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# Youth minister's overview of moral theology for application with youth in the moral decision-making process

Deborah A. Bomyea

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A YOUTH MINISTER'S OVERVIEW OF  
MORAL THEOLOGY  
FOR APPLICATION WITH YOUTH IN  
THE MORAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

by

Sister Deborah A. Bomyea, O.P.

A RESEARCH PAPER  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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Rev. William Kohler  
Adviser Sister Joanne Marie Keisler

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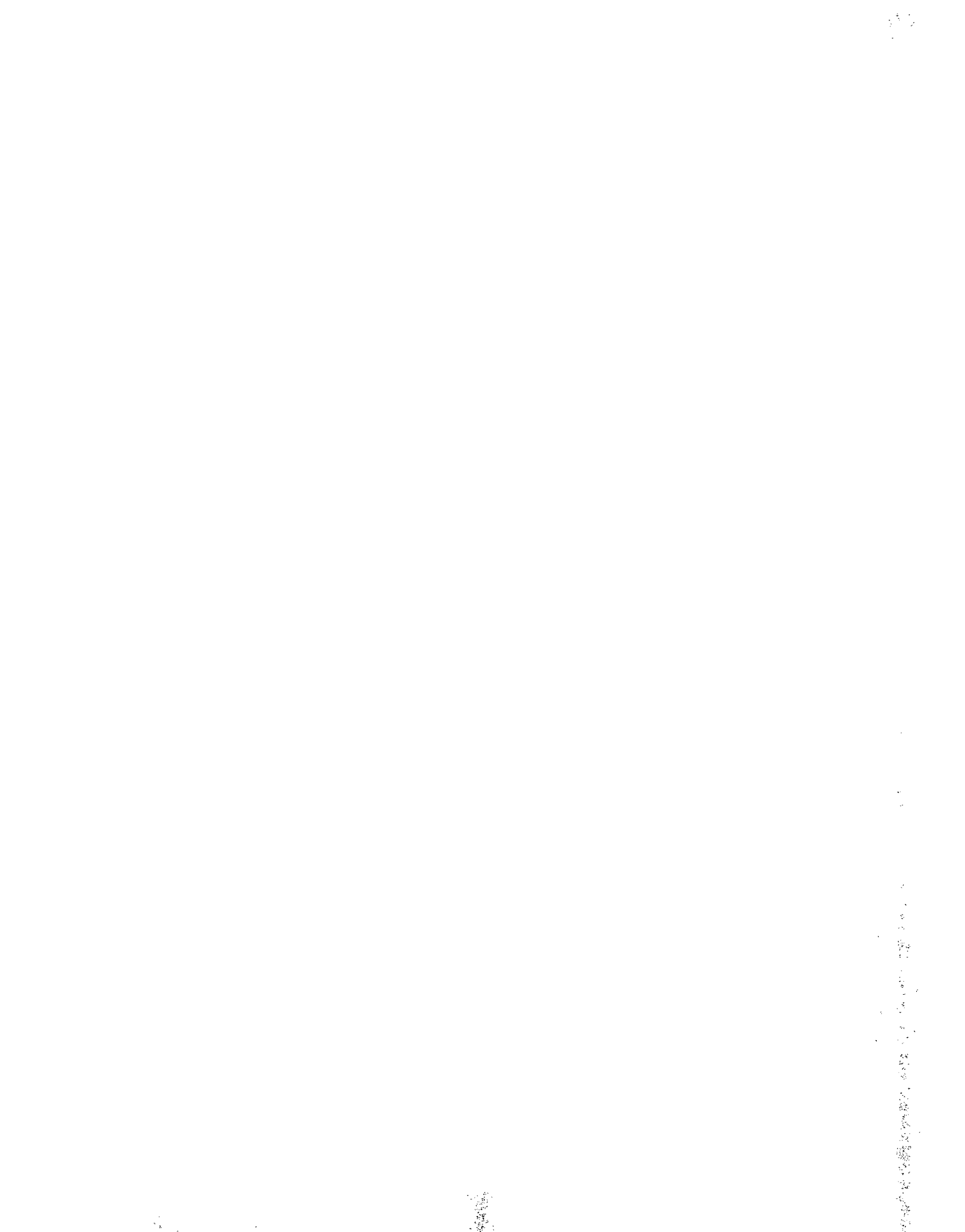


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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

One of the greatest sources of frustration in modern life today is the discrepancy found between a person's overall achievements and that individual's personal moral development. Daily news accounts give us stories of individuals who are top athletes, top executives, top lawyers, and politicians who have not only been accused, but convicted of crimes. As ministers in the Catholic Church one wonders about the moral development of those individuals. We constantly hear reports about the rise in teenage substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, teenage suicide. What has happened in their process of moral development? Are they following what they see, or are they unable to make their own choices?

The past several years have seen an increased concern for the building of values as evident in the rise of values education curriculum in our schools from elementary to college.

Yet the numbers of individuals convicted of crimes of substance abuse, attempted suicides, and teen pregnancies still grows. What is happening in our churches and schools, that they seem unable to move the young from "do's and don'ts" to a deeper moral way of thinking?

Adolescents look up to adults who are witnesses to the deeper meanings and values of life, who are models of what they say. The influence of the youth minister has possibilities that can at times be overwhelming. What can we, who are active in this role, do to assist parents, educators, administrators, pastors/ministers in the moral formation of youth? How can we assist the gradual process of developing the convictions and values that are influential in everyday life? How can we help youth who do not have a background in philosophy, psychology, history, and are often ignorant of the fundamentals of the Christian message?

In today's world we are bombarded with contradictions in what is considered real as opposed to what is ideal. One needs only to watch advertisements on television to experience this. This world offers us many choices and those many choices at times can be confusing to us as adults, not to mention the adolescent. We need to be knowledgeable decision makers first,



then show our youth the process of skillful discernment.

With the separation of Church and state, Christian moral development is not a topic of discussion in public schools. Rather values are "clarified" and that process is only a part of moral decision making.

As a youth minister, contact with youth is different from the youth's relation to parent, educator, administrator, or pastor/minister. This influential role as mentor and/or spiritual guide, calls for a look at different and creative ways to help today's youth. A background of moral development, its history and key contributors, enriches the adult's ministry to youth. A combination of the above background, an armful of ideas and different ways of assisting adolescents in major life-choices as well as an open mind, enables the minister to challenge the adolescent toward future moral and faith growth.

This paper was written to grasp a better understanding of moral development of adolescents and the possible influence of the role of youth minister. Perhaps the words of Paul B. Irwin (1975) states this writer's stance the best:

Youth need Adult Guaranters, women and men who become an affirming presence to youth, whose authentic and open self-hood communicates empathic understanding, unconditional

positive regard, and trustworthiness. In response to this maturity of leadership, youth give themselves enthusiastically to the task of cooperatively creating a culture of covenant-caring community and shaping a vision of life. It is in this socio-religious climate, experiencing a relationship of care and counseling, that they are enabled to hear and respond to the "call forward" (p. 73).

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The intent of this study was to gain a background in moral development. For this study the background development had two directions: (1) to acquire knowledge of the historical and biblical foundation of Catholic moral theology, and (2) to grasp an understanding of the two current major contributors to adolescent moral and faith development, namely Lawrence Kohlberg and James Fowler.

This study attempted to answer the call to assist youth in finding the inner courage, strength, and Christian identity to be able to deal with social and peer pressures in making choices that are morally right for them and all other concerned.

#### **Scope and Limitations**

This study begins with a brief overview of the history of

moral thinking of the Church, the important people, and other factors that influenced each era. It includes an overview of the theories of current key people in the fields of faith and moral development.

The study was presented from a youth minister's point of view, not that of the classroom teacher. Although the information could be applied to those settings it is not the writer's perspective. The adolescent or teen culture is very different from twenty, even ten years ago. It is not that youth of today, teens, are different, but the world is different, making their culture different in today's world.

The historical research was from a Catholic perspective. The rest of the study could be applied to any youth group.

### **Definitions**

In order to assist the reader in fully understanding the writer's presentation, the following definitions are presented:

Christian ethics - a system that reflects on the experience of God in Jesus Christ and applies it to the conduct of the Christian life in community helping the community find what God is requiring it to do.

Christian Theology - the science which seeks to understand and to speak, within a changing world, the life-giving Good News of

God in Christ Jesus.

Decalogue - the Ten Commandments.

Ethics - a system of values and rules.

Fundamental Option - the basic life choice to turn toward or away from God.

Moral theology - "The part of theology that attempts to discern the implications of revelation for human behavior, to answer the question, 'How ought we, who have gifted by God, to live?'"

(McBrien, 1981. p.6).

Pentateuch - the first five books of the Old Testament.

Spirituality - our deepest concerns about the meaning of life, our identity, our relationships, and the place of God in our lives.

Summa - Thomas Aquinas' major work on systematic theology.

Values - in its broadest use, anything people cherish such as people, things, activities, and qualities.

### **Summary**

The accusations against and convictions of top athletes, executives, lawyers, and politicians of crimes leaves us as well as youth confused about morality. This is evidenced in the rise of teenage suicide, pregnancies, and substance abuse. We have seen an increase of value clarification curricula in our education systems. Yet today's youths are in need of assistance

in their moral development beyond that which the parents, educators, administrators, and pastors or ministers have provided. The role of the youth minister is a very influential one. It is this writer's belief that this role can be of major assistance in adolescent moral development and moral decision making. In order to help this adult, the youth minister needs a foundation of moral theology's history, an understanding of the psychology of moral and faith development, an armful of ideas, and an open mind. Together, parents, educators, administrators, pastors and ministers, and youth ministers can call adolescents to grow in deeper and skillful moral decision making, despite social and peer pressure.

Chapter two presents a review of literature concerning an historical and scriptural overview as well as a look at conscience and sin in moral theology. The chapter also presents two key figures, Lawrence Kohlberg and James Fowler, authorities in adolescent moral and faith development.

## CHAPTER 2

### Historical Overview of Moral Theology

The following outlines the development of moral theology from the Patristic period to the sixteenth century, when the system of manuals for moral theology developed.

#### The First Six Centuries

The first 500 years of the Church's history is known as the Patristic Era. From the beginning, the church has been concerned with the behavioral implications of the Gospel. One of the first writings, the Didache (A.D. 75), was written portraying two ways of life, the way of virtue and the way of evil. This work did not result in the creation of a moral system, but was a response to the needs of the community. The Church did not develop moral systems as we know them until the sixteenth century. The concerns of the early Christians were actions defending themselves against the pagan life style and for acquiring proper Christian attitudes.

Ignatius of Antioch (d. 215), one of the first of the Patristic Fathers, approached the issue by addressing what Paul and John taught; "that Christian existence is life in and with Christ. The Christian is a temple of God and a bearer of Christ

(Eph. 9:11)." Also that, "the Eucharist is the source and center of the Christian life" (McBrien, 1981, p. 928).

Clement of Alexandria (d. 215) who dealt with concrete issues of the time, was the first to attempt to create a system of moral theology. He was an optimistic thinker and tried to connect the positive values of the pagan philosophy with those in the Gospel. "What counts in the end is the good of the community of love and the things of the Lord. (Stromata III, 12)" (McBrien, 1981, p. 928).

Origen (d. 253) was Clement's successor, and was more negative in his world view. "It was Origen who first used the classic concept of the cardinal virtues in Christian theology. But even so, one discerns in his discussions of sin, of human freedom, and of the meaning of salvation a relatively pessimistic view of human life" (O'Connell, 1978, p. 11). Origen is known for his monastic movement of white martyrdom.

Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan (d. 397), was one of the first to present an individual approach in moral theology. He set up a system of duties that attempted to show that the Christian moral idea was superior to pagan philosophies.

The most notable of the Patristic Fathers was Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), a disciple of Ambrose. He is known as one of

the greatest moral theologians of all time though he was a rigorist. Even though he never established a systematic moral theology, he was a systematic thinker dealing with issues of the relationship of grace and freedom, faith and works, faith and love, original sin and the restoration of grace, grace and the law, natural law and revealed law, and divine love and the natural appetites. Christian morality is the way and means to eternal union with God. Morality, in turn, requires obedience to the divine law of love, but not merely through external observance. The moral disposition of the heart is decisive (McBrien, 1981, p. 929).

His theological visions are found in Confessions, his understanding of the world in City of God as well as his writings on sexuality.

#### The Sixth through Twelfth Centuries

This period is important in the history of moral theology, not only because the Christian faith grew from being a minority to the majority faith, therefore causing needed changes in its theological vision and pastoral approach. This also caused a change in the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This



sacrament experienced a radical change in ritual and practice, from "Public Penance" to "Tariff Penance". The Celtic monks had the greatest influence in this change, making the sacrament a more frequent part of Christian life. This caused the development of the Penitential Books. These books were to help the clergy in finding the correct penance to fit the sin. Christian life then became a matter of acts or varieties of sin. Thus developed the ideas that a good Christian avoided sin and that if a serious sin was not confessed before a person's death, it meant condemnation to hell, no matter how good the person had been. This practice reinforced the attitude that moral theology was study which only the clergy could do.

Secondly, the period was influenced by the rise of the great European Universities. This academic development led to the creation of a system of moral theology. The development of Summas came from this push to organize, integrate, and produce a system.

#### The Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries

These centuries were influenced by two major figures, the Franciscan, Bonaventure (d. 1274), and the Dominican, Thomas Aquinas (1274). "For Bonaventure, the central characteristics

of people were their will, their power to decide to act. The intellect, while extremely important, was in the order of means, a tool to be used for action" (O'Connell, 1978, p. 13-14). He felt that the purpose of theology was to "make us holy". Yet, Aquinas stressed the intellectual part of being human. Theology was for understanding and sought the integration of dogma and moral theology. He felt that once the Gospel was heard and understood it could only demand that one's life-style be responsible to that Gospel. "The foundation for his whole theology is God, the Creator, the Christ, the Redeemer. We shall achieve beatitude or union with God through participation in God's own knowledge and love through the grace of Christ" (McBrien, 1981, p. 930).

Following these two men this period experienced two major changes. There was a shift from scholasticism to nominalism, causing an individualistic ethic to emerge as well as the development of ethical legalism. Before Medieval time, there was no universally established ethical system. Moral thinking was mostly in response to individual unique situations and each situation was dealt with alone. Now individual things or ideas were gathered together in groups and then given guidance by law. Therefore, the emergence of legalistic morality. The second

change came in the economic system. Medieval feudalism gave way to new middle-class commerce. The exchange of goods and services increased as well as the mobility of the people. This precipitated the development of the demands of justice, to identify exactly what one was due. Law was then seen as central to moral thinking. It was a tool to decide what the minimum for living was, what it was that people were absolutely to do, what was the bare moral minimum.

Here we find the entrance of the monk, Martin Luther (1483-1546). The law was dealing with only what was just. Yet, Luther felt no one was just. Luther, a disciple of Paul, distrusted the law. He was a man driven to perfection, "The situation cherished good works, Luther placed his trust in faith" (O'Connell, 1978, p. 16). It was this situation of moral minimalism to which Luther reacted. He felt there was more to faith than just simply doing what was absolutely required. This challenge to the Church's legalism resulted in the Protestant Reformation.

By the end of this era the Church had undergone the Counter-Reformation in the Council of Trent and experienced a full scale rebellion resulting in the loss of most of Europe. It was during this rebellion that the Church developed rules

establishing a clear, formal education for clergy. Therefore the seminary system was created. The rules established at this time emphasized the behavior necessary for a Catholic. These occurrences caused the separation of moral theology from dogma, connecting itself to Canon Law. The Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) were the major people involved in this educational process. It was then that the writings of Thomas Aquinas were revived. As a result of this combination a separate field of moral theology was developed.

#### Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

The Post Reformation gave way to a period of moral questioning. Moralists were expected to answer certain questions by defining the precise meaning of the law. "What, exactly, is the right thing to do? What is the minimum expected of the Catholic Christian? How can one permit a certain amount of legitimate Christian freedom while at the same time protecting the supremacy of objective moral demand? What is the proper response to a situation in which the demands of the law are in doubt?" (O'Connell, 1978, p. 17).

Through debates, responses were given to the extremes of the rigorism of Luther and the laxism of the law. These debates led

to the development of many moral ethical systems. One of the major figures of these debates was Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787). He was known as a prudent and balanced theologian who had the ability to develop balanced, reasonable, and humane opinions. He was also significant because of his ability to identify and summarize all the opinions on a particular question, then find the middle ground in developing an answer to the question. He produced manuals which summarized the prudent and reasonable positions on the issues of the times.

#### Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

The influence of the revival of scripture study in Germany saw two more influential figures emerge, Johann Michail Sailer (1750-1832), Bishop of Ratisbon and Johann Baptist von Hirscher (1788-1865). Both attempted to reformulate moral theology and again attach it to doctrinal theology. They pointed out the connections between Christian morality and Christian spirituality as well as reviving the work of the Patristic Fathers, especially Augustine. Both men saw the connections between psychology and moral theology; yet these insights were slow in gathering momentum outside of Germany primarily because of the hostility between German and Italian scholars.

Eventually the effects of the German scholars were seen outside Europe through the writings of Charles Curran, one of Bernard Haring's first American students. Another influence on recent Catholic moral thought was Gerard Gillman. Gillman (1959) The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology (Westminster, Md: Newman Press.) and Haring (1961-1966) The Law of Christ, 3 vol's (Westminster, Md: Newman Press) were books widely used in seminaries just before Vatican II.

Even into the 1950's, moral theology in the United States stayed with the so-called classicist, legalistic approach. It was oriented to preparing confessors and stressed obedience to law; divine law, human law, and/or natural law. The "good" was shown in the law. The manuals were used by confessors and portrayed that humans were basically unchanging in nature. These ideas seemed to be supported by the official teachings of the Church.

The idea of humans as unchanging was no longer held as true after Vatican II. In its Decree on Priestly Formation the council called for a renewal of moral theology: "Its scientific exposition should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching. It should show the mobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful, and their obligation to bring forth fruit in

charity for the life of the world" (n16). In general, moral theology should be:

renewed by livelier contact with the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation. Elsewhere in its two major constitutions, one on the Church and the other on the Church in the modern world, the council proposes an ideal of Christian existence which goes well beyond the observance of law and of juridical norms (McBrien, 1981, p. 937).

Catholic moral theology has now moved from classicism to historical consciousness. Classicism meant the conforming to certain pre-existing norms of divine law, natural law, and ecclesiastical law. It was based on authority and law and was deductive, not inductive, dealing with moral issues according to universal norms instead of dealing only with particular circumstances and situations. Classicism emphasized the end, duty, obligation, and law.

Historical consciousness contends that the moral Christian life is one of personal responsibility in changing historical conditions. It emphasizes the idea that the person is both historical and social. Therefore it deals with moral issues in the concrete particularities of the given moment. Historical

consciousness is inductive rather than deductive, stressing the responsibility of each person to God, to oneself, to the Church, and to the wider human community.

Although classicism was clear, simple, and certain as to what was good and evil, it was authoritative, did not allow one to reason, and emphasized the teaching role of popes and bishops. It therefore did not recognize the levels of authority that belong to the Church through its priests and lay people. Hence individual freedom of conscience was minimalized. On the other hand, historical consciousness shows respect for the dignity of the person, human freedom, and each one's responsibility to act morally while understanding moral life as always in process. However, there are some built-in difficulties in this approach if one is not careful. Those difficulties are, "subjectivism ('I am my own law'), relativism ('nothing is finally binding upon me'), and anti-nomianism ('Laws of every kind are completely irrelevant')" (McBrien, 1981, p. 942).

Catholic moral theology was first developed to assist the confessor. It has always stressed the mediating role of the Church through its ministers, while being attentive to the norms and principles formulated by the leaders. Today, Catholics have



a deeper understanding of natural law and Church authority while still retaining the values of the classicist approach. Even though Vatican II supported the teaching of Vatican I concerning the infallibility of the Pope, there was a change in both the content and the style of teaching this doctrine. Papal authority is now seen as an exercise that is more pastoral and collegial, listening more to the hopes and concerns of the modern world.

When one talks about morality, moral theology, and/or moral decision-making, one needs to look at the concepts of conscience and sin. These concepts are considered briefly in the next section.

### **Concepts of Sin**

Morality has to do with our behavior as responsible human beings. When we fail to respond to God's invitation to move beyond ourselves, to respond as moral beings, we sin. What is the meaning of sin? O'Connell (1978) takes us back to the original biblical meaning of sin, "missing the mark" (p. 68). Another way to put it would be to fail to be your best self.

The following outlines the perspective of Catholic theological development in definition of the concept of sin. Sin has traditionally been defined as breaking God's eternal law. John Dwyer (1987) demonstrates why, in the traditional approach, it became very important to specify categories and types of sin as well as the degrees of seriousness of the sin (p. 169). He explains further the categories;

Sin was understood as a violation of God's law, and some sins were seen as a violation of the natural law, while others were seen as violations of the divine positive law - the Ten Commandments and the laws presumably given by Christ or others in the New Testament - and still others were seen as violations of the laws of the Church. (The

term "positive law" here means "law made by God in a distinct act subsequent to creation") (p. 170).

As a result of this division, sins became classified as mortal sins or venial sins. Which category the sin fell into was determined by whether it was a violation of a serious law of God, making it a mortal sin, or if it was a not so serious breaking of the law, making it a minor or venial sin. Dwyer (1987) presents the idea that this way of defining sin led to a view of sin as an action rather than a stance (a way of being). This idea of sin as an action caused an unclear distinction between the action and the decision process in the action (p. 171). The traditional approach emphasizes only the action which was separate from the kind of person one was or was becoming. These attitudes made sin into a collection of personal taboos which only led to list making or account keeping with God. One simply avoided actions which violated God's law.

To understand a more modern definition of sin one needs to understand what "fundamental option" means. McBrien (1981) gives us this definition, "It is that fundamental capacity for making a final and irrevocable choice to be someone, to be a particular kind of human being" (p. 955). There is still a distinction between mortal and venial sin. That distinction is

between a matter of fundamental option and how deep the action transcends the person. In mortal sin the person who chooses to act a certain way also chooses to become this kind of person. Yet when one commits a venial sin, though the person does choose the action, the action is contrary to what the person really believes in his/her inner-self and therefore is not the way the person becomes. Today moral theologians do not consider as much the specific acts, but rather the pattern of a person's life. Therefore serious (mortal) sin occurs when that act a person does turns a person away from God because the actions have become a life pattern. The actions are habitual and have become a part of life, the way the person is.

Joseph Moore (1987) gives us three categories of sin. There are sins of commission and sins of omission, these being the classic examples. Yet, he says that modern awareness brings us to another category, that is the sin of submission. In submission, a person, without reflection, conforms to the norms of peers, national values, and the values of society, "doing what the crowd does" (p. 44-45).

Modern theology does not stress individual acts, yet it does not neglect the meaning of these acts either. The Catholic of today may have given up the old textbook definition of sin;

yet we still believe the idea that sin is, in its basic element, a failure to love enough. Modern Catholics are more aware of the sins of the world, war, poverty, discrimination in their consciences. (Deedy, 1972).

This historical approach is new. Then remembering the symbolic meaning of our historical experience, we need to use the techniques of this approach as a way to help us evaluate our obligations and responsibilities for today in light of our past. In that historical context, original sin was the name given to the evil underside of human existence. It was baptism which has freed us from this evil hold. So we identified in symbol our sinfulness and were challenged to a more loving way of behavior.

Today we may use new symbols or language; yet we are still attempting to identify our sinfulness and move beyond it, to do the good we want to do. We now see and affirm our goodness, where before we looked mostly at the negative. With a new understanding of sin, we also develop a new understanding of God. God is always there for us. Sin is when we turn away from God and fail to relate to God. The important idea is that we choose to turn from God. It is not God turning from us. Perhaps one of the best understandings of this idea of sin is presented by Geaney (1973); "We can only come to a healthy understanding of

sin when we see man as being responsible for the messy world in which he finds himself" (p. 55). It is our response to human needs that draws us near or away from God. As Jesus puts it in Matt. 25. "I was hungry...thirsty... stranger...naked...sick... in prison."

We now approach sin not as results of lack of obedience to law, but the fundamental options that we choose which includes our intelligence. This fundamental option comes from a commitment to reality in the real world. Christian faith and the gospel message influence this reality not by laws and norms, but rather by bringing about a fundamental change in the human situation. This change is the enabling of people to think and act intelligently. This new approach in faith enables us to be intelligent in thought and action. It helps us keep what is solid in tradition while avoiding the difficulties presented by that tradition (Dwyer, 1987, p. 175).

### **Conscience**

When one speaks of moral decision-making, one also speaks about conscience as one of the tools used in the process. Before a definition is presented, this writer believes there is a need to distinguish conscience from guilt. Guilt is a feeling one has after an act has been performed. Conscience is not a feeling. Therefore, if we feel guilty about something it does not mean our conscience is trying to tell us something. Also, according to McBrien (1981) conscience is not judgment though it does involve the use of judgment as an act (p. 999). Dennis Geaney (1973) says of conscience, "The source is within us: that is, it is not a judge who is external to us" (p. 15). Conscience uses reflection, discussion analysis, and reason. Conscience is said to be in the heart and something which critiques the heart, that "voice within".

Just what is conscience? Timothy O'Connell (1978) suggests that we abandon traditional moral theology's use of synderesis, the habit of conscience, and syneidesis, the act of conscience (p. 88). Instead, he suggests the use of a three level definition of conscience: conscience/1, conscience/2, and conscience/3. Conscience/1 is the more general level which

speaks to the senses of value and of personal responsibility. To be human is to be accountable for and in charge of one's life, thus having the capacity for self-direction which implies a responsibility for good direction. This definition belongs to the whole human community as it is a partial definition of being human. In being human we have an innate sense of the difference between good and evil (p. 89).

Conscience/2 is the level of exercising reason, thus being an act of conscience. At this level, one judges--dealing with both the perception of specific values and the individual values, the good or the bad. There is a problem at this level as it is subject to failure therefore needing help. It, in a sense, needs to be educated (p. 90). Therefore one can consider conscience/2 as the level of the development of a process of conscience formation. Conscience/2 needs to be formed, to learn the facts, to make use of the sources of wisdom.

As humans we must be responsible for this formation. We must act, we must decide, we must judge our own behavior and finally declare that "this is what I ought to do though it may be wrong." This "doing" is conscience/3. Thus conscience/3 is the concrete judgment of a person in relation to his/her actions (p. 91).



Now, to show the interconnections of the levels. The obligations of conscience/1 is to be human, which is a part of, and assists conscience/2, the act of conscience. Thus we find ourselves at conscience/3 in declaration of what we "ought" to do. When one follows one's conscience, which conscience does one follow, 2 or 3? Conscience/2 follows the truth and is sometimes a failure; therefore one must follow conscience/3 for it declares what one ought to do (p. 92). To assist in this question, both McBrien (1981, p. 1002) and O'Connell (1978, p. 92) turn to Bernard Haring's, The Law of Christ, (1961, p. 151 vol. 1, Westminster, Md: Newman Press). "Everyone, of course, must ultimately follow his conscience; this means he must do right as he sees right with desire and effort to find and do what is right." For further clarification, the "doing" is conscience/3 and the search is conscience/2. When, we as human beings, act in conscience, all three are combined.

So now, what conscience is not! Guilt has already been identified as a feeling and is therefore not conscience because conscience is not a feeling. Conscience is not the respect for a stated wrong or taboo. Dwyer (1987) tells us that acting only with the idea of staying away from taboos is not a worthy way for a human being to act (p. 197). It is not giving in to the

"way it has always been", the traditional way. In other words, conscience is not unreflected response to existing rules or laws.

Conscience is a personal factor of life. Our conscience is shaped by our history. Our life experiences provide data which is needed in making conscientious judgments. This personal factor tells us that conscience does not require faith nor is it a faith act. Our conscience is a source within us, a human reality which tells us inside that something is good or bad. When our conscience is in conflict, it is not a conflict with God but with ourselves as we evaluate the values and struggle with the desire to do good. Or as Richard Reichert (1983) puts it, "After all, our problems with conscience are not direct conflicts with God or our faith. Rather, they are conflicts with ourselves, specifically with what a psychologist calls our 'will to do good'" (p. 71).

In The Documents of Vatican II (1966), within the document, "Declaration of Religious Liberty", we are informed that we are called to act on our conscience. Paragraph one of the document states;

A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness

of contemporary man. And the demand is increasingly made that men should act on their own judgement, enjoying and making use of responsible freedom, not driven by coercion, but motivated by a sense of duty. (p. 675)

Dennis Geaney (1973) suggests that to avoid being nothing we need to respond to the summons of our conscience to grow, to develop, to risk, to stick out our necks, because our conscience is calling us to do so. (p. 16) We are also challenged by the Vatican Council to use our conscience and to be more than a nameless, undistinguished nothing. Therefore, we need to form our conscience and act upon it.

How do we go about conscience formation? How does our conscience get the information, the data needed for good conscientious choices? In the past the Church was considered as the chief source of this formation for its membership. Some people even long for those "good old days" when we were told what to and what not to do. Today conscience is viewed as each one's own unique conscience yet the conscience grows as we grow. We form our conscience by educating our moral senses. This we do by a willingness to consult scripture, tradition, theological teachings, discussion with the Christian community, reading about current debates on important moral issues as well as

praying and doing critical analysis of the situations. To do its job properly the conscience needs to pay attention to all these resources. The Declaration on Religious Liberty according to Philip S. Kean (1977), has a presupposition about a person's conscience, "the presupposition is that conscience in making its choices will guard against the possibility of error by obtaining as much pertinent information as possible from the sources that guide or help its choices" (p. 52). These sources of information are those listed above.

As children, the world is composed of parents, teachers, and playmates. Conscience is imposed on them by adults who say what is wrong. This imposition is for safety and security. As adolescents the world grows larger and enables a "getting away". Thus adolescents begin to question those norms set upon them as children, asking what it is they want out of life. The fact that a person's conscience is developing as evidenced through the questioning, shows that the person is maturing. As a part of this growth process people internalize their stance on law, deciding which ones are valid enough to conform to and which ones will help them toward achieving their internalized goals (Dennis Geaney, 1973). As the world of experience expands, so does the development of conscience.

A person's conscience can be limited and influenced by many factors. Human awareness differs with race, nationality, social status, money, age, and local customs. Also limiting the conscience are psychological defense mechanisms that the conscience can employ to avoid responsibility. Those mechanisms deal with the threshold of tolerance of guilt within each person. Some people feel guilty before others. That "guilt" is felt to be the conscience and there are many ways we employ to deal with that guilt. According to C. Ellis Nelson (1978), some of those mechanisms are as follows; self-punishment, the extra work taken on as punishment to self to keep life on even ground. Partial restitution, the doing of things that have a high value of goodness attached to them. Denial of guilt, the denial of the action or a justification of the action by saying it's for the "good" of those concerned. Ritual, a person that pacifies the guilt, one such ritual is the Church's ritual of confession. And, scapegoating, a method of projecting the guilt on something else or someone else. A major social defense mechanism Nelson (1978) calls "social acquiescence" (p. 49). In this mechanism a person gives up the responsibility for actions by identifying with socially approved behavior, for example, the Nazi party.

When one is in serious decision-making, one needs to be

sure to do his/her homework to gain the important information needed in making that decision. One needs to get facts by reading, talking to experts, and (talking with) others involved. One needs to "check out" decisions with those who can give pro's and con's that will open the person's perspective. For an individual to make moral choices he or she needs to have an informed conscience; not just any conscience will do. An informed conscience is one where choices are made according to certain moral principles--the major principle being the respect for persons or the ultimate concern for worth of human life. A person with an uninformed conscience makes very limited decisions.

In following conscience, one does not just follow one's heart. In following conscience, one also follows feelings, reason, and knowledge gained from studying the facts. All are parts which operate together. A person should not depend on any one alone.

There are three levels to this "good" conscience moral decision making process. This inter-related three level system according to Dan Maguire (1974) helps to line up the moral values in a situation according to their relative importance. Level one is the identification of the values. What is it that

holds intrinsic worth or is a degree of excellence? Level two is the identification of the principles, norms, or laws. What are the standard rules of conduct relating to the named value with the intention to bring about good, or shows a value judgment about what is fitting human behavior? And level three, the circumstances or exceptions. What are the situations, facts, and accompanying events that affect it to one degree or another?

With all information gathered, one can make the "good" conscience judgments which one is then obliged to follow.

### **A Biblical Foundation**

#### Overview of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament)

When one looks at the Hebrew Scriptures, it should be kept in mind that it is a story of relationship, namely the relationship between humans, between God and humans, and between humans and God. The laws and codes within the Bible show a long process of Israel's discovering its code of behavior. This code was developed from the demands of day-to-day living while in reference to a relationship with Yahweh, the God of covenant.

The first five books of the Bible are called the Pentateuch. John Gallagher (1985) and George Lobo (1982) explain that the Pentateuch contains several codes of laws: the code of the covenant (Ex. 20-23) which identified covenant obligations, the Deuteronomic code (Dt. 12-26) which deals with religious obligations as a gift from Yahweh, the Holiness code (Lev. 17-27) and Priestly code (Lev. 1-7, 11-15, Num. 28-29 also throughout Ex.) which contains religious prescriptions, marriage and sexuality regulations, and directions for priests concerning sacrifice, rituals, and festivals, and finally the Decalogue (Ex. 20:1-17, Dt. 5:6-21).

For a long time believers accepted the authorship of the Pentateuch as Moses. The implicit and explicit precepts could



easily be seen as having been revealed directly to the great law-giver and prophet on Sinai. But scripture study has revealed that only part of the Pentateuch can be attributed to Moses. A considerable part of the writing is the work of many men spread over many years. The Pentateuch is now viewed as a conscientious effort of Israel's religious leaders to regulate life according to the spirit of God. A scripture student must keep this in mind for, as the divine authority behind the Old Testament writing is revered, one has to be careful to distinguish between values that were established because of historical circumstances occurring at the time and the values that remain valid despite time and circumstance.

The codes found within the Pentateuch contain three types of law: ritual, civil, and moral. This threefold aspect was not distinguished by the Israelites, but was taken together as God's directives about how they were to live. Yet, this code was not developed all at once, but rather it was a result of the lived experience of many years.

Biblical morality comes then from revelation, God making God's self known. It is not presented as human wisdom to be learned by reason, but is founded on divine revelation through experiencing God in life. Thus law in the Hebrew scriptures

belongs to salvation. It is religious and appeals only to God as Creator and Savior. It is a structure or frame, without explicit directions, given to humans as a grace established during the events at Sinai. It opens the way of salvation for fallen humanity and is inclusive of all people, not a chosen few, to live in the covenant relationship of love.

The decalogue, Mosaic Law, is also called the moral law. This code is not an exhaustive list of duties, but is the will of God, the fundamental demands placed on the people in covenant, thus adaptable to the people's situations. It was the people's response to doing the will of God, based on a realization of who God is, Creator and Savior. This God loved them and sought a whole-hearted love in return as observed through fear of God and gratitude for what God has done. Thus the motive for doing God's will is to be religious.

The covenant provides motivation for observing the law as well as justifies and makes sense to its contents. The law is not imposed, but flows naturally from the covenant of love. The "punishments" are direct, natural results of rejecting the wisdom of the law. For example, when one rejects the way of obtaining good, one ends up with something not so good. The "rewards" of the law are natural results of acting wisely. Thus

the covenant becomes part of salvation history--helping the poor and weak, being fair to workers, and caring for the sick--the core of Jesus' moral teaching.

The Israelites' sense of law came from the profound religious experiences that involved the covenant. The need to preserve this experience meant it had to be captured in words and images in order to pass it on to later generations. Problems arose at this time because with the writing down of this code it lost its flexibility and became in a sense "written in stone". This "law" was our guide until the Christ came: the Christ who represented the spirit of the law. Thus the law was to educate the people of God in preparation for this coming. Humans were never left to ignorance, but God spoke to them through their conscience and the light of revelation. Thus their actions had a transcendent religious purpose, the following of God's will in love, "to love God with all your mind and all your heart, and all your might." (Dt. 6:5).

#### An Overview of Christian Scripture (New Testament)

The scripture as a way to salvation is also true within the New Testament. But there we find Christ, as model and teacher, reminding us how to live by giving beatitudes, guidelines, and commandments during his public life, the Sermon on the Mount

being one such example.

This code or way of life in the Christian Scripture holds for all people as it is God's will that all should be brought through Christ to salvation. "You must go out, making disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all the commandments which I have given you. And behold I am with you all through the days that are coming until the consummation of the world" (Matt. 28:19-20).

In study it is obvious that the moral demands of the New Testament are not just for a particular time and place, but are for all times. One needs to keep in mind though, that this moral law does not bind with a "must" but with an "ought". This means it calls for free decision and the use of reason, our free will.

The main requirement of the New Testament is to have faith, faith in Christ as the mediator of revelation. "Separated from me, you have no power to do anything." (John 15:5). Therefore we need to seek union with Christ. Again and again Christ charges us to follow him (Matt. 16:24, Luke 9:23, Luke 9:62, John 11:25, 14:6). That following means discipleship with Christ.

New Testament morality begins with the command to repent

(Mk. 1:15) "Reform your lives and believe in the Gospel". We are then called to love as it is the greatest of all virtues (1 Cor. 13:1-13). As it is love which unites humans to God and through this union humans become like God and glorify God, thus our supernatural end. We can say then that love is the be-all and end-all of Christian morality. It is in this from which all other commandments spring. The closer we come to fulfilling this, the closer we come to our eternal destiny. In Col. 3:9-10 St. Paul's words tell us, "You must be quit of the old self, and the habits that went with it; you must be clothed in the new self that is being refitted all the time for closer knowledge, so that the image of God who created it is its pattern." This new clothing is that of putting on love, that love is in the image of God.

The early Christians then did not simply create their moral teachings. Instead they drew from the many sayings of Jesus which they considered relevant in teaching the faithful. Thus they formed what is called the Christian Scriptures.

We can say that the moral teaching of the New Testament then is embedded in a context that includes historical data, the story of the Christian journey, as well as an explanation of the story's religious significance.

## Major Elements of Biblical Morality

In the review of research for this paper, there were certain elements that appeared again and again which the writer believes ties together all of Biblical Morality. Timothy O'Connell, 1978, Principles for a Catholic Morality; Karl Hormann, 1958, An Introduction to Moral Theology; Ed. William Dunby, 1967, The New Morality: Continuity and Discontinuity; George M. Regan, C.M., 1971, New Trends in Moral Theology; Eugene Kennedy, 1971, What a Modern Catholic Believes About Sex; and Alan Schreck, 1987, Basics of the Faith: A Catholic Catechism, are a few books that all seem to agree on the following elements.

The first, and seemingly most important, element is that we are in covenant relationship with God. This covenant is an intimate, personal reality, a vow of genuine love. God continuously reminds us of this love through the "Old" covenant of Noah, Abraham, and Moses, where Yahweh imposed specific duties on the Israelites and in turn promised to be their God (Jr. 24:7, Ezr. 11:20). The "New" covenant was established through Jesus by his blood on the cross (Matt. 26, Mk. 14, Lk. 22, 1 Cor. 11).

The main idea Jesus preached about, (our next element) was that of the establishment of the "Kingdom". This kingdom is the

state of being, where God reigns in people through love, a kingdom of joy, life, and light (Mt. 25:21, Mk. 9:42, Lk. 16:8). This kingdom is a gift from God, yet participation in it also calls for some personal responsibility - that of belief (faith) and repentance.

Repentance (the next element) means a total turning around, transition, a personal change of life-style, or a personal moral resolution, to total conformity to God's will (Mt. 7:21-23). We are called to stop sinning, repent, and become a new creature.

Jesus called many to do this and to come follow him. Those who follow are called disciples (the next element).

Discipleship meant membership in the kingdom. To become a member, one needs to be willing to leave all behind, including mother and father, son and daughter, to be willing to lose one's life in being a follower (Mt. 10:37-38, Lk. 14: 26-27).

Discipleship also includes obligations or laws. The Sermon on the Mount is the charter of the kingdom. Jesus appeared as a "new" Moses whose coming was to fulfill the covenant not abolish it (Mt. 5:17-19). Jesus called for it to be internalized, for disciples to be committed to this new covenant. The Beatitudes call for a reversal of the world's values "Blessed are they who are poor...etc".

This great charter, or commandment is of love. This love is the life of the kingdom. God has loved us therefore we must love. The Golden rule is not love of self, but God's love for us and all else follows. The great command of law is love, love of God above all else and love of neighbor as oneself (Dt. 6:5, Mt. 22:34-40). It is this love which binds all else together and makes them perfect.

Christian life then is not just acceptance and conformance to abstract ethical principles. It is a response in fidelity to the God of covenant. Therefore being Christian means being one's self as created by God, revolving around the mystery of being bound together with God in covenantal relationship, not created by one's decision, which can be evil.

The moral life of Christians then should avoid emphasis on the law, sin listing, and catalogues of vices. It basically consists of a morality of love, a covenant loving response to God's gift of love through Christ. Joined to Christ as new people of God we have the duty to live according to what Christ patterned for us.



### **An Overview of Lawrence Kohlberg's Views**

Influenced by the works of Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg attempted to develop a system of moral education for schools. His first work was a cross-sectional study of moral reasoning in seventy-five boys ranging in age from early childhood to late adolescence. Kohlberg and his associates studied how people structure their experiences and judgments about their social world. As a result of his studies, he developed six stages of moral reasoning which were modeled after Piaget's model of human cognition. He, as Piaget, felt that one stage of reasoning built on the next, therefore following a sequence. Kohlberg shows how people construct and look at the social perspectives of themselves, other people, and groups, in their moral reasoning process. "Each stage (which Kohlberg also labels a structure) helps the individual to realize the importance of personal life values, as well as the reasoning behind why he or she cherishes a particular value" (Shelton, 1983, p. 46). Kohlberg categorized his six stages into three levels, 1) the preconventional level where the dominant influences are the outside demands of authority with the desire to avoid pain; 2) the conventional level where the outside demands come from

social groups such as their peers; 3) the postconventional level where the person draws from values that are universal and therefore exist beyond social groups (Shelton, 1983), p. 43-45). The levels flow from a self-centered thought process to thinking about the feelings of others and on to universal moral thinking about the rights of all humans. Kohlberg further divides each level into two stages each. For an outline of these stages see table 1a. Examples follow in table 1b.

Kohlberg has received much criticism because of the limitations of his research. Yet, his model inspired studies in moral development and is the model most often used. Therefore, we will look at two often overlooked, but critical points.

Shelton (1983), points out the following:

First, Kohlberg's emphasis is not on the actual behavior of the person. For Kohlberg, moral reasoning is concerned instead with the actual reasoning one uses to determine which actions are right or wrong. In other words, it is reasoning that the adolescent utilizes to choose a particular value over another that is the object of Kohlberg's inquiry, not the behavior itself...

Second, Kohlberg is concerned not with the "content" of the moral reasoning, but only in the moral reasoning

itself. In other words, the value (the content) that a person prizes are not Kohlberg's concern; his interest lies in the reasoning that a person utilizes in choosing a particular value or explaining the meaning that is given to a value (p. 47).

Kohlberg asserts several things in his studies. One is that he viewed life to be a living out of value choices which are made in everyday life situations. He felt that those choices occur between two or more values which are in conflict in each situation. Then the person reflects, through reasoning, what it felt to be important about the value or values in each situation, then makes choices. Kohlberg also asserts that justice is at the center of all moral reasoning and that each person's understanding of justice is reflective of the level of the moral reasoning on which they are operating (Shelton, p. 46).

Kohlberg's development was free from religious claims even though his studies have had a great impact on religious educators. Craig Dykstra (1981), writes about how Kohlberg saw his stages as separate from these claims;

...religious belief and moral development are independent of one another. He claimed this largely on empirical grounds by citing research findings; (1) American subjects use very

little religious language in responding to moral dilemmas and in justifying their responses; (2) in more religiously homogeneous societies, religious language is used at the earlier developmental stages but drops out in the post-conventional stages; and (3) no differences in moral development have been found that are due to religious beliefs (p. 23-24).

Though Kohlberg felt that religion did not play a role in moral development, he did admit that it could be an influence, but only in the same way social experience can influence reasoning. He did not deny the fact that the Church may play a part in the development of morality, just that it simply has no unique part to play. The Church can stimulate one's natural moral development as anything else could. There is nothing special about one's religious community that gives an advantage over other communities. Therefore the development of moral ideologies does not depend on the teachings of one's particular religious orientation. One does not need religion in order to develop into a person with high moral reasoning. However, Kohlberg does suggest that moral development can parallel faith development, (the faith development as proposed by James Fowler 1981). The same cognitive structures that help shape a person's

perspective on moral decision making can also shape the person's perspective on their relationship with God. The next section will present an overview of Fowler's faith stages.

Table 1a.

**The Six Moral Stages**

## Level I Preconventional

| Stage                     | What is right   | Reasoning for doing right   |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Stage 1<br>self-interest  | Obedience to rules backed with punishment.                                      | Avoidance of punishment.  |
| Stage 2<br>equal exchange | What meets one's own interests and needs. Also what is fair, an equal exchange. | To serve own needs or interests where one has to recognize the same for others. |

## Level II Conventional

|                       |   |  |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Stage 3<br>conformity | Living up to what others expect of you. "Being good" is important which means you have good motives, show concern | The need to be a "good" person in one's own eyes as well as the eyes of others. To follow the Golden Rule. |
|-----------------------|---|--|

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | about others, show trust, loyalty, and respect.   | Support stereotypical behavior.  |
| Stage 4<br>social<br>systems<br>+ conscience | Fulfilling duties, laws are upheld except when in conflict with fixed social duties.<br>Contributes to society. | To avoid breakdown in the system. The drive of the conscience to meet defined obligations. |

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Level III      Postconventional

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|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Stage 5<br>social<br>contract +<br>individual<br>rights | Aware that others have values and opinions that are relative to one's own group.<br>But some values and rights such as life and freedom must always be upheld | Obligation to the law for the welfare and protection of all people's rights.<br>Laws based on, "the greatest good for the greatest number." |
|---|---|---|

despite the majority  
opinion.

Stage 6  
universal  
principles

Particular laws are  
valid because they  
rest on universal  
principles. Follow  
self-chosen ethical  
principles. The  
universal principles  
are justice, equality  
of human rights,  
respect for dignity  
of humans as  
individual beings.

The belief in the  
validity of universal  
moral principles and  
a commitment to them.



Table 1b.

**Examples of Kohlberg's Stages**

| Stage | Reasoning for actions      | Example   |
|-------|----------------------------|---|
| 1     | punishment avoidance       | Adolescent gang activity.<br>The members do what the leader says to avoid punishment.   |
| 2     | personal needs and desires | When one says "I'll do this for you if you do this for me" or "I'll scratch your back if you will do the dishes for me."        |
| 3     | "good boy, good girl"      | The teen who always gets home on time or at least notifies parents of lateness, because of awareness of parents' being worried. |
| 4     | doing "one's duty"         | The one who signs up for the draft because it's the law even though he doesn't believe in war.                                  |

- 5        Laws can be altered                    The teen who breaks the rule  
          for changing human needs        of curfew time at home  
   because a friend was in need.
- 6        There are universal                    The person who gets involved  
          principles which are                in helping at a soup kitchen,  
          above one's own and/or            because of awareness of  
          a group's principles                those are the have nots.

### **The Faith Stages of James Fowler**

Why present a section on Fowler's faith stages? Wasn't it noted that Kohlberg did not believe that faith was a necessary component of moral decision making? Seeing that this research is presented from a Catholic perspective, this perspective ties faith into moral decision making. It is important to remember that one's moral view is supported by the beliefs one cherishes. The faith perspective needs to be considered when discussing morality.

The psychologist, James Fowler, studied how adolescents came to develop their faith view. He separates this view from the content of faith, dogmas, and the value placed on a particular religious tradition. Fowler believes that care needs to be taken in separating this view from content because faith has to come out of actual lived experiences that include the dogmas (the content) as well as personally held values. Fowler contends that "cognition and affection are inextricably bound up together." Also that "any discussion of faith must blend this affective dimension with a cognitive understanding" (Shelton, 1983, p. 67). Fowler believes faith is more than a noun, that which we believe, the dogmas, rules, etc. Faith is a verb, it

is a way of relating that calls for an investment of our hearts. He says that "faith is a person's way of seeing him-or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose." "Faith is the commitment we make to others, to groups, and to communities" (Shelton, 1983, p. 67). Faith is the way we find meaning in many elements that make up our lives. We can take note here that this is very similar to and at least related to the moral theologians' notion of fundamental option. In his book, Stages of Faith (1981), Fowler explains what he sees as the importance of faith.

Even our nearest relatives in the animal world are endowed with far more set and specific instinctive guidance systems than we are. ...But as far as we know none of these other creatures bears the glory and burden we carry of asking what life is all about. They do not struggle under the self-consciousness of shaping their lives through the commitments they make or of searching for images of meaning by which to give sense of things. ...We do not live by bread alone, sex alone, success alone, and certainly not by instinct alone. We require meaning. We need purpose and priorities; we must have some grasp on the big picture (p. 4).

Faith is an attempt to grasp, to understand, to see and to name the "big picture", to see how we put our lives together. It is what makes life worth living that becomes our faith. Faith is a human occurrence when we find ourselves working within the dimensions of struggle and awareness of the struggle. The most universal human struggle is that of life and death and answering the question of where we find meaning in our lives. Fowler (1984), says, "We are language-related, symbol-born and story-sustained creatures. We do not live long or well without meaning. That is to say, we are creatures who live by faith. We live by forming and being formed in images and dispositions toward the ultimate conditions of our existence" (p. 50).

A brief overview of Fowler's stages of faith follows next.

Fowler calls Stage 1 Intuitive - Projective faith. It occurs between the ages of two to four until seven or eight. During these years a child develops abilities to walk freely and question everything. Through the newly acquired skills of speech the child names and explores, sorting out a world of novelty. He or she daily encounters new things for which there is no previously developed structures. The child has to organize these experiences into meaningful units. The child relies on the parent as the main source of information. At this

stage the child is unable to separate cause and effect, fantasy from fact and to understand a sequence of events. This is a fantasy-filled, imitative stage in which the child can be powerfully influenced by examples, stories, and symbols of visible faith from significant adults, primarily the parents. The child's forms of knowing are through perception and imagination, making this stage a time of producing longlasting images and feelings (both positive and negative). This stage is where self-awareness first develops. The strong taboos of the family and culture have come into awareness as well as the child's first awareness of death and sex.

The strength of this stage includes the gift of imagination and ability to grasp the experienced world in powerful images, especially in stories which show the child's intuitive understandings.

Fowler cautions us of the dangers of this stage. Those dangers "arise from the possible 'possession' of the child's imagination by unrestrained images of terror and destructiveness, or from the witting or unwitting exploitation of her or his imagination in the reinforcement of taboos and moral or doctrinal expectations" (Fowler, 1981, p. 134).

Transition to the next stage occurs with the emergence of

concrete operational thinking. The child has growing concern of how things really are and attempts to clarify the difference between what is real and what is fantasy.

Fowler's Stage 2 is called Mythic - Literal faith. At this stage the child is more able to distinguish fantasy from real and the world becomes more linear, orderly, and predictable. Now operating at the concrete operations level, the child is capable of changing stories and myths to find personal meaning to them. The child is capable of inductive and deductive reasoning and can role play from others' perspectives. Within the child's ability to investigate and test, the child insists on demonstrations or proof in claims of fact. This concrete operational child does not lose his or her imagination, but this is now combined more into play and is deeply scrutinized before accepted as a part of their knowledge. The child can tell self generated stories that help the child to communicate and compare meanings and experiences. This story telling has a new accuracy and richness which also reflects his/her thinking on good and evil, right and wrong. This child's sense of fairness is based on reciprocity, with a deeper sense of the world of cause and effect and the actions of others.

At this stage authorities have moved beyond the parents to

include teachers and religious leaders, as well as customs and traditions. Faith, then, is a matter of relying on the stories, rules, and implicit values of the family's community. The community is where the family relates to a larger community of shared traditions. Shelton (1983) indicates, "At this stage God is viewed as being both faithful and lawful. Yet the world is still uncertain, and in many ways the child remains powerless. Thus by embracing and involving himself or herself in religious belief and ritual, the child finds security while he or she expresses his or her faith in anticipation of the future and all it holds" (p. 69-70). Thus Fowler believes it is important to know faith stories.

Knowing the stories of "our people" becomes an important index of identification and evaluation of self and others in their groups. The ability to create classes based on distinguishing characteristics of objects or groups makes these kinds of identifications (and exclusions) important matters in this stage (Fowler, 1984, p. 56).

Fowler creates an image of a flowing river to represent our lives. The stage 2 person "tells stories that describe the flow from the midst of the stream. The stage 2 person - child or



adult - does not yet step out on the bank beside the river and reflect on the stories of the flow and their composite meanings" (Fowler, 1981, p. 137). Stage 2 people cannot yet draw conclusions from these stories about an order of meaning to life. They speak with concreteness and literalness without a sense of self or others in personality or inner reflectiveness.

The strength at this stage is the rise of the use of narrative, story telling, drama, and myth as ways of finding coherence in life's experiences.

This stage is limited by its literalness and its reliance upon reciprocity as a guide in putting together its environment. The result of these limitations can be "an overcontrolled, stilted perfectionism or 'works righteousness', or in their opposite, an abasing sense of badness embraced because of mistreatment, neglect or the apparent disfavor of significant others" (Fowler, 1981, p. 150).

The transition to the next stage is initiated by the implicit contradictions in stories that call for reflection on its meaning. The change from concrete operational thought to formal operational thought makes it possible for this reflection as well as a necessary function. "Previous literalism breaks down; new 'cognitive conceit' (Elkind) leads to disillusionment

with previous teachers and teachings" (Fowler, 1981, p. 150). The reflection causes conflicts to occur between authoritative stories such as the story of creation - Genesis versus evolution. There is also an "emergence of mutual interpersonal perspective taking ('I see you seeing me; I see me as you see me; I see you seeing me seeing you') (Fowler, 1981, p. 150).

The transition also experiences the breakdown of the principle of reciprocity which was often used in their images of God. Thus God, in their experiences doesn't seem to be able to deal with evil or doesn't want to deal with it. The God or reciprocity dies and needs to be replaced. This means dealing with feelings of anger, struggles, guilt and grief, creating a transition to a new stage.

The next stage Fowler calls Stage 3 Synthetic - Conventional faith. The person's experience now extends well beyond the family. A number of social spheres now demand his/her attention, family, school or work, peers, the street society, media, and perhaps religion. Faith now needs to provide a coherent orientation in the midst of this more complex range of involvements. Faith needs to synthesize values and information, giving a basis for identity and outlook on life.

A person at stage 3 is able to construct all sorts of

"ideal" possibilities and considerations. Formal operational thinking has made possible the creation and use of abstract concepts and ideas. Thus it is now possible to think in terms of systems. It is also possible to see the perspective others have of us; to see ourselves as others see us. In a way, the person at this stage uses mirrors. "He or she needs the eyes and ears of a few trusted others in which to see the image of personality emerging and to get a hearing for the new feelings, insights, anxieties and commitments that are forming and seeking expression" (Fowler, 1981, p. 151).

Recall the image of the river of life; formal operational thinking with the ability to reflect on one's thoughts and experiences now has the story teller on the river bank where he/she can look at the flow as a whole. One is able to pick out patterns of meaning from the collection of stories (paraphrased Fowler, 1981, p. 152). This is synthetic meaning "the pulling together and drawing disparate elements into a unity, a synthesis" (Fowler, 1984, p. 59).

The synthesis at this stage is twofold. First it occurs when one first draws together that identity of self reflected from the many "mirrors".

The other is critical to this stage of belief as it

involves the drawing together of one's stories, values, and beliefs into a supportive unity. The person must pull that pattern out of the river, he/she must construct his/her own stories of stories. This creates meaning and purpose for his/her life. This process is helped through significant one-to-one relations. It is that "chum" (mirror) with whom everything is bounced off. In this stage, one is embedded in his/her faith outlook as well as the identity taken from that circle of face-to-face relations, thus making faith conventional as it has not been internalized, but rather it is tacitly (unexamined) held. "A person in stage 3 is aware of having values and normative images. He or she articulates them, defends them and feels deep emotional investments in them, but typically has not made the value system as a system the object of reflections" (Fowler, 1981, p. 162).

Symbols relating to the transcendence of God, are expressive of their deepest meanings and loyalties. They are not separate from what they symbolize. To a person of stage 3, symbols of the sacred are just that - sacred. Any attempt at demythologization is a threat against the symbol and what is symbolized, and is taken as an assault on the sacred itself.

The dangers at this stage are also twofold. The

expectations and evaluations of others can be so internalized that individuality in judgment and action can be jeopardized. Also interpersonal betrayals can cause such despair about a personal principle of God that one might compensate in unusual drive for intimacy with God, totally unattached to worldly relations.

Contributions giving way to the transition from Stage 3 may include serious contradictions between valued authorities, major changes by sanctioned leaders or changes in practices previously held sacred and unbreakable. A good example of this is the Catholic Church's change from the Latin Mass to English. These encounters lead to critical reflection on how one's beliefs and values have formed and changed, and to whether these beliefs and values are relative to that group or background. More often though the event of "leaving home" precipitates this kind of introspection of self, background, and lifeguiding values.

Fowler calls the next stage, Stage 4 Individuative - Reflective faith. In this stage there is a shift of authority. The sense of grounding, of identity is not derived from significant others and their expectations, but comes from the self. The judgments of others are still important yet the expectations and advice of others are reflected on and judged

internally. Through this internal panel of judges, the person chooses and is ready to take the responsibility for his/her action. This self-authorization is sort of an "executive ego - a differentiation of the self behind the personae (masks) one wears and the roles one bears, from the composite of roles and relations through which the self is expressed" (Fowler, 1984, p. 62).

There are two features within this stage. One is the above emergence of the executive ego. The second is the movement away from one's assumptive value system. This assumed system is replaced with a "choosing" of one's values, beliefs, and commitments which form a personal value system, this personal choice of one's own and group's commitments becomes one's "lifestyle". The once tacitly, unexamined, held beliefs now become explicit with commitment and accountability. "Stage 4 thinks in terms of the impersonal imperatives of laws, rules and the standards that govern social roles" (Fowler, 1981, p. 180).

In this stage of critical reflection, Stage 4 people can separate meaning from the media which symbolizes them. This person will ask, "But what does it mean?" If it is meaningful, the meaning is translated into definitions and conceptual foundations. This is a "demythologizing" stage. The strengths in

this Stage 4 person lie in his/her ability of critical reflection on self-identity and world view (outlook or ideology). A danger lies in becoming too confident in self, a sort of narcissism can occur.

When a restlessness of these self-images and outlooks occur, the Stage 4 person is ready for a transition. This person "finds him -or herself attending to what may feel like anarchic and disturbing inner voices. Elements from a childish past, images and flatness of the meanings one serves - any or all of these may signal readiness for something new" (Fowler, 1981, p. 183). One comes to a realization that life is more complex than Stage 4's logical clear distinctions and abstract concepts. This realization pushes one toward a more dialectical and multileveled approach to finding the future of life.

For Fowler, Stage 5 is called Conjunctive faith. This stage is marked by several occurrences. One is the awareness of the polarities in life, being masculine and feminine, being old and young, as well as the stress of being both constructive and destructive; also that there are two sides to the self, the conscious and shadow sides. This awareness of the conscious and unconscious causes the stress found in the task of integrating the two.

Another factor is acceptance that truth is more multidivisional and complex than any of the previous stages is able to grasp. Given this multidivisionality, richness, and ambiguity, truth needs to be looked at from at least two or more angles of vision at the same time.

Conjunctive faith also moves beyond Stage 4's interpretation of symbols, myth, and liturgy into a conceptual meaning. "Conjunctive faith gives rise to a 'second naivete', a post critical receptivity and readiness for participation in the reality brought to expression in symbol and myth" (Fowler, 1984, p. 65). This leads to the next factor, that of honest, genuine, and open encounters with traditions other than its own. This openness acknowledges that one's own tradition does not hold all the truth, but each are partial and limited to a certain people's experience of God which is incomplete on its own. Stage 5 sees "that the relativity of religious traditions that matters is not their relativity to each other, but their relativity - their 'relativity' - to the reality to which they mediate relation" (Fowler, 1981, p. 186).

Conjunctive faith, then, combines deep, particular commitments with a principled openness to the truths found in other traditions. This faith combines its own loyalty to one's



primary community of values and beliefs to the reality of the concept of a community of communities. This person lives with the tensions of divisions and works toward the evolution of complete justice, yet aware of his/her own participation in the unjust structures he/she opposes.

A strength of this stage is the recognition of its diversity. This is the ability to see within one's group that they are partial and distorted realities of the transcendent reality. The danger lies in allowing this awareness of the paradox of truth to paralyze one into passivity or inaction, thus becoming cynical, withdrawn, and complacent.

The movement toward Stage 6, which he calls Universalizing faith, is marked by the radical completion of two developments seen in earlier stages. The first is the movement from self to the ability to balance one's perspectives with those of others in the ever widening circle of person--the ability to see the world through the eyes and experiences of persons, classes, nationalities, and faiths different from one's own.

The second development is seen in the process of the self undergoing clarification as each stage calls for an expansion of the groups whose values, concerns, and survival become that person's concern too. Fowler (1981) put it, "They are

incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community" (p. 200). He/She has moved the valuing process so much, that what is valued is the Creator and all other beings. He/She works from the standpoint of love of the Creator for creatures rather than the standpoint of a vulnerable, defensive, anxious creature.

This type of person sees the idea that the environment, inclusive of all beings, is rare. Many persons at this stage die at the hands of those they hope to change. These people can be described as having a sort of kenosis. Kenosis is the literal "pouring out" of one's self, of being drawn beyond the finite centers of value in our lives which promise security and meaning. This is the move from "worldly" to another world, the world which Jesus speaks about when he says that he does not promise things of this world but of another. Universalizing faith is the fruit of a person's total and convincing response in love and trust to the radical love of God. Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa of Calcutta are a few names brought to mind at this stage.

It is difficult to speak of strengths and weaknesses at this stage, as very few people reach this level of faith development.

One needs to keep in mind a note of caution about this stage development. It is a mistake to think that movement along these stages could be compared to climbing a ladder. This imagery sets us in a "higher/lower" mentality when the process is that of a development of more complex, differentiated ways of valuing and knowing. This ladder form shows a movement up as an essentially unchanged person. But each of these transitions represent significant changes in ways of one's valuing, knowing, and basic responses of one's self. As Fowler (1984) says, "because of new operations and comprehensiveness in our knowing and valuing, both our previous knowledge and values and our very ways of verifying and justifying our perspectives and our actions undergo change and must be reworked" (p. 57). Briefly put, we are new and changed persons at each stage, there is no turning back!

Another caution about both Fowler's and Kohlberg's studies is the limits set by the people used for the research to represent all of us. Kohlberg's research is limited by his use of only male figures. One really should gain a broader perspective through the reading of other books, especially those written on the women's perspective. One such book is Carol Gilligan's (1982) In A Different Voice.

### CHAPTER 3

#### Implications

We are a people who are in transition out of and into the various levels of faith and moral thinking. We may be at one level in one area of our faith while at another level in our moral thinking. For example what we think about other races may be at one level, yet we may be at least one level below or above that in terms of how we feel liturgy should be celebrated. Then an action we are a part of one day may move us along to the next level of faith and/or moral thinking. Also the culture in which we live is one of freedom and sometimes offers us too many choices. Is it no wonder our youth are confused, the adults are too! Because of this we need to be knowledgeable and skillful decision makers as well as being able to help our youth in this process.

The basic most fundamental question we need to help our youth ask themselves is, "Will this decision help me, and others, become more fully human or less fully human?" We must remember that the idea of being "fully human" will be understood differently by each level of moral reasoning or faith development. We need to help them refer to the one moral

absolute as reflected in the scriptures, the covenant of love. Our decisions need to be motivated by love and have love as the goal. This leap from one value to daily action is large. Yet, if our decisions contain these elements they can then be morally justified.

We need to help youth in the process of critical reflection with the awareness that it varies from growth stage to growth stage. In critical reflection one needs to ask what (is exactly happening), why (what motive), how (the means or method), who (is involved), when and where, what are the consequences (the effects) and last, but not least, options (are there alternative choices?). We need to challenge youth to start asking these questions, then apply the answers according to self-reflection on what values they most cherish, what values are in conflict, what are the circumstances, what values focus on people as well as what values are the youth willing to talk about in public.

The high school years are a decisive period for the development of personal morality. During the earlier years morality was imposed. Now the young people begin to decide, with some certainty, how they will live and what they will do. They begin to form their own philosophies, develop their own values, and set their own goals. They are beginning to move

away from their dependence on their homes for moral guidance. They are in search of a way of life, a system of values, and a moral code that will assist them in being what they desire to be. It is with these premises that we should acknowledge the forces that influence youth and work with them through and in those influences. The list that follows is sociological, yet the items have much bearing on the youth's decision making process in light of the moral and theological development stages they are in.

1. Many teenagers live in single parent homes.
2. Television has a major impact on them.
3. The advertising practices influence values and goals.
4. The music is important in their culture.
5. Today's youth have been raised in a materialistic and money conscious culture.
6. Birth control and abortion is more readily available.
7. Many youth work part time or have summer jobs.
8. Peers have a strong influence.
9. Many youth grow up in poverty.
10. Financial pressures on schools have resulted in larger classes and fewer opportunities in the arts such as music, drama, and art.

11. Reported instances of child abuse and incest have increased.
12. The use and availability of drugs and other addicting substances has increased greatly.
13. The greater possibility of nuclear war has caused a mentality of "get all you can now because there may not be a tomorrow".

High school students know that they are on the way to personal freedom and independent decision making. But, they also know that they really are not ready to do it all on their own. They want and need help in deciding. They need and want outside reinforcement in their way of knowing what is morally right and wrong as well as why it is right or wrong.

An effective Church youth program accepts young people as they are, responds to their developmental needs, and wishes to help them grow and change in faith by offering opportunities to grow. These opportunities need to offer chances to; grow in their relationship with Christ, develop greater self-worth, develop ability to show concern for others, serve others especially those less fortunate, develop values and morals they own for themselves and share their concerns and hurts in confidence. The program opportunities should also offer a chance to form close and trustworthy friendships with peers and

adults, to recognize the impact of advertisement, television, music, and peers on their values, as well as learning what it means to lead a Christ-centered life, develop a personal prayer life, and be a participating member in community worship.

A program with these opportunities meets the needs mentioned above as well as challenges the youth to change their way of thinking from "me" centered to "other" centered. They gain knowledge of themselves and how they respond to the world about them, drawing them out of themselves toward others, thus coming closer to the covenant of love. Both Fowler's and Kohlberg's stages develop from self outward toward others as one moves along the stages moving from individual to social to universal concerns. Also provided for is the beginning or further development of a relationship with the God who created all out of love and wants all to relate in love, to be in covenant.

A youth program that includes mini-lectures on the youth's interested topics presented by outside, known, and informed speakers, sets up functioning youth officers who have voice in activities, plans retreats, has opportunities to visit other places (for example, an Amish community), has sports activity nights, plans longer trips such as canoeing and skiing trips, and



gets the youth involved in the parish such as readers and altar servers is a program that attracts youth and begins to meet the relationship needs of the youth. Parishes are beginning to see the value of a youth minister and are beginning to hire full time people for this position. This is how we can start to help our youth, by showing we do care about what they are doing and are willing to help develop programs of activity for them.

It is this writer's belief that in order to help youth in these developmental stages of moral and faith growth, the Youth Minister needs a basic foundation of Catholic Morality as is provided in this research. Keeping in mind the ideas of Kohlberg's and Fowler's stages, we must grow together, challenging movement into the next stage by taking the opportunities to pray, study, share self, work for social justice, and lead a Christ-centered life, while recognizing where we are. Youth Ministers who are open to the youth, acknowledge their own limitations, shortcomings, needs for growth, are willing to grow with the youth, and are accountable, present a human person the youth can and will follow. We need to acknowledge ourselves as well as show youth that, it is the truth that sets us free. As we seek that truth together, we grow closer to that transcendent stage in full surrender of the

covenant of love.

### **Conclusions**

The intent of this study was to gain a fundamental background in moral development and to assist the writer as a Youth Minister. The development took two focuses, one was the historical and biblical foundation of Catholic moral theology, the second was an overview study of two current contributors in moral and faith development. The reader should be reminded that the presentations of these two focuses are but overviews and only begin to introduce moral development. A much more indepth study could be done in each area alone. Yet, for the writer, the intent was to gain introductory knowledge in beginning to assist today's youth in the moral decision-making process. Hence the limitations are that of being an overview in a Catholic perspective, from the viewpoint of a youth minister, as well as the built in limitations to the Fowler and Kohlberg studies.

As this writer has composed this paper some insights have been formed. One such insight is that the historical development, the presentations on sin and conscience, as well as the biblical foundation, all have developed in stages somewhat like what Fowler and Kohlberg have developed for the individual. For example, in historical development during the

Patristic period, systems of duties were established. Because of a medieval mentality which tended toward a sort of Stage 1 Intuitive - Projective faith, people allowed the "Official" Church/Authorities to say what was right and wrong. The Church represented that significant other whom the people relied on for symbols of visible faith and source of information, through which their perceptions were formed.

In the biblical overview one can turn to the Old Testament and see the same analogy in the reliance on Moses and the Ten Commandments as the source of authority in what was right or wrong. This was the way through which the people's perceptions were formed.

Perhaps the idea of life just being simple, either/or, expresses these early times. One also can see this in the first concepts of sin and conscience. The concept of sin was that of lists of and was determined by the action done with no consideration given to a thought process. The idea of the sin being moral and/or venial did not develop until later.

These all can be tied into Kohlberg's Stage 1 where the person acts to avoid punishment and follows rules without question.

Moving to moral theology today one can see the shift from

outside the person to personal internal authority. Moral theology was first developed to assist confessors, where today's approach in religious education is more pastoral, encouraging a deeper involvement of the people. The concept of sin has changed too. Though we are still in the process of recognizing our sins and trying to move beyond them, we also take more personal responsibility. Sin is viewed as more than just a list of "wrong" actions, it goes into the depth of a person and his/her chosen lifestyle. We understand more the responsibility of forming, educating our conscience and the conscience involvement in the decision-making process.

The New Testament has developed the law from outside authority to personal authority in response to God's call to covenantal discipleship. The story of the rich young man is a good example of this. Jesus challenged him to give more, to give all his possessions and follow. Vatican II moved the Church to new awareness. Though in one sense, we would probably find the majority of Catholics today operating at Kohlberg's Stage 3 - conformity, a good many have moved to Stage 4 - Social Systems and Conscience and even to Stage 5 - Social - Contract and Individual Rights (see Table 1a for more details of each stage.)

As for Fowler's stages and the church today; this writer believes the majority could be found somewhere between Stage 2 - Mythic - Literal faith, where one's world is broader yet linear, and Stage 3 - Synthetic - Conventional faith which includes even broader social spheres and faith has deeper meanings to it. A good number of people are pushing into Stage 4 - Individuative - Reflective faith. This stage moved faith into greater personal introspection where authority comes from the self, reflected on and assisted by input from outside sources such as significant others, teachings, traditions, and meaningful experiences. One could find a number of people even at Stage 5 - Conjunctive faith which combines one's faith with others' faith realizing that, apart, there is only the partial truth and together we can grasp the whole truth.

Very few people reach the highest level of either Kohlberg or Fowler. Those realms of faith and moral living seem to be beyond the reach of most and are left for those who are able to connect with the Transcendent and move totally beyond self to the universal realm. We find such people as Ghandi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at these levels.

Therefore, we are a people who are in transition, struggling with the tensions of being at various levels at the

same time, something we need to keep in mind as we work with youth. As we are in transition, think about the many transitions they are experiencing!

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