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Principles of Catholic Bioethics

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Elements of End of Life Planning



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Medical
Ethics

Pastoral Care of the
Sick and Dying

Order of Christian
Funerals

Financial
And
Legal

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Introduction to Catholic Bioethics

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Introduction to Catholic Bioethics



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- Medicine is rapidly advancing
 - Advantage: People are able to live longer productive lives
 - Disadvantage: Complex moral questions arise surrounding the use of these advances
- The Catholic Church extends her moral teaching as a compass on the path of dying well

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Church's Moral Teaching

- Rooted in respect for the dignity and sanctity of every person
 - Created in the Image and Likeness of God
 - "In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ" - Ephesians 1:5
 - We are not just another creation of God but rather are loved and adopted by God to be His sons and daughters
 - Redeemed in Jesus Christ
 - "God proves his love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" - Romans 5:8
 - The Father sent His Son into the world to die and rise so that we might have the hope of eternal life.
 - Share a Common Destiny
 - "For God did not destine us for wrath, but to gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live together with him." - 1 Thessalonians 5: 9 – 10
 - God wills that we spend eternity with Him in heaven

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Our Relationship with God

- God loves us but love cannot be forced
 - Love demands a response
- We love God by keeping His Commandments
 - “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” – John 14:15
 - Those who keep His Commandments will be welcomed into the joy of the heavenly kingdom
 - Those who choose to reject God’s Commandments will have their wishes respected and spend eternity separated from God

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Sources of the Church's Moral Principles

- Faith
 - Jesus reveals the truth and through the teachings of the Church, preserves the revelation of the truth from God.
 - "And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it." - Matthew 16:18
- Reason
 - Regardless of one's religion, there are certain moral truths that are written on our hearts
 - Reason is not infallible
- All truth comes from and is a reflection of God. There can never be a real discrepancy between faith and reason.

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For Our Good

- The teachings of the Church are for our ultimate Good
 - God loves us and only desires what is good for us
- “God is offended by us only when we act against our own good.”
— St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 3.122
- Sin is “a failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods” – Catechism of the Catholic Church par. 1849
 - Rooted in unhealthy attachment to lesser goods like a pleasurable life
- Sin doesn't simply offend God it also harms us

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Our Moral Obligation

- Rooted in love
 - “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.” - Matthew 22: 37 – 40
- “Turn from evil and do good, that you may be settled forever.” - Psalms 37:27
- Three Moral Obligations
 1. Do not commit evil
 2. Prevent evil out of charity
 3. Correct others out of charity

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Determining if an Action is Moral

- Three Elements
 1. Object - What is directly chosen
 2. Intention - The reason the action was chosen
 3. Circumstance - The situation surrounding the object & intention

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Examples

1. Tom is addicted to opioids and so he goes to his doctor and lies about back pain. He is given prescription for opioids. He takes the medication prescribed to him and becomes intoxicated.
2. Tom has serious back pain and the only way for him to get out of bed is to take opioids. Tom goes to his doctor and is given prescription for opioids. He takes the medication prescribed to him and becomes intoxicated but he follows all of the warnings that come with the medication.
3. Tom has serious back pain and the only way for him to get out of bed is to take opioids. Tom goes to his doctor and is given a prescription for opioids. He takes the medication prescribed to him and becomes intoxicated. He decides to ignore the warnings and goes back to his job driving a tractor trailer while taking the medication.

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Examples



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	1	2	3
Object			
Intention			
Circumstance			
Moral?			

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The Principle of Double Effect

- Problem
 - Sometimes in trying to achieve the good we recognize that the good comes with unintended bad consequences.
- Solution
 - We can proceed with the action if the following conditions are met.

Four Conditions of the Principal of Double Effect

1. The act itself is good or at least neutral
2. Only the good is intended
3. The evil is never the means to the good
4. There is a proportionately grave reason for acting

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Double Effect in Action

	Taking Morphine at the End of Life
The act itself is good or at least neutral	
Only the good is intended	
The evil is never the means to the good	
There is a proportionately grave reason for acting	

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Practical Applications of Catholic Bioethics

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Practical Applications

Preserving Human Life

- A person has a moral obligation to use ordinary and proportionate means to preserve his life.
 - Proportionate means are those that in the judgement of the patient offer a reasonable hope of benefit and do not entail an excessive burden or excessive expense on the family or community.

Proportionate Care

Hope of Benefit
Commonly Used
Not too Difficult
Reasonably Simple
Proportionate to One's Status

Disproportionate Care

A Certain Impossibility
Greatest Effort is Required
Excessive Hardship
Excruciating Pain
Extraordinary Costs
Intense Fear / Repugnance

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Practical Applications



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Artificial Nutrition & Hydration

"In principle, there is an obligation to provide patients with food and water, including medically assisted nutrition and hydration for those who cannot take food orally. This obligation extends to patients in chronic and presumably irreversible conditions (e.g., the "persistent vegetative state") who can reasonably be expected to live indefinitely if given such care. Medically assisted nutrition and hydration become morally optional when they cannot reasonably be expected to prolong life or when they would be "excessively burdensome for the patient or [would] cause significant physical discomfort, for example resulting from complications in the use of the means employed." For instance, as a patient draws close to inevitable death from an underlying progressive and fatal condition, certain measures to provide nutrition and hydration may become excessively burdensome and therefore not obligatory in light of their very limited ability to prolong life or provide comfort." - Ethical and Religious Directives Part II n. 38

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Practical Applications

Physician Assisted Suicide & Euthanasia

- Moral Framework
 - God is the Lord of life and no one may take the life of an innocent person without opposing God's love for that person
 - Human life is a gift entrusted to a person who must live this life according to God's plan
 - Suicide is as wrong as murder, a refusal of love for self, the denial of a natural instinct to live and a flight from the duties of justice and charity owed to one's neighbor.
- Applications
 - Euthanasia - The practice of intentionally ending a life in order to relieve pain and suffering
 - Can be voluntary or non-voluntary
 - Physician Assisted Suicide - The voluntary termination of one's own life by administration of a lethal substance with the direct or indirect assistance of a physician

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Practical Applications



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Value of Suffering

- In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ *has also raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption*. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ. – Pope John Paul II, Salvifici Doloris, 19
- He does not discover this meaning at his own human level, but at the level of the suffering of Christ. – Pope John Paul II, Salvifici Doloris, 26

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Practical Applications



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A Catholic Approach to Death

- Provides the person in danger of death with:
 - Information necessary to understand their condition
 - Opportunity to discuss their condition with family members and care providers
 - Information necessary to address morally legitimate choices
 - Spiritual support and the opportunity to receive the sacraments.
- Hospice Care focuses on:
 - The patient rather than the disease
 - Palliative control of symptoms rather than a cure
 - Care of physical, psychological and spiritual offerings
 - The needs of the patient's family

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Practical Applications

A Catholic Approach to Death



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- What is death?
 - "a separation of the soul from the body" – *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 997
 - "a single event consisting in the total disintegration of that unitary and integrated whole that is the personal self" - Pope Saint John Paul II *Address to Transplantation Society* August 29, 2000, n. 4
- How is death determined?
 - "The death of the person...is an event which **no** scientific technique or empirical method can identify directly" - Pope Saint John Paul II *Address to Transplantation Society* August 29, 2000, n. 4
 - "Human experience shows that once death occurs certain biological signs inevitably follow, which medicine has learnt to recognize with increasing precision." Pope Saint John Paul II *Address to Transplantation Society* August 29, 2000, n. 4
- Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Orders
 - The condition of the patient must be such that the intervention would be of no or little significant benefit to him or her
 - Proper application of Proportionate v Disproportionate Care

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Practical Applications



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Vital Organ and Tissue Donation

- "a noble gesture and 'genuine act of love.'" - Pope Saint John Paul II, *Address to Transplantation Society* August 29, 2000, n.1
- "Catholic healthcare institutions should encourage and provide the means whereby those who wish to do so may arrange for the donation of their organs and bodily tissue, for ethically legitimate purposes, so that they may be used for donation and research after death." - Ethical and Religious Directives Part II n. 63

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Practical Applications

Advance Directives

- Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare
 - We choose a health care agent who makes decisions on our behalf
- Healthcare Directive (Living Will)
 - A statement where one's wishes for the end of life are written down
- Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST)
 - Appropriate for individuals with a serious illness or advanced frailty near the end-of-life
 - Gives medical orders and tells emergency personnel what treatments patient wants to have during a medical emergency
 - Has the same ethical concerns as Living Wills

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Questions & Answers

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