

# The Institute for Catechesis and Formation

## *Course Outline for Instructors*



## **ICF 105 – Christian Morality**

*This course provides a basic introduction to the fundamental teachings of Catholic morality and its foundations in Sacred Scripture, Tradition and Natural Law. Participants will examine virtue, conscience formation and apply moral theology to contemporary moral issues in the areas of health care and human sexuality*

**Texts:** Introduction to Catholicism for Adults, Rev. James Socias (ICA)

### **Supplemental Reading/Additional Resources:**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC):  
<http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm>

The Bible: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/>

## **Week 1: Dignity of the Human Person**

### **– Man created in the Image and likeness of God**

ICA Chapter 17, pp. 573-615; CCC Part III, Section 1

**What does it mean to live the *moral life*?**

***Imago Dei* – image of God** (CCC 355-359)

God creates us to be like Him, *in His image and likeness*: analogy in communion of persons, self-gift, unity in difference. We image God in ourselves, and in the communion of persons.

Man and woman have the capacity for God (*capax Dei*). The human person is unlike any other creature on the earth, having a status and a vocation that no other creature has: to be like God. Being like God means *to love*.

God created man and woman to *have a share in His creative power* (cf. Gen 1:28) and *in His kingship* by giving them dominion over the earth (cf. Gn. 1:26).

**Freedom** (CCC 1731)

*Freedom properly understood is to use one's ability and will to choose what is good and what God wills for our lives and act accordingly. Free will is at the very heart of the human person's place in creation. Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.* Bl. John Paul II

***Authentic freedom is oriented toward the Good and Truth.*** (3 Jn 1:11 - *Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does what is good is of God; whoever does what is evil has never seen God;* Jn 14:6 - *Jesus said to him, 'I am the way and the truth and the life';* Jn 8:31-32 - *If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*)

We determine ourselves through our **freely chosen acts**. Our acts give definition to who we are as moral beings, and in relation to God and others. We freely choose actions, but *we, ourselves, do not determine if these acts are good or bad* (moral or immoral)

There is an objective moral order – what is right and what is wrong (what is good and for our fulfillment, and what is bad for us and stifles our ability to flourish.) We are all moral actors and we need guidelines. God reveals what is good (and *for our good*) and what is bad (and *will not lead us to our fulfillment*).

**Concupiscence** is the inclination to sin. St. John's first letter (1 John 2: 16-17) describes the three-fold concupiscence:

*For all that is in the world, **sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life,** is not from the Father but is from the world. Yet the world and its enticement are passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains forever.*

- **Sensual lust:** an inordinate desire for physical gratification
- **Lust of the eyes:** greed or covetousness
- **Pride of life** – arrogance or ostentation in lifestyle that reflects a willful independence from God and others

### **Eternal Law, Natural Law, Divine Law**

St. Thomas Aquinas:

**Eternal law** – “The plan of divine wisdom as directing all acts and movements.”

**Natural law** – “The rational creature’s participation in the eternal law.”

**Divine law** – “The natural law as explicitly revealed by God in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. “

**Natural law:** do what is good and avoid evil.

*Jer 31:33: But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

*Rom 2: 13-16: For it is not those who hear the law who are just in the sight of God; rather, those who observe the law will be justified. For when the Gentiles who do not have the law by nature observe the prescriptions of the law, they are a law for themselves even though they do not have the law. They show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even defend them on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge people's hidden works through Christ Jesus.*

### **The Moral Act (CCC 1750-1756)**

The moral act is comprised of three elements:

- **Object:** the act freely chosen here and now
- **Intention:** the motive behind the act freely chosen
- **Circumstance:** the situation in which the act is done; the factors *surrounding* the act

To be a morally good act, all of these elements must be morally good

As persons, we are a *body/soul unity*, possessed of the powers to *reason* and *act* (intellect and will).

- **Temptation**  
All people share in the one human nature that was weakened by Original Sin; all people are vulnerable to temptation. The nature of temptation will be discussed and its causes. What are the means by which we are tempted? Temptation occurs in three phases: suggestion, complacency and consent. How do we overcome temptation? How can we deal with it?
- **Errors of Conscience** – Moral relativism – Judging an action from a subjective perspective is a rejection of Christian morality. Common forms are Situation Ethics, Consequentialism and Proportionalism.

*Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

*A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions. CCC 1803*

- The **theological virtues** are Faith, Hope and Charity. These refer to God and are given us by Him through grace. (CCC 1812-13)
  - **Faith** – belief in God and all He has told and revealed to us
  - **Hope** – a desire for God and the kingdom of heaven, and realizing we cannot do anything simply of our own strength
  - **Charity (Love)** – love of God, neighbor and self
- The **Cardinal Virtues** are the four principle moral virtues:
  - **Prudence** – the virtue that allows us to make right judgments
  - **Justice** – the constant and permanent determination to give everyone his or her rightful due
  - **Fortitude** – allows us to overcome fear and remain steady on our will in the face of obstacles
  - **Temperance** – restraint of our desires and passions; moderation, self-mastery

There is a connection between what is *morally good* and the *fulfillment of one's destiny* – which is eternal life with God.

## **Week 2: Conscience, Action and God's Grace**

### **ICA Chapter 18; CCC Part III, Section 2**

We determine ourselves through our **freely chosen acts**. Our acts give definition to who we are as moral beings, and in relation to God and others. We choose actions, but **we do not determine if these acts are good or bad** (cf. Gn. 2:16-17; Rev. 2:7)

We must make **decisions** in accord with **Truth**. (**John 8: 31-32** - *If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*)

### **What is Conscience?**

#### **Conscience (CCC1778)**

*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. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right. It is by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognizes the prescriptions of the divine law.*

- **Right conscience** – makes a correct judgment based on the moral law
- **Erroneous conscience** – Makes an incorrect judgment. A person judges an evil act to be good
- **Doubtful conscience** – One is not sure of the morality of a choice. The person has an obligation to search out the truth before making a choice
  
- Conscience is to be oriented toward Truth and what is Good
- Conscience helps us to judge our actions rightly, *not to decide* for ourselves if an act is morally good or bad
- *Conscience is not an independent and exclusive capacity to decide what is good and what is evil. Rather there is profoundly imprinted upon it a principle of obedience vis-à-vis the objective norm which establishes and conditions the correspondence of its decisions with the commands and prohibitions which are at the basis of human behaviour. (Dominum et Vivificantem 43)*

Our **appetites** can steer us from good choices (**Rom 7: 18-23** – *For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. The willing is ready at hand, but doing the good is not. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want. Now if (I) do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. So, then, I discover the principle that when I want to do right, evil is at hand. For I take delight in the law of God, in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.*)

It is by God's *grace* and our *free response* to His self-offering, and by following Him that we can begin to overcome sin and learn to make choices that lead to our fulfillment. (Cf. 1 Cor 2:12; Rom 3:23-24; Ps 23:3, 25:4;)

Along with His *grace*, God offers us His help to avoid sin and live a good life through the Decalogue (10 Commandments). Jesus further reveals the Way to fulfillment in the Beatitudes, the Great Command (Mt 22:36-40), and by the witness of His very life, death and resurrection

The Decalogue, the Beatitudes, the cultivating virtue, and the teachings of the Church together reveal how Christ wants us to live and set us on the path to eternal happiness

- **The Ten Commandments** – Christ elevated the Old Law in the New Law. He came not to abolish the Old Law but to fulfill it; His New Covenant not only includes the Mosaic Law but also transcends and perfects the Old Covenant. The Ten Commandments do not represent a minimum standard rather they are a divine call to Christian perfection and love of God and neighbor. The Commandments show us how to be in right relationship with God, our neighbors, and ourselves.

We need the salvation only Jesus can give to us *and* His continued guidance and love. Therefore He leaves us the Sacraments, as well as precepts, to help us live as Christian witnesses. We need the *continued help of God's grace* to overcome our sinfulness and properly exercise our freedom. (*What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate.* Romans 7:15)

- **The Beatitudes** – Perfection of Moral Law (Matthew 5: 3-12)  
Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law, and He represents the continuation of God's loving and patient teaching. Jesus calls us to a mature faith: *When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things.* (1 Cor 13:11)

## **Week 3: Morality and Issues of Health and Life**

### **ICA Chapter 21**

#### **Supplemental Reading:**

[Distinction between Direct Abortion & Legitimate Medical Procedures](#)

[Advanced Healthcare Directives/Living Will](#)

Address of John Paul II: ["Life-Sustaining Treatments and Vegetative State: Scientific Advances and Ethical Dilemmas"](#) (March 20, 2004)

*Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. (CCC 2258)*

#### **Biblical Basis for respecting life – Old and New Testament**

##### **Adam and Eve procreate – Genesis 4:1**

*The man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man **with the help of the LORD.**"*

##### **Psalm 139:13**

*You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb.*

##### **Jeremiah 1:5**

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.*

##### **1 Cor 6:19-20**

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body.*

The Church says that willful acts of harm and violations to the dignity of a person are morally wrong and are injustices to the person and to the Creator (Cf. Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, p. 245ff. *Justice towards the Creator, on the part of man, comprises as we see two elements: obedience to the order of nature and emphasis on the value of the person....In any case there can be no justice towards the Creator where a correct attitude to his creatures, and in particular to other human beings, is lacking. P. 247)*

## All human life has dignity from conception to natural death

Every person is in relationship with God from the very beginning of his/her existence, and this relationship exists regardless of our awareness at any given moment throughout life. *Personhood is not contingent upon another's criteria*; it is not subjective. Personhood is not based upon one's productivity, or the ability to "contribute" to society.

## Some issues impacting the life and dignity of the human person

- **Abortion** - Regardless of the circumstances, it is never morally acceptable to directly cause the death of an unborn child. In other words, abortion is prohibited in all circumstances, and is considered intrinsically evil.

### Direct abortion is never morally permissible.

- **Indirect abortion and double-effect:** interventions that seek to treat a mother's illness, but result in the death of the unborn child may be permissible if:
  - The act itself is directly aimed at treating *a life-threatening illness* in the mother
  - The mother and physician would save the child if it were possible
  - *The death of the child is not the means by which the mother's life is saved*, but is a side effect (principle of double-effect)
  - There is a proportionate reason to save the mother's life
  - There is no other means of saving the mother's life
- **Embryonic stem-cell research**
  - The use of embryonic stem cells requires that the cells either be "harvested" from an aborted baby, that an embryo be created for the sole purpose of "harvesting" the cells (both are direct cooperation with evil); or "harvesting" cells from frozen embryos created for IVF procedures but left unused (which would be at least remote cooperation with evil.)
  - The creation of human persons for the purpose of "using their parts" is depersonalizing and views them not as persons, but objects of use.
  - Because embryonic stem cells have the potential to become any other kind of cell in the body, they are seen by many as the best sign of hope for curing a number of diseases. Research, however, is proving that the use of adult stem cells holds more real promise for good results.

See Fr. Tad Pacholcyk's [Media Myths](#)

- **Assisted Suicide/Euthanasia**
  - Death is a mystery, but Christian hope sees it through the lens of the Incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as a doorway to new life – eternal life.



- It is never permissible to cause the death of another person – directly or by passive means – even if the intention is a so-called “mercy”
- *Intentional euthanasia, whatever its forms or motives, is murder. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator. CCC 2324*
- *Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable. CCC 2277*
- *Thus an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator. The error of judgment into which one can fall in good faith does not change the nature of this murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded. CCC 2277*
- *Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be legitimate; it is the refusal of "over-zealous" treatment. Here one does not will to cause death; one's inability to impede it is merely accepted. The decisions should be made by the patient if he is competent and able or, if not, by those legally entitled to act for the patient, whose reasonable will and legitimate interests must always be respected. CCC 2278*
- *Even if death is thought imminent, the ordinary care owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted. The use of painkillers to alleviate the sufferings of the dying, even at the risk of shortening their days, can be morally in conformity with human dignity if death is not willed as either an end or a means, but only foreseen and tolerated as inevitable Palliative care is a special form of disinterested charity. As such it should be encouraged. CCC 2279*

- **Medical ethics and decision-making**

- Advanced Directives
- Ordinary vs. extraordinary treatment
- What you should know about Advance Health Care Directives

See **Supplemental Reading** list, and [DNR](#); [Nutrition and Hydration](#)

## Week 4: Chastity in Relationships

### ICA Chapter 22

God created man and woman in His image and likeness, equal in dignity, and united in marriage with natural sexual differences and a strong mutual attraction. We must have a proper understanding of our human nature in order to understand and uphold the dignity of the human person. The sixth and ninth commandments will be examined taking a look at the true meaning of sexuality as reflected by Saint Pope John Paul II in his Theology of the Body. He taught that the intimate union of a married man and woman reflects the community of divine Persons that is the Blessed Trinity.

#### **Suggested Reading:**

November 17, 2009, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, [Life-Giving Love in an Age of Technology](#)

November 14, 2006, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, [Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan](#)

#### **The Virtue of Chastity**

*Chastity is a moral virtue that empowers a person to have a loving relationship with God and to see Christ in every human person. It is to see others as complete human persons rather than viewing them as objects. The Catechism describes the virtue of Chastity as “the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. CCC 2337*

**Chastity** is the *worship of God in your body*: It is a work of the Holy Spirit, and a stance of self-giving love which is fruitful; a stance of being a disciple of the Lord. Chastity never uses another or reduces him/her to a means to an end. Chastity is expressed in all of our relationships and every aspect of our lives.

Chastity is a **stance before the other person**, whereby I see him as a good; I desire and seek the good for him; I see him in his potential (the way God sees him); and I am willing to give myself totally, to *take the risk* by loving the other person. Chastity speaks of a **deeper commitment** that is essential to the endurance of a relationship, including marriage. It shows that there is a **willingness to sacrifice** for the other person.

**The Christian vision of human sexuality**, as expressed in the virtue of chastity, is one which takes into account the human person as a whole, seeking what is good, true and beautiful in every person.

- **For the Unmarried Person**, chastity in one’s sexual life means **abstinence** from sexual relations (in anticipation of marriage in the future, or as a

sacrificial gift of self to God if one remains unmarried).

- **Within the vocation of Marriage**, chastity is expressed *both* in the **sexual union** (which is unitive and procreative) and in **abstaining from sexual relations** during certain periods (for prayer and spiritual sacrifice, cf. 1 Cor 7:5; or, with good reason, to postpone for a time, - or indefinitely – conceiving a child, cf. [Humanae vitae](#) 16)

## Marital Love

In a Christian vision of marriage it is proper to speak of *the marital act*, because **marriage is the privileged place for sexual expression**. The current threats to our sexuality (artificial reproductive technologies, “gender reassignment” surgery, same-sex “marriage”) rest on a proper understanding of the *human person* and the natural and theological/sacramental *meaning of marriage*

The purpose of the marital act is essentially three-fold: for the *good of the couple* and their bond, to *maintain lasting unity* between them, and to *bear fruit* (most concretely in bearing and raising children, (but in numerous other ways, such as charity, communal living, hospitality, care for extended family, etc.) These are expressions of the **goods of marriage**: Unity, Indissolubility, and the Openness to children

Sexual expression within marriage must respect the *language of the body*:

**What is this language spoken by the body?** *First, the body reminds us that we have been generated from others. Thus, it tells us that dependence is part of the human condition and prompts us to live in grateful acceptance of God’s gifts. Then, the body shows that it is possible to encounter other people and to share a common world with them, as it happens in the union between man and woman, where their masculinity and femininity reveal to them a call to mutual love.*

*Finally, the body tells us that love is fruitful, creative, able to open up new horizons, as when father and mother generate a child. In these experiences the body reveals also the presence of God, origin and destiny of our life, whose generosity entrusts to us the person of the beloved, and whose blessing makes our love fruitful.*

*In sum, when we listen to the language of the body we realize that we are not autonomous and isolated individuals, but persons who belong to others and are called to give themselves in love to them.*

[Fr. Jose Granados, DCJM](#)

## Issues in Marriage, Family and Human Sexuality

- **The importance of the family**
  - The first and most essential cell of society
  - Culture is built through the family
  - Family is the place of care for spouses, children, extended family, and community
  - Marriage is a covenant of life and love
- **Human life and its absolute dignity**
  - Human life begins at conception, i.e. fertilization
  - Personhood *does not rely on* consciousness, intelligence, or cognizance. Personhood is not an arbitrary classification.
  - Potentiality – a person is not just *stuff*: a clump of cells or some biological material. Every person at conception contains the potentiality for self-development, and is unique and unrepeatable

- **Artificial Reproductive Technologies – ARTs** (ex. human cloning, IVF)

Artificial methods of reproduction deny the giftedness of the child, and its ultimate creator, who is God (The man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the LORD." Genesis 4:1) They have the danger of viewing the child as a possession, or their motherhood or fatherhood as something to which they have a right – not something that is a privilege and a gift.

- The desire for children is a good one, and given us by God
- This desire is caught up in our *sexual differentiation* and need for *communion*
- The capacity for cooperating with God to bring a new life into being is His gift to us, and is uniquely ours to employ in freedom and love with a person to whom we have vowed to give ourselves completely
- ARTs **separate the life-giving and unifying purposes of married love** and transform the creation of new life into a **transaction** in which the **child is manufactured** in a sterile, scientific environment by a **technician whose motive is not love**, but carrying out a **procedure**. The **child is not received as a gift**, but is produced – which **reduces the child to an object**.
- The woman and man are also objectified: lack of respect for the conjugal union, reduction of their bodies, sexual organs and gametes to mere *parts* needed for the completion of a technical process
- A child is a *gift of God*, and has the right to be the fruit of the conjugal act of his/her parents, with a right to be respected as a person from the moment of conception

- **Contraception, Sterilization, and NFP**
  - Contraception purposely renders the procreative dimension of the marital act inoperable. In other words, the complete gift of self on the part of the spouses is unable to be fully shared because a part of who they are as persons is withheld. This is intrinsically evil because it denies the life-giving aspect of marriage and the marital act, and it sets a very real (if not always tangible) barrier between husband and wife
  - Contraception acts to thwart the natural function of the body – to change it (in the case of the woman on the Pill, to *masculinize* it), and to treat the natural bodily functions as pathologies. It treats procreation as a disease
  - There is a very real separation that occurs between spouses who contracept, even if it is not always tangible, or if they are not fully conscious of it.
  - Direct sterilization is never morally permissible (“Direct sterilization” means that it is done for the purposes of preventing conception; a person may be rendered sterile as a result of an intervention to treat a disease. The intention is not to prevent conception in the future, but it is the foreseen but unintended result. This is the principle of double-effect)
  - NFP respects the integrity of the person and fosters the love of the spouse.
  - “Natural” doesn’t just mean “it’s green,” or it isn’t “artificial.” It is “natural” because it respects the integrity of the person, does not treat either man or woman as an object, does not interfere with the body’s natural processes, or create a barrier (physical or symbolic/spiritual) between husband and wife
  - NFP fosters communication, shared responsibility, and promotes a deeper relationship between the couple and with God
  - NFP addresses the true meaning of being *responsible* in regard to being open to the gift of children: listen to your bodies, listen to the Lord, and use your freedom to be open to the gift that God desires you to receive
  - NFP entails *listening to the body*, **and** *listening to the Lord*; accepting the body, and how God has *made us for love* which is **fruitful**