Power.

To attain to him and become merged into his life I have before me the entire universe with its noble struggles, its impassioned quests, its myriad of souls to be healed and made perfect. I can and I must throw myself into the thick of human endeavour, and with no stopping for breath. For the more I bring my efforts to bear on the whole surface of reality, the more also will I attain to Christ and cling close to him. God who is eternal Being-in-itself, is, one might say, ever in process of formation for us.

And God is also the heart of everything; so much so that the vast setting of the universe might be engulfed or wither away or be creation's dust, which is vitalized by a halo of energy and glory, to be swept away, the substantial Reality wherein every perfection is incorruptibly contained and possessed would remain intact; the rays would be drawn back onto their Source and there I should still hold them all in close embrace.

Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955)



St. Francis

The Canticle of Brother Sun

Most High, all powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, the honour, and all blessing.

To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no one is worthy to mention Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and you give light through him. And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour! Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you light the night and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth, who sustains us and governs us and who produces varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned. Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no living man can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin. Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.

AMEN.

St Francis of Assisi (1181–1226)

Step 5 – Decide and act

This is, of course, the hardest part to do and the most important. However, there is much that we can do as individuals and collectively. Here are some ideas:

- Clean Up the World: a campaign to inspire communities around the world to clean up, fix up and conserve their local environments
- Plant and look after school or community gardens, especially of edible plants.
- Include creation and environmental themes in the prayer of your family, parish and school communities.
- Become informed about local environmental issues and join or form an action group.
- Write to your local government and Parliamentary representatives to express your concern for environmental issues, and to urge for more effective laws to protect the integrity of creation.
- Buy a re-fillable water bottle and fill it with tap water instead of buying bottled water.
- Educate yourself about where your food comes from, who grew or raised it, and how it was caught or farmed. Ask questions at the grocery store, call the toll-free numbers on packaged food and talk to farmers.
- Switch off lights and appliances that are not in use.
- Close doors and windows when heaters are on.
- Ask retailers for sustainably caught seafood. Let them know there is a demand for seafood that has been caught in a sustainable way.
- Service your motor vehicle regularly; check its exhaust emissions; drive conservatively.
- Support local producers and manufacturers as much as possible.
- Recycle as much as possible.



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Case Study Two: Personal Use of Alcohol

While it is important to have a framework for looking at ethical issues on a social scale as has been done with the issue of the environment, it is also imperative that individuals making choices use the same level of consideration and awareness. This is where the framework for exploring an ethical issue is personally useful.

Use of alcohol

Alcohol is a freely available drug in our society. It is morally neutral. In its self it is neither good nor bad. Whether or not it is ethically acceptable to drink or not depends on a variety of factors including the amount that is drunk and the circumstances in which the drinking occurs.

The decision to drink alcohol and the amount to drink is a common choice that people have to make. Due to the circumstance in which the decision is made it is useful and morally responsible to consider the situation before the decision has to be made so that the conscience is able to inform itself. When it comes to responding to an invitation to go to a drinking on Saturday night there may be too little time to consider all the possibilities and consequences of the choice. This limits the maturity and wisdom of the decision.

Step 1 – Define the issue

Friends of a friend's parents are away and she is having a party at her house. You and your friends are invited to go. There will be no adult supervision and the invitation is to bring all you can drink.

- Alcohol is cheap and readily available to people.
- Alcohol is the main recreational drug used in New Zealand.
- Alcohol is accepted as a normal part of life.
- Alcohol is heavily promoted through advertising and is associated with sporting events and having a good time.
 - Alcohol companies are able to sponsor sporting events such as the Tennis Open.
- The alcohol industry is profitable.
- Alcohol plays a major role in vandalism, assaults, and traffic accidents.
- Many year 13 students are legally able to consume alcohol because they have turned 18.
- Social commentators consider that there is a dangerous teenage binge drinking problem in New Zealand with increasing reports of young people being killed either by abusive drinking of alcohol or road accidents where the driver is intoxicated

Step 2 – Seek advice

Scientific

- Alcohol is a depressant drug, not a stimulant. Alcohol slows down the controlling centres of the brain.
- Alcohol is more dangerous for children and young people than adults.
 - Because of the immature brain (the brain is not fully formed until a person is 2** years old) much less alcohol is required to depress the brain.
- Each person has a different reaction to alcohol depending on size, personality, age, mood and previous experiences with alcohol.
- Too much alcohol can kill a person. This could be due to alcohol poisoning, or long term damage to the stomach and liver.
- Anyone can become an alcoholic. Alcoholism is a dependency and a very serious disease.

- Alcohol affects a person's judgement by slowing down their thinking, self-control and movements. It increases confidence and decrease judgment and sense of responsibility.
- Alcohol is fattening.
- There is no formula for safe drinking for young adults.

The Catholic Church

- Catholics see all of God's creation as good. Whatever humans create as participants in God's creativity though it can be misused for destruction is never inherently evil.
- Alcohol is part of God's creation, but should be used responsibly and in moderation.

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food of well-aged wines strained clear.
(Isaiah 25:6)

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise
(Proverbs 20:1).

- Drunkenness, along with the use of drugs except for therapeutic reasons is condemned by the Church.

The virtue of temperance disposes us to avoid every kind of excess: the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco, or medicine. Those incur grave guilt who, by drunkenness or a love of speed, endanger their own and others' safety on the road, at sea, or in the air.
(CCC 2290)

The use of drugs inflicts grave damage on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is a grave offence. Clandestine production of and trafficking in drugs are scandalous practices. They constitute direct cooperation in evil, since they encourage people to practices gravely contrary to the moral law.
(CCC 2291)

- Humans need to care for their health as good stewards of the gift of life they have received. This requires a person to take responsible and reasonable attention and care of it, taking the needs of others and the common good into account (CCC 2288).
- Temperance this cardinal (hinge) virtue guides people towards balance and moderation in using what gives pleasure.
 - A temperate person learns to control and moderate the desire for alcohol so that she or he is in control not the desire.
 - Temperance is something that is learnt by practice and reflecting on past situations, good and mistaken choices made.
- A key question to consider is if you accept that we are 'made in the image and likeness of God' how do you treat yourself and others?



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Step 3 – Reflect on the consequences

Positive	Negative
A lot of friends will be there	Impulsive and risk-taking behaviour
You are responsible you will not over-drink	Accidental injury or death
You have a nominated sober driver	Unwanted and dangerous sexual situations
If you attend you and your friends will look out for one another	Poor decision making
You don't party a great deal	Dependency and serious health problems
You can easily leave if things are getting out of hand	Damage of brain function
It's an opportunity to make new friends.	Crime

Step 4 – Pray for God's guidance

God grant me:

*The serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can change,
and the wisdom to know the difference.*

(Author unknown: Prayer of Alcoholics Anonymous)

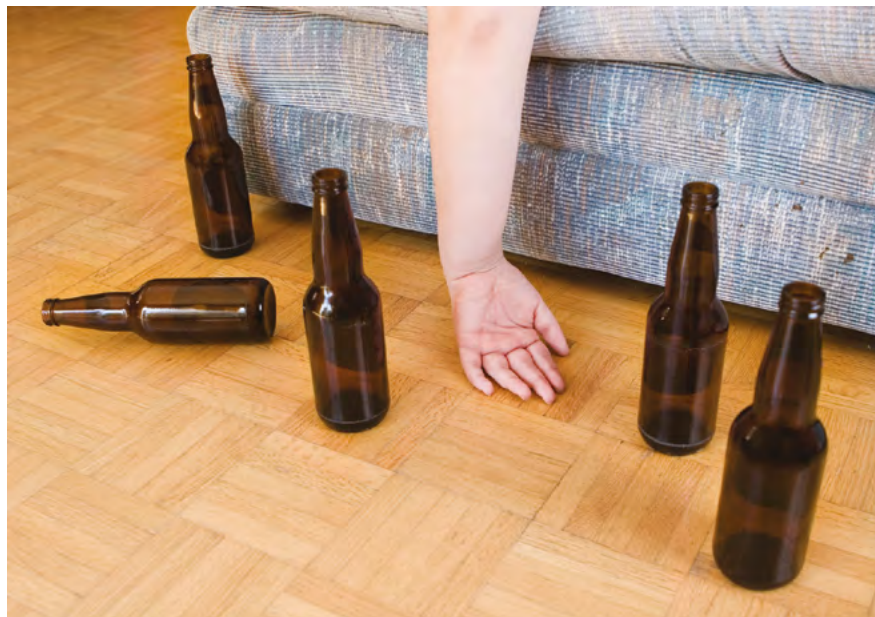
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Psalm 119:105

Step 5 – Decide and act

There is a lot more information about the scientific and health risk associated with binge drinking and early patterns of drinking that can be accessed through health professionals or other sources such as the internet.

No one can make this decision for you.



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Other Areas of Ethics

There are many areas of human endeavour where issues of ethics are raised. These include but are not limited to:

Bioethics

Bioethics is the field of ethics that asks ethical question about the advances in science and medical technology that can change the way human life is experienced particularly in the areas of health and illness and, ultimately, the way we live.

An example of a bioethical issue is:

What if every child were conceived as a means to prolong the life of other living persons? What would this do to our society and to the self-esteem of children as they progress to maturity?

Business ethics

Business ethics is a form of professional ethics that examines ethical problems that arise in a business environment. It applies to all aspects of business conduct and is relevant to the conduct of individuals and business organisations as a whole.

An example of a business ethics issue is:

A company that builds obsolescence into its product or designs wasteful and unnecessary packaging for a product.

Medical ethics

Medical ethics is primarily a field of applied ethics, the study of moral values and judgments as they apply to medicine including issues around the value of human life and death.

An example of a medical ethical issue is:

A terminal patient's claiming the right to die via physician-assisted suicide.

Scientific ethics

Scientific ethical conduct has two key purposes to assure the reliability of research results and the safety of research subjects.

An example of a scientific ethical issue is:

The scientific research on twins carried out by the Nazis in concentration camp and the use by other scientists of the information that they collected.

Sexual ethics

Sexual ethics refers to those aspects of ethics that deal with issues arising from all aspects of sexuality and human sexual behavior.

An example of a sexual ethical issue is:

The ethical questioning of the right of any person to create a child in an overpopulated world.

Sport ethics

There are two dimensions to ethics in sports: the ideal and the effect on society. Equal conditions for all are the sports equivalent of the general moral principle of equal justice for all.

An example of a sports ethics issue is:

The availability of training opportunities to athletes from countries which do not have the money to give to elite athletes as other wealthier countries do. The challenge to whoever has the money to train gets the winner's purse.



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Glossary of theological meanings

Anthropology (3.2)

In theology this term refers to the critical reflection on the origin, purpose and destiny of human life in light of Christian belief.

Apologetics (1.1)

Theological method by which a belief or doctrine of a community is defended against criticism.

- From the Greek word for defence.

Apocalypse (2.5)

The end of the world described in highly imaginative language incorporating fantasy and symbolism.

The Book of the Apocalypse is also called the Book of Revelation. Using visions the author describes the trials of the early Christian community and encourages them to have courage and keep trusting in God.

Authority (1.2)

In the Catholic Church authority comes from Jesus and is held in a particular way by those who descend in from the apostles as witnesses to the resurrection i.e. the teaching authority of the Church the Bishops in union with the Pope.

Scripture has authority for Catholics because the Scriptures they are inspired by the Holy Spirit and are therefore an expression of the authority of God.

Church (2.2)

A group of people, who live, worship and express their faith in particular ways.

The Church is the whole body of Christians who follow Christ.

Common Good (3.1)

The sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively through and ready access to their own fulfilment. (*Gaudium et Spes, 26*)

Culture (1.1)

A complex symbol system reflecting the broad social values and world system of a given group of persons.

Enlightenment – The (4.6)

Period of philosophical, political and scientific movements in the eighteenth century that rejected tradition and authority and relied instead on human reason alone.

Ethics (3.1)

A set of standards for judging if an action is right or wrong.

Existential (1.1)

Regarding human and transcendent (God) existence.

Fideism (1.4)

A theological position that asserts the primacy (greatest importance) or faith (belief in God) over reason.

Fundamentalism (1.1)

The rejection of understanding of sacred texts from a historical-critical study because of a belief in the absolute and unerring authority of the Bible.

Heresy (4.5)

The teachings of a group within a religion that is different from the teachings of the main religion. Any false teaching about Christianity.

Inerrancy (2.5)

Teaching of the Church that the Scripture teaches religious truth without error for the sake of human salvation. This truth witnesses to the truth of God's divine wisdom and self-revelation.

Morality (3.1)

The codes a person holds about what is right and good that influences how they think and act.

Mystery (1.5)

The sense of a belief being so deep and complex that humans will never fully explore its meaning and never completely understand it meaning.

- From the Greek word for secret.

New Age (2.7)

General term given to groups and belief systems that advocate an expanded notion of human spiritual potential linked with hopes for social and planetary renewal. In the late 20th century very influential in the 'self-help' movement.

Nihilism (1.4)

A rejection of all values and beliefs. Nothing really matters, the world is absurd and no point in trying to improve it.

Parousia (4.1)

The second coming of Christ at the end of the world. Early Christians thought that it would occur during their lifetime.

Paschal Mystery (4.4)

A term that refers to what God has done for the human race through the death of Jesus which enabled people to pass from the slavery of sin to freedom.

Penance (4.7)

The official name for the sacrament that is referred to as Reconciliation or confession.

Perpetual (5.5)

Permanent, never-ending.

Rationalism (1.4)

A way of approaching religion that assumes that religion is a cognitive (to do with the intellect) way of explaining belief. Belief provides a consistent and complete account of everything in the known world.

Reincarnation (2.1)

The belief that on a person's death their soul goes into a new body and they are reborn. This is not a Catholic belief.

Religion (2.1)

A group of people who organise themselves so that they can express a common set of beliefs which are presented in rituals and practices in an effort to be true to their God and others.

Revelation (2.1)

God's communication with humanity that enables people to grow into the fullness of life. Catholics believe that the revelation takes place in the scripture, the community of Church and in a special way in the person of Jesus Christ.

Secularism (2.2)

A secular world view where religion has no primary part, there is a clear split between those things that are of the world, the secular parts of life and those that are of the religious sphere.

Theotokos (5.5)

Teaching from the Council of Ephesus that Mary is the Mother of God not just the mother of a dualistic human Jesus.

Tradition (2.5)

The process by which the faith is handed down through the generations and the content that is handed on. For Catholics this includes Scriptures, teachings of the Church, liturgical practices and the living faith of the Church throughout the ages.

Utilitarianism (1.4)

The theory that the utmost good lies in the greatest good for the maximum numbers.

Acknowledgements

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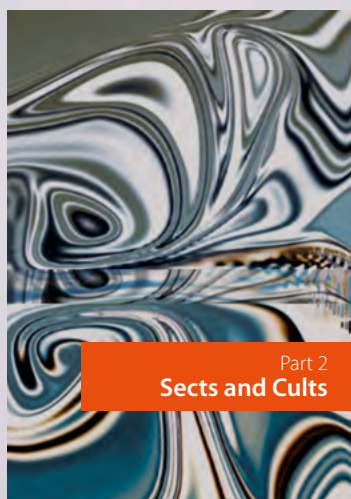
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On the Threshold presents key topics for the final year of Catholic secondary school religious education. The content is based on Church teaching.



Part 1
Finding Meaning

Deals with the importance of meaning for human existence and how people come to find meaning through asking key questions of themselves and God. As well as exploring religious answers to these questions it also looks at some secular belief systems.



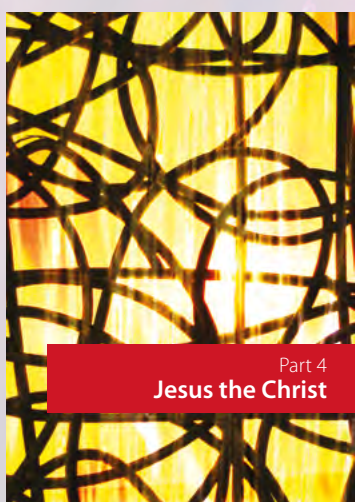
Part 2
Sects and Cults

Surveys the distinctive characteristics of Church, Sect, Cult and Religious Movement. The particular claim of the Catholic Church to religious authority is studied within the context of the topic.



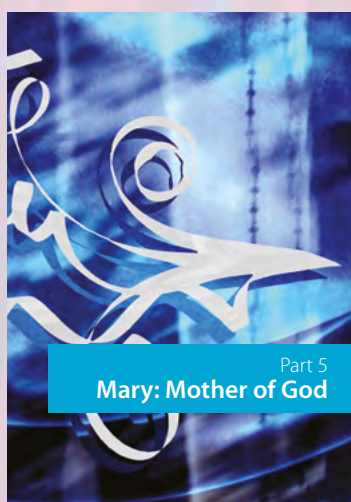
Part 3
Ethics and ethical issues

Explores the basis, the teachings and general application of Catholic ethics and provides opportunities for students to consider moral issues from a Catholic perspective. There is an opportunity for students to learn about the primacy of an informed conscience.



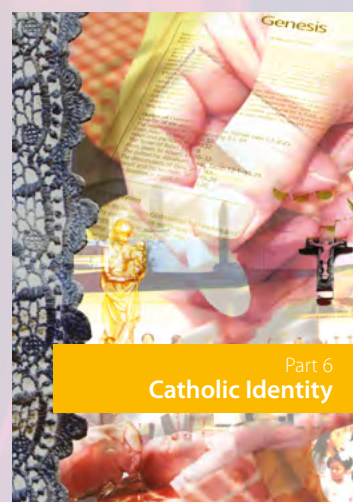
Part 4
Jesus the Christ

Examines traditional and contemporary 'Christologies'. It assists students to broaden their knowledge of how Jesus the Christ is revealed and understood through his life, the Scriptures and the Church's tradition. The historical development of the teaching of the Catholic Church about Jesus the Christ is explored.



Part 5
Mary: Mother of God

Provides a survey of the place of Mary in Christian tradition from early Church until today. It identifies and describes doctrine and devotion to do with Mary and her role in the history of salvation and explores how Mary is a role model for all people.



Part 6
Catholic Identity

This section looks briefly at important Catholic beliefs and practices.