



Ethically Speaking...

Newsletter of

THE CANADIAN CATHOLIC BIOETHICS INSTITUTE
AT ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY

Volume 1 | Issue 2

Summer 2015

News, Events & Updates:

Advance Care Planning Workshop St. Paul's Parish:

In May, Maria Giannotti presented a brief talk at all masses on the importance of Advance Care Planning to the parishioners of St. Paul's Parish. The responses from that talk were very positive and as a result, CCBI-A presented an Advance Care Planning workshop for parishioners on August 5th, 2015. The workshop was well attended and those who participated found the information and materials very useful in helping them begin a discussion about end of life issues with their friends and families. If your organization would like a similar presentation please contact Maria Giannotti at the following email address:

CCBI-A@assumptionu.ca

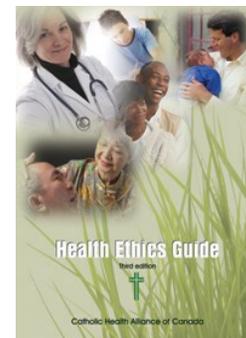
For the People in the Pews Program : CCBI-A will be launching the *For the People in the Pews* program at Most Precious Blood Parish in November. Fr. Greg Bonin and the Parish Council were very enthusiastic about the opportunity to host the inaugural session for this important program. The sessions will cover morality and bioethical issues from a Catholic perspective. Topics will include reproductive technology, palliative care and end of life issues, euthanasia and physician assisted dying. The talks are scheduled for November 5, 12, 19, 26th from 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. at Most Precious Blood Church hall. We look forward to beginning our journey with the parishioners of MPB Church.

If you would like more information or to book a presentation for your organization or parish contact:

Cecile Bertrand at CCBI-A
Phone: 519-973-7033 Ext. 0
Email: CCBI-A@assumptionu.ca

Save the Date!

Thursday, September 24th 2015



Topics: The Health Ethics Guide, Papal Encyclical "On Care for our Common Home" (Laudato Si) & Moral and Spiritual Issues in End of Life Care

Speaker : Rev. Michael Prieur
Professor of Moral and Sacramental Theology

Place: St. Paul's Parish Hall
5885 Malden Road, LaSalle, ON

7:00 p.m.

For more information contact CCBI-A
Cecile Bertrand 519-973-7033 Ext. 0

Proclaiming the Dignity of Conscience

The use of power to attempt to force people to act against their conscience is not a new phenomenon. Throughout the ages, the martyrdom of countless men, women and children of different religious and moral beliefs testifies to this. In the early twenty-first century, this use of power has to be resisted by all right-thinking people, those who understand the nature of conscience.

We begin by saying what conscience is not. It is not guilt feelings. Guilt feelings may indeed accompany a realization that what we have done or failed to do is morally wrong. But they may not. Feelings of guilt arise from what we have learned to feel guilty about. For example, till fairly recent times, many Catholics would have known about the immorality of certain sexual practices and would have felt guilty had they chosen such practices. They had learned to associate choice of certain practices with feelings of guilt. On the other hand, these same Catholics may not have experienced guilt feelings in matters of social justice. They had never been taught to do so. Confessional practice bore that out. Statements like, “My conscience doesn’t bother me,” often simply mean that the speaker had never learned to feel guilty about certain actions or omissions, even though the action in question produced grave individual and social harm.

A person may have no guilt feelings because of a burnt out conscience brought about through habitual sin.

His or her guilt feelings have disappeared. A married man tells his mistress, “You know, at the beginning I had all sorts of guilt feelings, but now I’m at peace with our being together.” Any sin has the capacity to lessen or obliterate guilt feelings, like lying, stealing or sexual sin. Guilt feelings, though, are not essential to true conscience.

A good starting point for an understanding of the human reality of conscience is the Second Vatican Council’s treatment of authentic conscience in *The Church in the Modern World*, par. 16.

Deep within their consciences men and women discover a law which they have not laid upon themselves and which they must obey. Its voice, ever calling them to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells them inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For they have in their hearts a law inscribed by God. Their dignity rests in observing this law and by it they will be judged. Their conscience is people’s most secret core, and their sanctuary. There they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths. By conscience, in a wonderful way, that law is made known which is fulfilled in the love of God and of one’s neighbour.

Timothy E. O’Connell (*Principles for a Catholic Moral Theology*, Revised Edition, 1990) simplifies the notion of conscience for us. He speaks of conscience 1, conscience 2 and conscience 3. Conscience 1 is what the Second Vatican Council speaks about above; it is at the core of a person driving the person to seek

the good and avoid evil. To conscience 1 belong the basic goods of the human being, attracting the person to preserve his or her life, to seek communion with others, to rejoice in knowledge and the like.

For conscience 1 to achieve its goals, it needs the help of conscience 2. Conscience 2 consists of all the authentic values a person has embraced and holds dear – honesty, integrity, love of others, humility, chastity and so on. In this, he or she has been aided by good teachers of morality, especially, for Catholics, the official teaching of their Church. His or her experience of the truly good is authenticated by experience.

Conscience 3 is the final judgement a person makes before a choice values or disvalues. It has its dynamism from conscience 1, filters this through the values of conscience 2, and makes the judgement about the goodness or evil set before him or her. Then in freedom he or she chooses in accordance with the truly good or in contradiction to his or her good in choosing a competing false good or evil.



Proclaiming the Dignity of Conscience continued...

From all of this, we see the dignity of conscience. It lies at the very core of a person. To act against conscience is to act against one's own authenticity. Moreover, it is to act against God. This is sin. Nothing justifies sin. To attempt to force a person to act against his or her conscience, to commit sin, is a heinous injustice. There is so much more to be discussed in the area of conscience. This short submission is simply to proclaim the dignity of conscience. We end with the cry of Cardinal John Henry Newman: **"Certainly, if I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts (which indeed does not seem quite the thing), I shall drink - to the Pope, if you please - still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards."** Fr. Leo Walsh csb



RU-486: The "Abortion Pill"



Canada Health has approved the pill RU-486. Known as the "abortion pill", it will be available in Canada January 2016. RU-486 takes its name from the French pharmaceutical company Roussel-Uclaf where it was first synthesized in 1980. RU-486 is a synthetic hormone which blocks the natural hormone progesterone which is essential for a healthy pregnancy. Progesterone prepares a nutrient rich environment in the uterus to receive the newly conceived life, stops contractions of the uterus and keeps the cervix closed, further protecting the growing unborn baby. But RU486 blocks these effects and expels the fertilized ovum from the uterus.

The RU-486 medical abortion procedure is a two-day regimen and really involves two types of medication - RU-486 itself, which is mifepristone, and a prostaglandin, known as misoprostol. A woman will take mifepristone, blocking the production of progesterone and then a day or two later takes misoprostol which causes contractions, essentially inducing a miscarriage. In Canada RU-486 will

be marketed as *Mifegymiso*. It has no other function than to kill and expel the newly conceived human from the womb by making it a hostile environment.

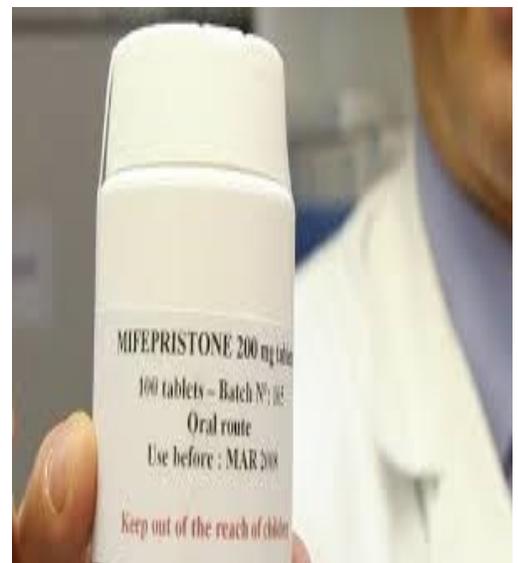
The Church upholds the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. "Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes. (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* #51). The *Declaration on Procured Abortion* (1974) affirmed that life is sacred from conception and that directly intended abortion is an intrinsically evil act. The result of an abortifacient drug such as RU-486 is no different in its morality than a surgical abortion procedure.

There are several important moral matters at stake here, like the possibility of dangerous side-effects for women, for example safety concern, both physical and psychological which are not being addressed. The main moral consideration, however, is the widening of an abortion mentality and the escalation of actual

abortions. Since no-one denies the science, the way to salve consciences which might balk at abortion is to claim that there is no human being until the process of implantation is complete. Neither philosophically nor scientifically has this claim any validity.

Our country is in dire need of conversion, intellectual, moral and spiritual. Without a national desire born of truth and humility to serve the living God, science will ill serve humanity.

Fr. Leo Walsh csb,
Maria Giannotti



The role of the Catholic Physicians Referrals and Transfers

“Referral” here means that one physician refers a patient to another physician or to an institution for a particular procedure. So Dr. X, for one reason or another (let’s presume conscience here) refuses to be involved in abortion procedures, but refers a woman seeking an abortion to Dr. Y whom he knows will perform the abortion. Or Dr. X does not know another physician at Rosebough General, but knows that abortions are performed there daily, and refers the woman to this public hospital.

This is implicit formal cooperation in evil and is never justified. Despite Dr. X’s declaration that he is anti-abortion, his actions declare that he is prepared to sanction abortion by others for his own reasons.

It may be proposed by well intentioned persons that a patient may be referred by an unwilling physician to a “buffer” person, one who will lay out different options, including doctors and institutions willing to facilitate the patient’s death. This too, though, is implicit formal cooperation in killing and never justified.

“Transfer” here is in reference to a patient’s choice to go to another institution or be under the general care of another doctor. In our case, the patient is seeking a

transfer because he/she wants to receive a procedure that is refused, for moral reasons, by the institution or physician. The patient may be given general information about which other institutions and physicians in the area may be contacted, without information about which ones do or do not perform the procedure.

People working from a secular point of view sometimes express both referrals and transfers in terms of allowing physicians to satisfy their religious or philosophical stance while allowing for full accessibility. This should never be the position of a Catholic physician. It is not a matter of “getting off the hook.” He or she is working to fulfill the will of God both in avoiding or minimizing the spread of evil and in promoting the glory of God and the love of God, through the care of and compassion for people.



Fr. Leo Walsh csb

Ethically Speaking provides news, articles and information from the Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute at Assumption University. We welcome comments and feedback. Should you have suggestions for future articles or inserts, please contact Maria Giannotti, Editor at: CCBI-A@assumptionu.ca.

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