

oriented to sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good of the Church. God also acts through many actual graces, to be distinguished from habitual grace which is permanent in us.

- 2025 We can have merit in God's sight only because of God's free plan to associate man with the work of his grace. Merit is to be ascribed in the first place to the grace of God, and secondly to man's collaboration. Man's merit is due to God.
- 2026 The grace of the Holy Spirit can confer true merit on us, by virtue of our adoptive filiation, and in accordance with God's gratuitous justice. Charity is the principal source of merit in us before God.
- 2027 No one can merit the initial grace which is at the origin of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life, as well as necessary temporal goods.
- 2028 "All Christians . . . are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (LG 40 § 2). "Christian perfection has but one limit, that of having none" (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Mos.*: PG 44, 300D).
- 2029 "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24).

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ARTICLE 3

THE CHURCH, MOTHER AND TEACHER

- 2030 It is in the Church, in communion with all the baptized, that the Christian fulfills his vocation. From the Church he receives the Word of God containing the teachings of "the law of Christ."⁷² From the Church he receives the grace of the sacraments that sustains him on the "way." From the Church he learns the *example* of holiness and recognizes its model and source in the all-holy Virgin Mary; he discerns it in the authentic witness of those who live it; he discovers it in the spiritual tradition and long history of the saints

72 Gal 6:2.

who have gone before him and whom the liturgy celebrates in the rhythms of the sanctoral cycle. 1172

2031 *The moral life is spiritual worship.* We “present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,”⁷³ within the Body of Christ that we form and in communion with the offering of his Eucharist. In the liturgy and the celebration of the sacraments, prayer and teaching are conjoined with the grace of Christ to enlighten and nourish Christian activity. As does the whole of the Christian life, the moral life finds its source and summit in the Eucharistic sacrifice. 1368

I. MORAL LIFE AND THE MAGISTERIUM OF THE CHURCH 85-87 888-892

2032 The Church, the “pillar and bulwark of the truth,” “has received this solemn command of Christ from the apostles to announce the saving truth.”⁷⁴ “To the Church belongs the right always and everywhere to announce moral principles, including those pertaining to the social order, and to make judgments on any human affairs to the extent that they are required by the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvation of souls.”⁷⁵ 2246
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2033 The *Magisterium of the Pastors of the Church* in moral matters is ordinarily exercised in catechesis and preaching, with the help of the works of theologians and spiritual authors. Thus from generation to generation, under the aegis and vigilance of the pastors, the “deposit” of Christian moral teaching has been handed on, a deposit composed of a characteristic body of rules, commandments, and virtues proceeding from faith in Christ and animated by charity. Alongside the Creed and the Our Father, the basis for this catechesis has traditionally been the Decalogue which sets out the principles of moral life valid for all men. 84

2034 The Roman Pontiff and the bishops are “authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people entrusted to them, the faith to be believed and put into practice.”⁷⁶ The *ordinary* and universal *Magisterium* of the Pope and the bishops in communion with him teach the faithful the truth to believe, the charity to practice, the beatitude to hope for.

73 Rom 12:1.

74 1 Tim 3:15; LG 17.

75 CIC, can. 747 § 2.

76 LG 25.

2035 The supreme degree of participation in the authority of Christ is ensured by the charism of *infallibility*. This infallibility extends as far as does the deposit of divine Revelation; it also extends to all those elements of doctrine, including morals, without which the saving truths of the faith cannot be preserved, explained, or observed.⁷⁷

1960 2036 The authority of the Magisterium extends also to the specific precepts of the *natural law*, because their observance, demanded by the Creator, is necessary for salvation. In recalling the prescriptions of the natural law, the Magisterium of the Church exercises an essential part of its prophetic office of proclaiming to men what they truly are and reminding them of what they should be before God.⁷⁸

2041 2037 The law of God entrusted to the Church is taught to the faithful as the way of life and truth. The faithful therefore have the *right* to be instructed in the divine saving precepts that purify judgment and, with grace, heal wounded human reason.⁷⁹ They have the *duty* of observing the constitutions and decrees conveyed by the legitimate authority of the Church. Even if they concern disciplinary matters, these determinations call for docility in charity.

2442 2038 In the work of teaching and applying Christian morality, the Church needs the dedication of pastors, the knowledge of theologians, and the contribution of all Christians and men of good will. Faith and the practice of the Gospel provide each person with an experience of life "in Christ," who enlightens him and makes him able to evaluate the divine and human realities according to the Spirit of God.⁸⁰ Thus the Holy Spirit can use the humblest to enlighten the learned and those in the highest positions.

77 Cf. LG 25; CDF, declaration, *Mysterium Ecclesiae* 3.

78 Cf. DH 14.

79 Cf. CIC, can. 213.

80 Cf. 1 Cor 2:10-15.

2039 Ministries should be exercised in a spirit of fraternal service and dedication to the Church, in the name of the Lord.⁸¹ At the same time the conscience of each person should avoid confining itself to individualistic considerations in its moral judgments of the person's own acts. As far as possible conscience should take account of the good of all, as expressed in the moral law, natural and revealed, and consequently in the law of the Church and in the authoritative teaching of the Magisterium on moral questions. Personal conscience and reason should not be set in opposition to the moral law or the Magisterium of the Church. 1783

2040 Thus a true *filial spirit toward the Church* can develop among Christians. It is the normal flowering of the baptismal grace which has begotten us in the womb of the Church and made us members of the Body of Christ. In her motherly care, the Church grants us the mercy of God which prevails over all our sins and is especially at work in the sacrament of reconciliation. With a mother's foresight, she also lavishes on us day after day in her liturgy the nourishment of the Word and Eucharist of the Lord. 167

II. THE PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH

2041 The precepts of the Church are set in the context of a moral life bound to and nourished by liturgical life. The obligatory character of these positive laws decreed by the pastoral authorities is meant to guarantee to the faithful the very necessary minimum in the spirit of prayer and moral effort, in the growth in love of God and neighbor:

2042 The first precept ("You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor") requires the faithful to sanctify the day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord as well as the principal liturgical feasts honoring the mysteries of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints; in the first place, by participating in the Eucharistic celebration, in which the Christian community is gathered, and by resting from those works and activities which could impede such a sanctification of these days.⁸² 1389 2180

The second precept ("You shall confess your sins at least once a year.") ensures preparation for the Eucharist by the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation, which continues Baptism's work of conversion and forgiveness.⁸³ 1457

81 Cf. *Rom* 12:8, 11.

82 Cf. CIC, cann. 1246-1248; CCEO, can. 880 § 3, 881 §§ 1, 2, 4.

83 Cf. CIC, can. 989; CCEO, can. 719.

1389 The third precept ("You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season") guarantees as a minimum the reception of the Lord's Body and Blood in connection with the Paschal feasts, the origin and center of the Christian liturgy.⁸⁴

2043 The fourth precept ("You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church") ensures the times of asceticism and penance which prepare us for the liturgical feasts and help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart.⁸⁵

1387 The fifth precept ("You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church") means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability.⁸⁶

1438 The faithful also have the duty of providing for the material needs of the Church, each according to his abilities.⁸⁷

III. MORAL LIFE AND MISSIONARY WITNESS

2044 The fidelity of the baptized is a primordial condition for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the Church's mission in the world. In order that the message of salvation can show the power of its truth and radiance before men, it must be authenticated by the witness of the life of Christians. "The witness of a Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have great power to draw men to the faith and to God."⁸⁸

753 2045 Because they are members of the Body whose Head is Christ,⁸⁹ Christians contribute to *building up the Church* by the constancy of their convictions and their moral lives. The Church increases, grows, and develops through the holiness of her faithful, until "we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."⁹⁰

2046 By living with the mind of Christ, Christians *hasten the coming of the Reign of God*, "a kingdom of justice, love and peace."⁹¹ They do not, for all that, abandon their earthly tasks; faithful to their master, they fulfill them with uprightness, patience, and love.

84 Cf. CIC, can. 920; CCEO, cann. 708; 881 § 3.

85 Cf. CIC, cann. 1249-1251; CCEO can. 882.

86 Cf. CIC, can. 222; CCEO, can. 25; *Furthermore, episcopal conferences can establish other ecclesiastical precepts for their own territories* (Cf. CIC, can. 455).

87 Cf. CIC, can. 222.

88 AA 6 § 2.

89 Cf. Eph 1:22.

90 Eph 4:13; cf. LG 39.

91 *Roman Missal*, Preface for the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

IN BRIEF

- 2047 The moral life is a spiritual worship. Christian activity finds its nourishment in the liturgy and the celebration of the sacraments.
- 2048 The precepts of the Church concern the moral and Christian life united with the liturgy and nourished by it.
- 2049 The Magisterium of the Pastors of the Church in moral matters is ordinarily exercised in catechesis and preaching, on the basis of the Decalogue which states the principles of moral life valid for every man.
- 2050 The Roman Pontiff and the bishops, as authentic teachers, preach to the People of God the faith which is to be believed and applied in moral life. It is also incumbent on them to pronounce on moral questions that fall within the natural law and reason.
- 2051 The infallibility of the Magisterium of the Pastors extends to all the elements of doctrine, including moral doctrine, without which the saving truths of the faith cannot be preserved, expounded, or observed.
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The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:2-17

I am the LORD your God,
who brought you out
of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of bondage.

You shall have no other gods before me.
You shall not make for yourself a
graven image,
or any likeness of anything that is in
heaven above, or that is in the earth
beneath, or that is in the water under the
earth; you shall not bow down to them
or serve them; for I the LORD
your God am a jealous God, visiting
the iniquity of the fathers upon the
children to the third and the fourth
generation of those who hate me, but
showing steadfast love to thousands
of those who love me and keep my
commandments.

You shall not take
the name of the LORD
your God in vain;
for the LORD will not hold him guiltless
who takes his name in vain.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep
it holy. Six days you shall labor,
and do all your work; but the seventh
day is a sabbath to the LORD your
God; in it you shall not do any work,
you, or your son, or your daughter,
your manservant, or your
maidservant or your cattle, or the
sojourner who is within your gates;
for in six days the LORD made heaven
and earth, the sea, and all that is in
them, and rested the seventh day;
therefore the LORD blessed the
sabbath day and hallowed it.

Deuteronomy 5:6-21

I am the LORD
your God,
who brought you
out
of the land of
Egypt,
out of the house
of bondage.

You shall have
no other gods
before me . . .

You shall not take
the name of the
LORD
your God in vain . . .

Observe the
sabbath day, to
keep it holy . . .

A Traditional Catechetical Formula

1. I am the LORD
your God:
you shall not have
strange gods before
me.

2. You shall not take
the name of the
LORD your God in
vain.

3. Remember to
keep holy the
LORD's Day.

The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:2-17

Honor your father and your mother,
that your days may be long in the land
which the LORD your God gives you.

You shall not kill.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against
your neighbor.

You shall not covet
your neighbor's house;
you shall not covet
your neighbor's wife,
or his manservant, or his
maidservant, or his ox,
or his ass, or anything
that is your neighbor's.

Deuteronomy 5:6-21

Honor your
father and your
mother . . .

You shall not kill.

Neither shall you
commit adultery.

Neither shall you
steal.

Neither shall you
bear false witness
against your
neighbor.

Neither shall you
covet your
neighbor's wife . . .

You shall not
desire . . .
anything that is
your neighbor's.

A Traditional Catechetical Formula

4. Honor your
father and your
mother.

5. You shall not
kill.

6. You shall not
commit adultery.

7. You shall not
steal.

8. You shall not
bear false witness
against your
neighbor.

9. You shall not
covet your
neighbor's wife.

10. You shall not
covet your
neighbor's goods.

- 1775 The perfection of the moral good consists in man's being moved to the good not only by his will but also by his "heart."
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ARTICLE 6

MORAL CONSCIENCE

- 1776 "Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment. . . . For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. . . . His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths."⁴⁷

I. THE JUDGMENT OF CONSCIENCE

- 1777 Moral conscience,⁴⁸ present at the heart of the person, enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil.⁴⁹ It bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn, and it welcomes the commandments. When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.

- 1778 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:

Conscience is a law of the mind; yet [Christians] would not grant that it is nothing more; I mean that it was not a dictate, nor conveyed the notion of responsibility, of duty, of a threat and a promise. . . . [Conscience] is a messenger of him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and

47 GS 16.

48 Cf. *Rom* 2:14-16.

49 Cf. *Rom* 1:32.

teaches and rules us by his representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ.⁵⁰

1779 It is important for every person to be sufficiently present to himself in order to hear and follow the voice of his conscience. This requirement of *interiority* is all the more necessary as life often 1886 distracts us from any reflection, self-examination or introspection:

Return to your conscience, question it. . . . Turn inward, brethren, and in everything you do, see God as your witness.⁵¹

1780 The dignity of the human person implies and requires *uprightness of moral conscience*. Conscience includes the perception of the principles of morality (synderesis); their application in the given circumstances by practical discernment of reasons and goods; and finally judgment about concrete acts yet to be performed or already performed. The truth about the moral good, stated in the law of reason, is recognized practically and concretely by the *prudent judgment* of conscience. We call that man prudent who chooses in conformity with this judgment. 1806

1781 Conscience enables one to assume *responsibility* for the acts 1731 performed. If man commits evil, the just judgment of conscience can remain within him as the witness to the universal truth of the good, at the same time as the evil of his particular choice. The verdict of the judgment of conscience remains a pledge of hope and mercy. In attesting to the fault committed, it calls to mind the forgiveness that must be asked, the good that must still be practiced, and the virtue that must be constantly cultivated with the grace of God:

We shall . . . reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.⁵²

1782 Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. "He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters."⁵³ 2106

50 John Henry Cardinal Newman, "Letter to the Duke of Norfolk," V, in *Certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching II* (London: Longmans Green, 1885), 248.

51 St. Augustine, *In ep Jo.* 8, 9: PL 35, 2041.

52 1 Jn 3:19-20.

53 DH 3 § 2.

II. THE FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE

1783 Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings.

1784 The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults. The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart.

1785 In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path;⁵⁴ we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross. We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church.⁵⁵

III. TO CHOOSE IN ACCORD WITH CONSCIENCE

1786 Faced with a moral choice, conscience can make either a right judgment in accordance with reason and the divine law or, on the contrary, an erroneous judgment that departs from them.

1787 Man is sometimes confronted by situations that make moral judgments less assured and decision difficult. But he must always seriously seek what is right and good and discern the will of God expressed in divine law.

1788 To this purpose, man strives to interpret the data of experience and the signs of the times assisted by the virtue of prudence, by the advice of competent people, and by the help of the Holy Spirit and his gifts.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Ps* 119:105.

⁵⁵ Cf. *DH* 14.

1789 Some rules apply in every case:

— One may never do evil so that good may result from it; 1756

— the Golden Rule: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them."⁵⁶ 1970

— charity always proceeds by way of respect for one's neighbor and his conscience: "Thus sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience . . . you sin against Christ."⁵⁷ Therefore "it is right not to . . . do anything that makes your brother stumble."⁵⁸ 1827 1971

IV. ERRONEOUS JUDGMENT

1790 A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. If he were deliberately to act against it, he would condemn himself. Yet it can happen that moral conscience remains in ignorance and makes erroneous judgments about acts to be performed or already committed.

1791 This ignorance can often be imputed to personal responsibility. This is the case when a man "takes little trouble to find out what is true and good, or when conscience is by degrees almost blinded through the habit of committing sin."⁵⁹ In such cases, the person is culpable for the evil he commits. 1704

1792 Ignorance of Christ and his Gospel, bad example given by others, enslavement to one's passions, assertion of a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience, rejection of the Church's authority and her teaching, lack of conversion and of charity: these can be at the source of errors of judgment in moral conduct. 133

1793 If—on the contrary—the ignorance is invincible, or the moral subject is not responsible for his erroneous judgment, the evil committed by the person cannot be imputed to him. It remains no less an evil, a privation, a disorder. One must therefore work to correct the errors of moral conscience. 1860

1794 A good and pure conscience is enlightened by true faith, for charity proceeds at the same time "from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith."⁶⁰

56 Mt 7:12; cf. Lk 6:31; Tob 4:15.

57 1 Cor 8:12.

58 Rom 14:21.

59 GS 16.

60 1 Tim 5; cf. 3:9; 2 Tim 3; 1 Pet 3:21; Acts 24:16.

- 1751 The more a correct conscience prevails, the more do persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and try to be guided by objective standards of moral conduct.⁶¹
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IN BRIEF

- 1795 "Conscience is man's most secret core, and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths" (GS 16).
- 1796 Conscience is a judgment of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act.
- 1797 For the man who has committed evil, the verdict of his conscience remains a pledge of conversion and of hope.
- 1798 A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. Everyone must avail himself of the means to form his conscience.
- 1799 Faced with a moral choice, conscience can make either a right judgment in accordance with reason and the divine law or, on the contrary, an erroneous judgment that departs from them.
- 1800 A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience.
- 1801 Conscience can remain in ignorance or make erroneous judgments. Such ignorance and errors are not always free of guilt.
- 1802 The Word of God is a light for our path. We must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. This is how moral conscience is formed.
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61 GS 16.