

Life and Death: Some teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

The numbers refer to paragraphs in The Catholic Catechism

Everyone should obey their conscience and take responsibility.

Conscience is a judgement of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act.

Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions.

Conscience enables one to assume responsibility for the acts performed.
(1777-1781)

General laws should be applied prudently to particular cases.

Prudence is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance. Prudence is “right reason in action” writes St Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle. It is not to be confused with timidity or fear.

With the help of this virtue we apply moral principles to particular cases.
(1805-1806)

Intentional homicide.

The fifth commandment forbids direct and intentional killing as gravely sinful. The murderer and those who co-operate voluntarily in murder commit a sin that cries out to heaven for vengeance.

The moral law prohibits exposing someone to mortal danger without grave reason, as well as refusing to assist a person in danger.

The acceptance by society of murderous famines without efforts to remedy them is a scandalous injustice and a grave offence.

(2268-2269)

Euthanasia.

Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible. Whatever its motives or means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable.

However, 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.

(2276-2277)

Suicide.

Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of. Voluntary co-operation in suicide is contrary to the moral law.

However, psychological disturbances, anguish or fear of hardship, suffering or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide.

(2281)

Mortal sin (very grave sin).

For a sin to be classed as *mortal* three conditions together must be met. It must be a **very serious matter** (a life and death issue, not something superficial) and which is also done **with full knowledge** and **deliberate consent**.