



THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not kill”

2. Respect for the Human Person, Safeguarding Peace, Avoiding War.

Texts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY OF PERSONS

Respect for the souls of others: scandal

Scandal is an attitude or behaviour which leads another to do evil. The person who gives scandal becomes his neighbour's tempter. He damages virtue and integrity; he may even draw his brother into spiritual death. Scandal is a grave offence if by deed or omission another is deliberately led into a grave offence. (2284)

Scandal takes on a particular gravity by reason of the authority of those who cause it or the weakness of those who are scandalized. It prompted our Lord to utter this curse: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Mt 18:6) Scandal is grave when given by those who by nature or office are obliged to teach and educate others. (2285)

Scandal can be provoked by laws or institutions, by fashion or opinion. Therefore, they are guilty of scandal who establish laws or social structures leading to the decline of morals and the corruption of religious practice, or to social conditions that, intentionally or not, make Christian conduct and obedience to the Commandments difficult and practically impossible. This is also true of business leaders who make rules encouraging fraud, teachers who provoke their children to anger, or manipulators of public opinion who turn it away from moral values. “Temptations to sin are sure to come; but woe to him by whom they come!” (Lk 17:1) (2286) (2287)

Respect for health

Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good.

Concern for the health of its citizens requires that society help in the attainment of living-conditions that allow them to grow and reach maturity: food and clothing, housing, health care, basic education, employment and social assistance. (2288)

If morality requires respect for the life of the body, it does not make it an absolute value. It rejects a neo-pagan notion that tends to promote *the cult of the body*, to sacrifice everything for its sake, to idolize physical perfection and success at sports. By its selective preference of the strong over the weak, such a conception can lead to the perversion of human relationships. (2289)

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. (2290)

The *use of drugs* inflicts very 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 co-operation in evil, since they encourage people to practices gravely contrary to the moral law. (2291)

Respect for the person and scientific research

Scientific, medical or psychological experiments on human individuals or groups can contribute to healing the sick and the advancement of public health. (2292)

Basic scientific research, as well as applied research, is a significant expression of man's dominion over creation. Science and technology are precious resources when placed at the service of man and promote his integral development for the benefit of all. By themselves however they cannot disclose the meaning of existence and of human progress. Science and technology are ordered to man, from whom they take their origin and development; hence they find in the [human] person and in his moral values both evidence of their purpose and awareness of their limits. They must be at the service of the human person, of his inalienable rights, of his true and integral good, in conformity with the plan and the will of God. (2293-2294)

Research or experimentation on the human being cannot legitimate acts that are in themselves contrary to the dignity of persons and to the moral law. The subjects' potential consent does not justify such acts. Experimentation on human beings is not morally legitimate if it exposes the subject's life or physical and psychological integrity to disproportionate or avoidable risks. Experimentation on human beings does not conform to the dignity of the person if it takes place without the informed consent of the subject or those who legitimately speak for him. (2295)

Respect for bodily integrity – terrorism, torture, mutilation

Kidnapping and *hostage taking* bring on a reign of terror; by means of threats they subject their victims to intolerable pressures. They are morally wrong. *Terrorism* which threatens, wounds and kills indiscriminately is gravely against justice and charity. *Torture* which uses physical or moral violence to extract confessions, punish the guilty, frighten opponents, or satisfy hatred is contrary to respect for the person and for human dignity. Except when performed for strictly therapeutic medical reasons, directly intended *amputations, mutilations* and *sterilizations* performed on innocent persons are against the moral law. (2297)

Respect for the dead

The dying should be given attention and care to help them live their last moments in dignity and peace. They will be helped by the prayer of their relatives, who must see to it that the sick receive at the proper time the sacraments that prepare them to meet the living God. (2299)

The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection. The burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy; it honours the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit. (2300)

SAFEGUARDING PEACE

Peace

By recalling the commandment, “You shall not kill”, our Lord asked for peace of heart, and denounced murderous anger and hatred as immoral. (Mt 5:21)

Anger is a desire for revenge. “To desire vengeance in order to do evil to someone who should be punished is illicit”, but it is praiseworthy to impose restitution “to correct vices and maintain justice” (St. Thomas Aquinas). If anger reaches the point of a deliberate desire to kill or seriously

wound a neighbour it is gravely against charity; it is a mortal sin. The Lord says, "Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement." (Mt 5:22) (2302)

Deliberate *hatred* is contrary to charity. Hatred of the neighbour is a sin when one deliberately wishes him evil. Hatred of the neighbour is a grave sin when one deliberately desires him grave harm. "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." (Mt 5:44-45) (2303)

Respect for and development of human life require *peace*. Peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of powers between adversaries. Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons, free communication among men, respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity. Peace is "the tranquillity of order". Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity. (2304)

Earthly peace is the image and fruit of the *peace of Christ*, the messianic 'Prince of Peace'. By the blood of his Cross, "in his own person he killed the hostility" (Eph 2:16), he reconciled men with God and made his Church the sacrament of the unity of the human race and of its union with God. "He is our peace" (Eph 2:14). He has declared: "Blessed are the peacemakers." (Mt 5:9) (2305)

Avoiding war – conditions for a just war'

The fifth commandment forbids the intentional destruction of human life. Because of the evils and injustices that accompany all war, the Church insistently urges everyone to prayer and to action so that the divine Goodness may free us from the ancient bondage of war. (2307)

All citizens and all governments are obliged to work for the avoidance of war.

However, as long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defence, once all peace efforts have failed. (2308)

The strict conditions for *legitimate defence by military force* require rigorous consideration. The gravity of such a decision makes it subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy. These are the traditional elements enumerated in what is called the "just war" doctrine At one and the same time:

- the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave and certain;
- all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;
- there must be serious prospects of success;
- the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition.

The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgement of those who have responsibility for the common good. (2309)

Public authorities, in this case, have the right and duty to impose on citizens the *obligations necessary for national defence*. (2310)

Those who are sworn to serve their country in the armed forces are servants of the security and freedom of nations. If they carry out their duty honourably, they truly contribute to the common good of the nation and the maintenance of peace.

Public authorities should make equitable provision for those who for reasons of conscience refuse to bear arms; these are nonetheless obliged to serve the human community in some other way. (2311)

The Church and human reason both assert the permanent validity of the *moral law during armed conflict*. The mere fact that war has regrettably broken out does not mean that everything becomes licit between the warring parties. (2312)

Non-combatants, wounded soldiers, and prisoners must be respected and treated humanely.

Actions deliberately contrary to the law of nations and to its universal principles are crimes, as are the orders that command such actions. Blind obedience does not suffice to excuse those who carry them out. Thus the extermination of a people, nation or ethnic minority must be condemned as a mortal sin. One is morally bound to resist orders that command genocide. (2313)

Every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and man, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation. A danger of modern warfare is that it provides the opportunity to those who possess modern scientific weapons - especially atomic, biological or chemical weapons - to commit such crimes. (2314)

The *accumulation of arms* strikes many as a paradoxically suitable way of deterring potential adversaries from war. They see it as the most effective means of ensuring peace among nations. This method of deterrence gives rise to strong moral reservations. The *arms race* does not ensure peace. Far from eliminating the causes of war, it risks aggravating them. Spending enormous sums to produce ever new types of weapons impedes efforts to aid needy populations; it thwarts the development of peoples. *Over-armament* multiplies reasons for conflict and increases the danger of escalation. (2315)

The *production and the sale of arms* affect the common good of nations and of the international community. Hence public authorities have the right and duty to regulate them. (2316)

Injustice, excessive economic or social inequalities, envy, distrust and pride raging among men and nations constantly threaten peace and cause wars. Everything done to overcome these disorders contributes to building up peace and avoiding war:

"Insofar as men are sinners, the threat of war hangs over them and will so continue until Christ comes again; but insofar as they can vanquish sin by coming together in charity, violence itself will be vanquished and these words will be fulfilled: "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Is 2:4)" (Vatican II) (2317)

IN BRIEF

- **Scandal is a grave offence when by deed or omission it deliberately leads others to sin gravely. (2326)**
- **Because of the evils and injustices that all war brings with it, we must do everything reasonably possible to avoid it. The Church prays: "From famine, pestilence and war, O Lord, deliver us". (2327)**
- **The Church and human reason assert the permanent validity of the moral law during armed conflicts. Practices deliberately contrary to the law of nations and to its universal principles are crimes. (2328)**
- **The arms race is one of the greatest curses on the human race and the harm it inflicts on the poor is more than can be endured. (2329)**
- **"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt 5:9). (2330)**