

LESSON 29: Informing Conscience



REFERENCE

Page 361-362 [TRAINING:
CONSCIENCE properly INFORMED]



WHAT YOU NEED

- (4) LSM: 'Informing Conscience'
- (5) LSM: 'The STOP Sign'
- (6) Bibles

AIM

- To help learners realise that their conscience needs to be properly formed and informed
- To give learners a method of making moral decisions

OUTCOMES

- DAP Learners appreciate that conscience needs to be formed and informed.
- KUI Learners understand how to inform their consciences.

TEACHER'S NOTE

Familiarise yourself with the STOP Sign method of moral decision-making that is outlined in Pennock's *Moral Problems*, Chapter 2. Here is a short synopsis:

- **S**earch out the facts of the issue by asking key questions: what, who, why, where, when and how.
- **T**hink creatively about the alternatives to your proposed actions and consider all the possible consequences.
- **O**thers, both the effects on them and their advice, should be considered. (What do the law, the Church, people I respect, values say? How should I rank the values involved in this action?)
- **P**ray for guidance. (What would God expect/want me to do?)

The Lesson Materials page 'The Stop Sign' gives further details.

LESSON OUTLINE

1 Introduction

In the previous lesson we looked at what conscience is. While our responsibility is to be true to our consciences, we can have consciences that are mistaken or dulled. It is, therefore, also our duty to form and inform our consciences.

2 Conscience Survey

Present the following three statements to the class, asking the learners in each case to rate their response on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree)

- a. Something is right for me if I think it is right.
- b. In making moral decisions, sincerity is all that matters.
- c. No one has the right to judge my actions right or wrong.

The learners need not be asked to reveal their ratings, but ask them immediately, in small groups, to discuss the following two questions:

- a. If sincerity is what matters, then was it all right for terrorists to destroy the Twin Towers in New York? Is it OK for you to steal from the supermarket to give money to the poor? Give reasons.
- b. If some action is right because “I think it is right,” what role does law have? Do other people play any part at all in our moral decisions?

(From Pennock & Finley *Christian Morality & You*, p 81)

3 Informing Conscience

Ask the learners to call to mind the different voices that are competing for their attention: parents, peers, friends, church, school, television, magazines, pop songs, ... Having listed these, pose the question: Which of these can I trust when it comes to guiding me on the path to life?

4 The Lighthouse

Distribute the Lesson Materials page ‘Informing Conscience’. Learners will need time to read this reflectively. Invite discussion, drawing out the following points:

- The Church’s moral wisdom has evolved through 2000 years of experience under the guidance of the Spirit of Jesus.
- The Church’s moral wisdom is not intended as a condemnation but as an encouragement and point to aim for.

5 The STOP Sign

An appeal to the Church’s wisdom is best seen within the process of moral decision-making. Present the Stop Sign Method contained on the Lesson Materials page ‘The STOP Sign’, but don’t distribute the page until after the presentation. Your presentation might go something like this:

- i. Simply write up the word STOP, announce that it is an acronym, and ask learner groups to discuss and to come up with a creative interpretation of how this word might contain a key to moral decision-making. Don’t spend too long on this.
- ii. Go one step further by expanding the first letter to the word SEARCH, and again invite good guesses as to what the other three words signify.
- iii. After a few minutes distribute the page for reading and discussion.

The next lesson will provide an opportunity to apply the method.

6 Scripture

[Wisdom 7:7-14]

OTHER IDEAS

7 Summary

Invite discussion of one or two of the following points:

- Conscience is an inner dialogue with God who calls us to be what we are meant to be.
- We have two obligations with respect to conscience: (i) to follow our consciences, (ii) to develop an informed conscience.
- Sincerity is important, but it is not enough: we must also use our judgement when making decisions.
- When we violate our consciences we are guilty of sin.

8 Dulling Conscience

Ask the learners to list ways in which a person's conscience can gradually become dulled, for example – carelessness in little things, keeping bad company, being indiscriminate in what one reads and watches, laziness, selfishness, pride, disrespect for authority, neglect of prayer, refusal to admit fault or guilt. In each case that they mention, they offer concrete examples of how the dulling of conscience might take place.

MATERIALS



LEARNER

- Michael Burke. 1991. 'Conscience needs to be properly informed' 187 in *Connections*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publications, pp. 148 –149
- Michael Burke. 1991. 'About Moral Ideals' 188 in *Connections*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publications, p. 149
- Michael Pennock. 'The "Stop" Sign' in *Moral Problems*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, pp27-53 (summary)

Lesson Materials



Informing Conscience

Conscience needs to be properly informed

Our moral instinct points to the fact that Conscience (our sense of what is truly human) is part of our basic 'equipment' as human beings, not something added by society. But just as our instinct to eat needs to be - and inevitably is - educated (we learn - simply from living in our community - how to eat, what to eat, and what to avoid, etc.), so too our moral capacity inevitably absorbs values and principles - the only variable is *which* values and principles. In other words our Conscience is not left to 're-invent the wheel' - and it is in this light that the Church's moral guidance should be seen: we inherit a community's moral wisdom as it has evolved through ages of experience. (Note examples of this evolution: changes in the Church's attitudes to women, to usury, to religious pluralism, to slavery, to war - and note that the Church's moral insight continues to evolve through Christians' efforts to respond to God's call through changing times and circumstances). The Church's moral wisdom then, is an invaluable resource and it is appropriate to respond with respect and openness.

About moral ideals

A harbour light-house is a service: it shows ships the correct direction to sail. Without it, ships might blindly sail further and further away from the harbour instead of towards it. Conditions at sea might make it impossible to sail directly towards the light-house, but the light-house was never intended to stand as a condemnation of the indirectness of the path a struggling ship might trace; rather, the light-house act as a constant aiming-point and encouragement . . .

Lesson Materials



The STOP Sign

(Search, Think, Others, Prayer)

SEARCH

What?

Before passing judgement on the morality of an action, we must know precisely what issues are concerned.

- What is appropriate behaviour for me?
- What behaviour truly represents my relationship and commitment?

Why?

Motive is an important question to answer in every area of morality. A bad or selfish motive would make us suspect immediately that the action one proposes to do is wrong.

Who?

- Who does this action affect?

When & Where?

- Does the time and place make the action unacceptable?

How?

Some activities become immoral if they are uncaring, harmful or exploitative of another person.

THINK

Reason is often clouded by emotional involvement. It is therefore important to think about the issue before one becomes emotionally involved. To be truly human is to see more than one way to approach reality, even if the crowd see it just the one way.

- What are the advantages of this action?
- What are the possible consequences? Emotionally? Physically? Spiritually?

OTHERS

- How do we relate to the other?
- How will this act influence the other person?
- What is the value of principles discovered by others who have gone before us?
- What is the value of consulting suitable, trusted others on their beliefs about this issue?

PRAYER

Jesus understands us; our problems, our joys and strong desires, better than anyone. He knows the kind of society we live in. Jesus stands ready to help us in all difficult decisions, but we must be willing to ask for his help.

© Michael Pennock. 'The "Stop" Sign' in *Moral Problems*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, p 27-53 (summary)

LESSON 30: Moral Principles



REFERENCE

Page 362–363 [TRAINING: The ability to weigh up judgement]



WHAT YOU NEED

- (1) LSM: 'Tom and Jack: A Case Study'
- (2) LSM: 'Ends and Means'
- (3) LSM: 'The Stop Sign' (Lesson 29)
- (4) LSM: 'Key Moral Principles'

AIMS

- To introduce the idea of moral principles as guidelines for moral choice
- To help learners identify particular moral principles

OUTCOMES

- KUI Learners understand the usefulness of moral principles in guiding decisions.
- SKL Learners identify particular moral principles in given scenarios.

TEACHER'S NOTE

Every real-life situation is unique, and moral choices are often not clear-cut. However, there are certain well-tested principles we can apply to help in our decision-making. In this lesson, and the following one we introduce the idea of such principles, and help learners to identify and apply them.

Divide the class into 6 small groups for activity (4).

LESSON OUTLINE

1 Introduction

- i. Refer the learners to the case study 'Tom and Jack' from the previous lesson. What if Jack, unbeknown to Tom or any other of his class, was selling drugs to support his family? Would Jack be justified in his action?
- ii. Pose a second scenario. A high school coach has a very good team. It is up against some stiff competition, however. The outcome of the game is crucial if the team is to win the championship. At half-time he gives the players oranges with some "power boosters" (drugs) added. "It's just a help to them," he explains, "a way of bringing the team to its best possible performance level." Is the coach justified in doing this? Again, invite discussion: is there any similarity in the two scenarios?

2 Ends and Means

In the two cases above, we would judge against both Jack and the coach if we apply the moral principle: *the end* (supporting the family, raising the performance level) *does not justify the means* (selling drugs, administering drugs). One cannot directly do something that is evil in order to bring about the good effect one is hoping for. Distribute the Lesson Materials page 'Ends and Means', and ask learners to indicate which cases they think violate the "End does not justify the means" principle.

3 The STOP Sign

Revisit the STOP Sign method introduced in Lesson 2. Propose the idea that testing a choice of action against some moral principle can be seen as part of the OTHERS step, since such principles have been developed by other human beings through centuries of experience. We would be foolish to ignore the wisdom contained in them.

4 Key Principles

Distribute the Lesson Materials page 'Key Moral Principles'. Groups are given one of the six principles listed in Part A. They are asked to share instances from their own experience where the principle in question was applicable.

OTHER IDEAS

5 More Moral Principles

Learners could be challenged to apply the moral principles given in Part B of the Lesson Materials page 'Key Moral Principles' to any of the cases dealt with in the lesson. These principles are rather abstract in nature and will need some introduction by way of examples. You might try the following applications:

- Long-term good: Euthanasia (mercy-killing)
- Proportionate reason: Killing in self-defence
- Double effect: Dropping a nuclear bomb to end a war

MATERIALS

LEARNER

- Michael Pennock. 1979. 'Exercise 2' in *Moral Problems*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, p 38
- Nano Brennan & others. 1977. 'Key Moral Principles' in *The Moral Life: Guidelines for the teacher*. Dublin; Veritas, p 22
- Michael Burke. 1991. "Sample moral principles to consider" 189 in *Connections*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publications, p 149



Lesson Materials



Tom and Jack: A Case Study

Apply the steps in the S-T-O-P of the STOP sign to the following case. Discuss thoroughly with your classmates.

Scenario: Tom and Jack are good friends. Tom discovers that Jack is a drug pusher, a pusher of pills. Jack sells to high school kids and also to kids in junior high. His argument is that the kids know what the effects of the drugs are, and this relieves him of any responsibility.

Tom is quite disturbed by his friend's behaviour. He seeks advice from his friend Jim who claims that Tom should not turn Jack in. Why? Because that would be meddling in something that does not concern him; furthermore, it would be betraying a friend. In addition, what good would it do? The kids who use drugs would just get them from somebody else.

Tom's girlfriend also thinks it would be a bad scene for him to turn Jack in to the authorities. The worst thing a person can do is to betray a friend.

On confronting Jack, Tom learns that he is willing to stop pushing after he gets rid of his current supply. But Tom is not at all convinced. He is in a real turmoil. What should he do?

Some questions

1. To whom does Tom owe the greatest responsibility- his friend or those who might purchase pills from him? Whose welfare should he be most concerned about? What if Jack had been his brother?
2. Why is there such a strong feeling that one should never tell on a friend?
3. Does Tom have a *right* to interfere in Jack's affairs? An *obligation*? What are some of the alternatives available to him to stop Jack? Some of the consequences if he does or does not?
4. When does someone have the responsibility to interfere in someone else's life? What about the responsibility when that behavior is legal and widely approved of? (e.g. abortion) What guidelines would you establish in answering this question?
5. Is it the seller's or buyer's responsibility if the buyer suffers some ill effects? What about the age of the buyer?

Lesson Materials



Ends and Means

Listed below are several cases. Put a tick next to those items which you think violate the "End does not justify the means" principle.

- a. Taking a drug to go on a "trip"
- b. Taking a drug for a tooth extraction
- c. Testing nuclear weapons in the atmosphere for "defence purposes"
- d. Driving a car for recreation purposes
- e. Driving a car at double the speed limit for recreation purposes
- f. Burning the South African flag to protest against injustice
- g. Picketing the Israeli embassy to protest against Jewish strikes in Palestinian territory
- h. Stealing from the rich to give to the poor

Lesson Materials



Key Moral Principles

Part A

1. Always treat others as you would like them to treat you.
2. When we act for the good of others, we must be certain it really is for their good.
3. Most of our actions affect people in ever-widening circles, like the ripples of a stone thrown into a pond.
4. The idea that I must act rightly only to those I know shows a very limited understanding of the moral law.
5. The moral law concerns actions between one individual and another. Likewise it concerns actions between one group of people and another group of people.
6. When a group acts as a group, everyone in it shares the responsibility.

© Nano Brennan & others. 1977. 'Key Moral Principles' in *The Moral Life: Guidelines for the teacher*. Dublin: Veritas, p 22

Part B

Sample moral principles to consider

The long-term good of the other takes precedence over the apparent immediate good.

The principle of proportionate reason, i.e. these three criteria

1. If a value is to be sacrificed, a value at least equal to this must be at stake.
2. This other value can only be sacrificed if there is no other way of protecting or preserving it here and now.
3. The manner of protecting the value here and now should not be such as to undermine it in the long run.

The principle of double-effect, i.e. these four conditions:

1. The act can only be performed if it is not immoral in itself.
2. If there is an evil effect involved, it should not be directly intended.
3. The good effect should not come by means of the evil effect.
4. There should be proportionate reason.

© Michael Burke. 1991. "Sample moral principles to consider" 189 in *Connections*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publications, p 149

LESSON 31: Applying Moral Principles



REFERENCE

Page 362 [TRAINING: The ability to weigh up judgement]



WHAT YOU NEED

- (2) LSM: The STOP Sign (Lesson 29)

AIM

- To help learners apply moral principles to real situations

OUTCOMES

- KUI Learners understand some basic moral principles.
- SKL Learners have the ability to apply moral principles to given situations.

TEACHER'S NOTE

In this lesson, learners are introduced to the principle that concerns the three moral elements – the moral object (what is being done), the intention (why), and the circumstances (who, when, where and how). The learners should recognise these elements in the SEARCH step of the STOP Sign method presented in Lesson 29. This lesson draws extensively on Pennock's *Moral Problems*, p 39-40 & 231.

LESSON OUTLINE

1 Introduction

Conscience is sometimes called the subjective norm of morality, while law or moral principle is called the objective norm of morality. Together, subjective and objective norms of morality help us determine whether we are doing right or wrong.

2 The STOP Sign Again

Refer learners to the STOP Sign method outlined in Lesson 2. Briefly allow them to reacquaint themselves with the questions of the SEARCH step. Introduce the idea of the three elements of a moral case that correspond to these questions:

- What? The moral object (what is being done)
- Why? The intention (motive)
- Who? When? Where? How? The circumstance (the situation)

3 The Principle

- Introduce the learners to the following principle: If any of the three elements in a moral case are evil, the action itself should be considered wrong.
- Provide some examples, such as the following:
 - The act of rape is wrong. (the what)
 - Walking to the bank is not wrong (the what), but if you are walking there to rob it (the intention), then the action is wrong.

- Exploding firecrackers is not wrong (the what), neither is having a good time celebrating (the intention), but if it is done in a crowd of people (the circumstance) it is wrong because it is dangerous.

4 Applying the Principle

Considering the moral principle introduced above, learners identify which element is wrong in each of the following instances:

- Artificial contraception
- Driving while under the influence of alcohol
- Joining a club which practices racial discrimination
- Profaning God's name
- Murder
- Doing daredevil stunts on a motorcycle in front of young children

OTHER IDEAS

5 Human Life Inventory

The idea for this exercise comes from Michael Pennock's *Moral Problems*, p 179-180. Arrange the class into small groups. Present the learners with the following list of statements:

- Rapists murderers, and kidnappers should be put to death to protect society.
- Women have the right to terminate a pregnancy.
- Guns should be banned.
- Cloning (asexual reproduction), if perfected by science, should be allowed.
- Much more needs to be done to prevent teenage alcoholism.

Give the following instructions:

- Each learner indicates on the list whether they agree or disagree.
- If they disagree with a particular statement, they consider how they would change it to reflect their opinion.
- They identify the moral principle that lies behind their decision.
- They share and discuss their responses in their group.

6 React or Act?

This exercise is found in Pennock & Finley, *Christian Morality and You*, p 59. Present learners with the following situations:

- A classmate makes fun of another classmate who has a speech impediment.
- A casual friend shoplifts while you are walking through a supermarket.
- A beggar asks you to give him money for the taxi.
- You have a seat on a crowded bus. An old woman boards and has to stand. She looks directly at you.
- Your friend has a definite drinking problem.
 - Ask learners to imagine what their response might be to each,
 - then to decide whether their action qualifies as fulfilling Jesus' mandate to "treat others as you would like them to treat you", and, if not
 - to use their creative imagination to see alternative ways that would qualify.

MATERIALS

No further materials are provided for this lesson.



LESSON 32: Respect for Life



REFERENCE

Page 364-365 [EXPLORING: Respect for the SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE]



WHAT YOU NEED

- (1) LSM: 'Respect-For-Life Survey'
- (3) (5) Bibles
- (3) Strip of paper (coloured, if possible)

AIM

- To develop a positive understanding of the Fifth Commandment as an injunction to regard life as sacred

OUTCOMES

- KUI Learners understand the Fifth Commandment as a call to protect and nourish life.
- DAP Learners have an increased sensitivity towards life which they value as a gift from God.

TEACHER'S NOTE

This lesson unpacks for learners an understanding of the Fifth Commandment, and what it actually refers to. A key attitude to encourage here is the respect for the sanctity of life, for having this attitude helps us to discern more easily right action in a number of major moral issues.

LESSON OUTLINE

1 Respect-for-Life Survey

- i. Individually the learners complete the Lesson Materials page 'Respect-For-Life Survey'
- ii. In small groups they discuss the questions (a) & (b), trying to reach consensus.
- iii. In plenary, one group, chosen at random, presents their responses, indicating clear agreement and difference of opinion. Other groups are invited to share any variations they might have. This should be kept fairly brief.
- iv. Finally, ask what the basic principle underlying right choices in all the scenarios is.

2 The Fifth Commandment

The Ten Commandments can be seen as a charter or guide for good living. The 'the sanctity of life' or 'life is sacred' principle is enshrined in the Fifth Commandment, which states: "You shall not kill" [Ex 20:13] or "You must not kill" [Dt 5:17]. Invite learners to rephrase the commandment in positive terms such as: "You must safeguard and nourish life."

3 The Teaching of Jesus

In the same groups as before, learners look up one of the given texts below, and having read and reflected on it, they draft a statement of how this teaching of Jesus related to respect for life, or the sanctity of life. Their statements could be written on coloured strips of paper that are read to the class and displayed.

- Mt 5:38-48
- Mt 6:25-34
- Mk 2:23-28
- Mk 10:46-52
- Jn 8:2-11

4 Unpacking the Fifth Commandment

So far, the Fifth Commandment has been described in terms of general broad principles. The purpose in this activity is to unpack it in some detail. If the commandment is relevant to us today, then what issues does it refer to? Invite a brainstorm and list the learners' responses on the chalkboard or flip chart. Add to the list if you think important instances have been overlooked. All of the following moral actions are infringements of the Fifth Commandment:

TAKING LIFE	DIMINISHING LIFE	ENDANGERING LIFE
Murder Suicide Abortion Euthanasia Capital punishment Genocide	Cruelty to animals Mutilation & amputation Torture Sterilisation Alcohol or drug addiction Smoking Genetic engineering Child abuse	War Reckless driving Daredevil stunts Nuclear stockpiling Unhealthy work-places Kidnapping Hostage taking Hijacking Armed robbery

5 Reflection

Learners read Psalm 121. What does it reveal of God's knowledge of and care for each person?

OTHER IDEAS

6 Hebrew Scriptures

As a class, read Psalms 148 and 150. Discuss what they suggest our attitude to nature should be.

7 Human Life Inventory

Invite learner groups to discuss some of the following statements:

- In no circumstance should a young person be asked to go to war for his/her country.
- A terminally ill, long-suffering cancer patient should be put out of his or her misery if he or she requests it.
- Guns should be banned.
- Rapists, murderers and kidnappers should be put to death to protect society.
- Women have the right to terminate a pregnancy.
- Cloning, if perfected by science, should be allowed.

(From Pennock. 1979. 'Human Life Inventory' in *Moral Problems*, p 179-180)

MATERIALS

LEARNER

- Michael Pennock & James Finley. 'Respect-for-Life Survey', in *Christian Morality and You*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, p 161



Lesson Materials



Respect-For-Life Survey

Directions:

Tick the statements with which you agree.

1. Life is the most precious gift God has given to us.
2. The most serious moral problem today is abortion.
3. I could never kill another human being.
4. Hunting of animals for sport is wrong.
5. The building of nuclear weapons is an unspeakable crime against humanity.
6. The death penalty, even for criminals like murderers and rapists, is a kind of revenge and thus against the law of Christ.
7. There should be strict laws banning the possession of handguns.
8. The problem with using drugs for fun is that the person is ultimately endangering the quality of the life given to him or her by God.

Discuss:

- (a) Share your responses with your classmates. Did anybody tick all eight statements?
- (b) Why did you choose as you did? Defend your answers.