



# A Moral Imperative: Justice and Compassion

The glad tidings of  
educating a new  
generation toward a just  
and compassionate world

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*If you want peace, work  
for justice.*

*Pope Paul VI*

# What is a Moral Imperative?

A moral imperative is a principle originating in a person's mind that compels that person to act.

# Clarifying the Moral Imperative

## Kant's Categorical Imperative

Kant embellishes the concept of moral imperative when he states:

It is a categorical imperative that dictates pure reason in its practical aspects. In other words, he agrees that an imperative is operative, and that we can act!

# Inconsistencies in the Categorical Imperative

The theory of categorical imperative is inconsistent; the human will is not the highest lawgiving authority.

Human reason does not enact the moral law, but only voices it. The Higher Power transmits it to us through our conscience. (e.g. Whispers)

# Developing A Moral Imperative

When we are developing a moral imperative, a dialogue ensues:

Do our responses serve humanity as an end or as a means?

Do we take responsibility for our decisions?

How do we measure our actions?

What principles of Catholic Moral Tradition can we use?

# Catholic Moral Tradition

Catholic moral tradition designates four basic principles that help a person reason and develop an operative conscience.

(Bretzke, 2007)

Each principle involves a brush with evil because compromise may or may not be involved.

# Four Basic Principles

## First Principle: Double Effect

A single act has foreseen effects— one “good” (intended), the other “evil” (tolerated), (e.g. saving the life of a mother but losing the fetus).



# Second Principle: Tolerance

We judge, according to the gospel but realize that an “evil” must be endured ( such as, a war) lest a greater “evil” occurs.



# Third Principle: Compromise

When we actively participate knowing that the social structure has an evil component (e.g. social exploitative labor conditions).

# Social Exploitation



# Fourth Principle: Lesser of Two Evils

When we evaluate the situation and compromise, selecting to counsel the use of clean needles among drug addicts.



# Acceptance or Rejection

The *first two* principles (double effect and tolerance) are generally accepted by most people, but the *last two (compromise and the lesser of two evils)* are debated and misunderstood since each suggest actively participating in evil, or at least giving up the commitment to avoid evil.

(Bretzke, 2007 ,16.)

These principles are widely used and abused by many individuals.

Our quest must be to develop an ***operative conscience using acceptable principles.***

# An Operative Conscience

Many experiences intervene in developing an operative conscience.

Early abuse, neglect, or an overwhelming need to survive all delay or distort the evolution of a well-developed conscience.

# A Moral Imperative: Justice and Compassion

An operative conscience, based on principles, initiates a moral imperative.

An operative conscience evaluates human actions based on concepts such as *justice and compassion*.

When justice and compassion are operative in an individual's life, action follows thought! An assumption can be made that a *moral imperative has been established, and is functioning*.

# A Personal Experience

In a recent text, *Called By Many Names*, which I wrote in 2003, I referred to the voice of my own conscience as the *Whispers*. When I pay attention to the Whispers, I am involved in seeking justice and making compassionate decisions.

By nature, I have a thirst for equity and the *Whispers* awaken my conscience by calling me to action. As a result of this activity, a moral imperative to act occurs within, and I am moved to action. This presentation is a moral imperative.

# A Moral Imperative: Poetry

In a few moments, I will challenge you to listen to Myla Jones. She was one of my graduate students who challenged me to identify and support her ***moral imperative*** to seek justice and compassion.

When you listen to her, you will hear her developing conscience at work and her decision-making process. After you listen, I will ask you to read her work. You will be able to identify an operative conscience and her moral imperative.

DVD Presentation: Poetry Attached

# The Four Pillars: Educating A New Generation

The four pillars of the Dominican tradition and Molloy College are exemplified in Myla's dialogue. She reflected about her actions, spirituality, research and teaching, and her service to her community.

The glad tidings of educating a new generation toward a just and compassionate world are evident in her work, dignity, and purpose.

Join me as we listen to Myla!