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CATHOLIC VOTER'S GUIDE

GENERAL MORAL PRINCIPLES:
DOING GOOD AND AVOIDING EVIL



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General Moral Principles: Doing Good and Avoiding Evil

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1706.

By his reason, man recognizes
the voice of God which urges him
“to do what is good and avoid what is evil.”

Everyone is obliged to follow this law,
which makes itself heard in conscience
and is fulfilled

in the love of God and of neighbor.

Living a moral life bears witness
to the dignity of the person.



Catholics Must Form Their Consciences By Church Teaching

Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. It is not a matter of personal decision about what is good or evil, but upon the objective moral order willed by God, binding on human beings and known through reason (natural law) and divine revelation (Scripture, Tradition & Magisterial teaching).

The obligation to the Church's teaching flows from the supernatural virtue of Faith, since belief in Christ is also belief in the Church and in Christ's promises to the Church. This teaching can be found in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, which includes the formal teaching of Popes and Councils regarding what has been revealed.

It also includes what has been commonly taught in the Church, as the entire Church cannot error. In moral matters the place where you can find this teaching is in the accounts of the moral tradition by authors of noted orthodoxy and acceptance by the Magisterium. It is NOT found in individual authors whose theological opinions are outside of that common moral tradition of the Church. For example, historically the Church has condemned both laxity and rigidity in moral decision making, and in our time consequentialism and proportionalism.

More on Conscience: ewtn.com/vote/conscience.asp



Morally Good Acts are Good in Object, End and Circumstances

1. The Object, or thing to be done, is good.

An act must be good, or at least morally indifferent. Some acts are always and everywhere evil (intrinsic evils) and may never be done, for example, blasphemy, abortion and adultery. Doing them can never be made into good acts, by a good intention or circumstances.

2. The End, or intention for doing it, is also good.

An evil intention destroys the moral goodness of an otherwise good act, for example, doing an act of charity or religion in order to be seen by others. Human beings often do things with mixed motives, so this applies to the primary intention for which the act is done. Lesser mixed intentions, e.g. vanity, can diminish the goodness of the act without destroying it.

3. The Circumstances are also taken into account and are fitting.

Unfitting circumstances can also lessen, and even destroy, the moral goodness of an otherwise good act. For example, unless the common good requires it, fraternal correction should generally be given privately. To give it publicly without necessity, or in an unfitting manner, are among the circumstances that could reduce or destroy the moral goodness of the act.



Morally Good Acts Will Not Cooperate in Evil

If we may not morally do a particular act, we also may not cooperate in, or otherwise facilitate, the doing of it by another person. To do so offends our own dignity as a human person and as a child of God, but also the dignity of the person in whose sin we cooperate. Both the moral law (justice), and love of God and neighbor (charity), forbids such cooperation.

Such cooperation can be of two kinds, **Formal** – in which our will agrees in the sinful act, even if we physically don't perform it, and **Material** – in which we provide some material assistance or receive a material benefit from the sinful act without agreeing in it.

The Moral Principle of Double Effect. While we may not do evil, or formally cooperate with the evil others do, it sometimes can be necessary to tolerate evil which results, without our intention it, from a good act that we do. For example, paying taxes, which are then used to do evil things, or voting for candidates who are morally inconsonant in their views. Three conditions must be present for us to tolerate evil which comes about unintended as a result of our acts.

1. The act we intend must not be sinful in itself, and we may not intend the bad effect, only tolerate it.
2. There must be a proportionate reason for tolerating the bad effect, a good that is proportionately equal to or greater than the bad effect.
3. The danger of scandal from our cooperation must be prevented by protest, explanation or other means.

Failure to satisfy any of the three conditions voids the goodness of the intended act.

More on Moral Cooperation – ewtn.com/vote/moral-cooperation-in-evil.asp

More on the Principle of the Double Effect - ewtn.com/vote/double-effect.asp

Nota Bene

It is wrongly argued that a basket of *negotiable* goods is proportionate to a *non-negotiable* good. However, there is no proportion between the two. Where human life (and death) is concerned, preventing an imminent nuclear war may be seriously proportionate to the killing of 1 million innocents a year by abortion, but no collection of negotiables issues can be proportionate.



A Morally Good Act Will Be Prudent

Prudence is the virtue which disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance, and to choose the right means of achieving it: "the prudent man looks where he is going" (Prov. 14:15).

Prudence is the Queen of the Virtues. It governs the knowledge, judgment and execution of our acts. It helps us decide *whether* to act, in *what* circumstances, and *how* to carry the act through to the end. Prudence, therefore, concerns the beginning, the middle and the end of moral action.

St. Thomas Aquinas identifies 8 integral parts of prudence, elements which make for a perfect moral judgment and its execution. **Memory** of the past, **Understanding** of the present, **Docility** to be taught, **Shrewdness** in making a quick conjecture, **Reasoning** from one thing to judgment regarding another, **Foresight** regarding what is befitting the end, **Circumspection** appropriate to the situation, and **Caution** to avoid obstacles to attaining the end.

A failure in prudence is the sin of imprudence. A good deed can be tarnished by imprudence, so that its value is not altogether lost but is diminished (venial sin). It can also so detract from the goodness of the end so that it perverts it. If the matter of the act is grave, the sin would be grave; if the matter is slight, the sin would be venial.

Even good people commit imprudent acts, considered as imperfections of otherwise good actions. Thus, Proverbs 25:6 tells us, "a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again," and Our Lord taught us to ask forgiveness daily for our daily faults, that we in turn might be forgiven by the Father.

More on Prudence: ewtn.com/vote/prudence.asp



Citizens Have Co-Responsibility For Society

This duty especially obliges those in a democracy who must elect representatives to run the State on their behalf. The obligation to vote depends on the issue and the worthiness of the candidates. It is more seriously obliged when a good candidate is opposed by an unworthy one.

The moral theology tradition teaches that one may not vote for an enemy of religion or of freedom, except to exclude a worse enemy of religion and of freedom. In such a case, the exclusion of the worst candidate is the object which is intended, not the evils the less bad candidate might do. It is that good choice (excluding a worst candidate), not “the lesser of two evils” which is chosen. We may never choose evil directly, only tolerate it. This is an application of the Principle of Double Effect mentioned above.

In determining which candidate is a threat to religion and liberty, or, which of several candidates is the worse threat, there is a hierarchy of values. This hierarchy is moral common sense. For example, it is clearly more evil to kill a person than to slap them unjustly. In determining the hierarchy of political issues, therefore, **non-negotiables** issues outweigh **negotiable** issues.

Non-negotiables issues concern certain truths and are always morally applicable, such as taking the life of the innocent, depriving people of their liberty, especially religious liberty, and preserving the morality of society, since personal and social life depends on it.

Negotiable issues concern complex circumstances, for example, how to protect, preserve and pay for health care. Policy issues involve differing opinions about the best means to the good end both parties desire, even if they differ about the possibility of achieving it by the various means proposed.

More on Moral Duties: ewtn.com/vote/download/MoralGuide.pdf

