

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3

# ASPIRE

A MAGAZINE FOR HIGH SCHOOL RELIGION TEACHERS

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“Let the way  
you live be  
that of the  
Gospel.”



SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE

## FROM THE EDITOR



If you're like me, you've become increasingly disheartened by the growing polarization in the world. As noted in Pope Francis's encyclical "On Fraternity and Social Friendship" (*Tutti Fratelli*), we are facing a world in which the sense that we belong to a single human family is fading. Instead, people are moving to their respective corners, ready to defend their positions at all costs and willing to let go of a sense of shared community in the process.

How we make decisions and choose actions in this time can be complicated. We can become easily influenced solely by the decisions and arguments of "our side." In fact, we know that if we veer from the positions of "our side," we could very well be "dismissed." In this environment, it can be tempting not to deeply question everything we are supporting.

As people of faith, we are called to more. We have a solid system of guidance in helping us to form our conscience and make good moral decisions. And we are reminded that the only side we should be on is that of Jesus Christ and the Good News.

In this issue of *Aspire*, we provide materials around which engaging conversations can happen regarding certain aspects of morality and decision-making. The hope is that these resources might spark the desire to discern more wisely and live more authentically the path of true disciples of faith.

Live Jesus in our hearts ... forever!

*Steven Ellair*

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Saint Mary's Press is a nonprofit, Lasallian Catholic publisher administered by the Christian Brothers of the Midwest District. Our focus is a contemporary expression of the Catholic Church's mission to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and the Lasallian mission to provide a human and Christian education for young people, including those who are economically deprived. With our partners in schools, parishes, and families, we share the Good News of Jesus Christ with Catholic Christian children and young people through publications and services.

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# VIRTUES

By Josef D. Zalot and Benedict Guevin, OSB

**A distinctive element in Christian moral theology is its understanding of the virtues. Often discussions about ethics focus on actions: “What should I do in this particular situation?” Focusing on actions—the “ethic of doing”—is an important aspect of moral reflection, but it is only half the equation.**

The other, and perhaps more important, half concerns character, the “ethic of being,” which focuses on the kind of person one is.<sup>1</sup> Just about everyone would say that Mother Teresa was a good person. We say this because we know about the good she did for the poor of Calcutta as well as others around the world. Adolph Hitler, on the other hand, was not such a good person. We say this because we know that he was responsible (directly or indirectly) for the deaths of millions of people during the 1930s and 1940s. **The question one must ask oneself is, What kind of person do I want to be? Do I want to be known as a person of good moral character, or something else?** One’s moral decisions play an important role in answering these questions and, as we will see in a moment, there is an essential relationship between the choices one makes and the kind of person one is.



So how does one go about making good moral choices that, in turn, make for a person of good moral character? The answer lies in the virtues. **A virtue is a disposition of the will by which an individual willingly and consistently chooses to act in a morally good way.** Virtues are ongoing patterns of moral behavior that develop (people are not born with them) through our free and intentional choices. For example, one develops the virtue of honesty by freely choosing to always tell the truth. One develops the virtue of justice by consistently rendering to others their due. By willingly and consistently making good moral choices, one develops the virtues that help one become a person of good moral character.

It is precisely here that we recognize the importance of virtues for the moral life. Virtues are important because there is an essential relationship between the choices one makes (ethic of doing) and the kind of person one is or is seeking to become (ethic of being). **In order to be a person of good moral character one must make consistently good moral choices and, generally speaking, in order to make consistently good moral choices one must be a person of good moral character.** Again, the example of Mother Teresa illustrates this point well. Mother Teresa developed good moral character through the many good moral choices that she made

throughout her life. Therefore, when faced with an important ethical decision—and she faced many—she possessed the type of character that more readily allowed her to make the correct moral decision. Each correct moral decision, in turn, then aided her in further developing her good moral character.<sup>2</sup> Now Mother Teresa is not unique here; think of any person in your life who is of good moral character and you will recognize the same relationship at work. **In short, the virtues serve as the foundation for consistent responses to the many moral decisions people face in their lives, and define who they are as persons.**

So what are the virtues and how does one apply them to moral decision-making? Virtues can be understood both philosophically and theologically. The moral (or human) virtues are those that can be known philosophically through reason; thus they can be developed and practiced by all people no matter what their faith tradition—if any at all. Prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance are the primary or cardinal virtues, the ones on which all others “hinge” (this is what the word *cardinal* means). Thus any moral virtue that one cultivates falls under one of these four main categories. **Prudence is the virtue that disposes one to discern the good, to choose the correct means of achieving this good, and then to act in accord with this**





**discernment.** This virtue is often defined as practical wisdom or “right reason in action.” **Justice is the virtue that disposes one to render to each person what is due to them.** This virtue helps one to consistently act in ways that nourish right relations with others, for example, by respecting others’ rights and establishing peace and harmony in relationships with them. **Fortitude connotes**

**strength, so it is the virtue that enables one to face difficulties well.** This virtue ensures consistency in the pursuit of the good, and it enables one to overcome obstacles to living a moral life. **Finally, temperance is the virtue of self-control.** It is the virtue that inclines one to enjoy pleasures in reasonable and moderate ways, and it provides balance in the use of created goods.<sup>3</sup>



OK, so if all people can understand prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance through reason, what is different about Christian moral theology? Christianity responds by stating that in order to live a moral life one needs to cultivate not only the moral (human, philosophical) virtues but the theological virtues as well. The theological virtues relate directly to God, are infused into the souls of believers by God, and are revealed through faith. In fact, the first theological virtue is faith. **Faith is the virtue by which one believes in God and believes all that God has revealed.** It is the virtue by which the Christian professes belief, bears witness to it, and shares it with others. In terms of the moral life, faith is important because through it one believes what God has revealed about correct or

**The theological virtues relate directly to God, are infused into the souls of believers by God, and are revealed by faith.**

ethical behavior. As stated earlier, Catholicism maintains that moral truth is revealed through both Scripture and the Tradition of the Church. Faith is the virtue by which one understands this truth and confidently acts in accord with it throughout one's life.<sup>4</sup>

The second theological virtue is hope. **Hope is the virtue by which one desires to live in full communion**

**with God in heaven, and places one's full trust in the promises of Christ. It is the virtue that "inclines us to yearn for union with God,"<sup>5</sup> because God is one's true destiny and source of ultimate fulfillment.**

In terms of the moral life, it inspires and purifies one's activities and orders them toward God's kingdom. It also protects one from discouragement or disillusionment during times of difficulty, and it sustains one when one feels abandoned. Although the *Catechism* does not specifically state it, hope can also be understood as the belief that one's good works can positively influence the temporal order, that one can make the world a better place. Now one may not always recognize the immediate benefit of these good works, but through hope one can be confident that these works are part of God's overall plan and will come to fruition in God's own time.<sup>6</sup>



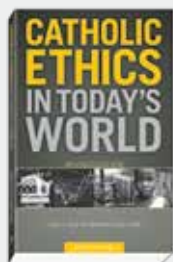
The final theological virtue is charity (love). **Charity is the virtue by which one loves God above all things and loves one's neighbor as oneself.** It is the virtue that animates and inspires the other virtues, binds them together "in perfect harmony," and is the "source and goal" of Christian practice.<sup>7</sup> What it means to love both God and neighbor has already been discussed, and will not be repeated here. But the virtue of love is crucial to living a Christian moral

life because it calls one to act differently from the world. Those who truly love God and neighbor recognize that all people are created in God's image and seek to uphold the common good of society as a whole.

**Overall, Christianity maintains that the theological virtues constitute the foundation of morality.** One cannot be a Christian or live as God wishes without knowledge and practice of them. They are essential for one's ongoing efforts to do good and avoid evil.

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1. Richard Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 7-8.
  2. Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. A person who is not of good moral character cannot consistently make good moral choices and, generally speaking, one cannot make consistently good moral choices if one is not a person of good moral character.
  3. For further discussion of the cardinal virtues, see William Mattison, *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 76-79, 98-99, 136-40, and 181-82. See also CCC, nos. 1804-11.
  4. This discussion of the theological virtues is adapted from CCC, nos. 1812-29.
  5. Mattison, *Introducing Moral Theology*, 258.
  6. Mattison speaks to this point directly: "Hope's foretaste of the true fulfillment that ultimately satisfies us most effectively illuminates the ways in this life that such fulfillment is not yet present. Furthermore, hope's steadfast clinging in trust that the realization of this destiny is a real possibility actually generates movement toward that goal, even though full realization is not possible here." See Mattison, *Introducing Moral Theology*, 259.
  7. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1827.

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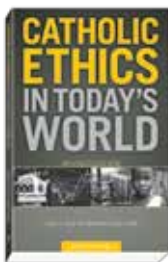


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# Reflecting on “Virtues”

Use the following prompts as an avenue for the discussion of some key points from the article. Invite the students to reflect silently on these questions before forming pairs to discuss their answers. Then, after allowing some time for conversation, encourage the pairs to share their thoughts with the larger group.

- 1** What is a virtue, and why are virtues important for the development of good moral character?
- 2** How does one go about developing virtues in oneself?
- 3** What is the difference between the “ethic of doing” and the “ethic of being”?
- 4** What are the moral (human/philosophical) virtues? What are the theological virtues?
- 5** How is the Christian moral life our response to God’s offer of love? What are the challenges to living a moral life?



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# Calling Forth the Invisible

**VIRTUE ETHICS IN LAUDATO SI'**

BY NANCY M. ROURKE



On the surface, Pope Francis's *Laudato si'* does not look like a call for an ecological virtue ethics.<sup>1</sup> Large-scale social change seems to be the main point. In two hundred and forty-six paragraphs, the word "virtue" appears only five times. The word "vice" appears once. Yet virtue ethics is the fuel that powers this encyclical. The call for an integral ecology and its repeated reminders that "everything is connected" are rooted in the particular wisdom specific to virtue theory. This chapter will explore the role of virtue ethics in *Laudato si'*.

## VIRTUE ETHICS

Virtue ethics is a moral theory concerned with moral character. Its main focus is not social systems or the morality of actions (although both are nevertheless important). Instead its main concern is us. It examines what we (human beings) are like, the sorts of people we should strive to be, and the ways we can realize this anthropological vision.<sup>2</sup> Virtue theorists imagine the "parts" of a person's moral character, looking for things like virtues and vices. Virtues and vices are habits of being in certain ways. **Because they are**

**habits, virtues and vices are formed by practicing them. Virtues are good traits or tendencies.** Traditionally, virtue ethics calls each virtue a specific "excellence." Virtues are like well-balanced habits. Imagine a kind person as a person who has a habit of being kind and who tends to be good at being kind. This means, of course, a kind person also has other virtues (like patience, frugality, or attentiveness). All these virtues work together to make up a person's moral character.



A moral character has vices. Vices are habits or tendencies that are out of balance, like greed, apathy, or wastefulness. This means a trait that is either too weak or too powerful. For example, one person might have developed the virtue of temperance, which means a tendency to enjoy good things in good amounts and for good reasons.<sup>3</sup> Another person who never practiced being temperate could have a tendency to go overboard with sensory pleasures. That person could have developed a vice like gluttony. A third person might not understand that balanced enjoyment is actually good and, having failed to practice balanced enjoyment, now has a vice like stinginess, or a sour suspicion of all good experiences. **A good moral character is made up of many well-balanced traits, or virtues, all working in a well-balanced way together.**

The explanation of virtue ethics offered above uses hypothetical people to explain what virtues and vices are. This says something else about virtue ethics: it relies on role models, actual and fictional, to help us direct our moral growth in good directions. Think about it: can you

imagine any moral virtue or vice without imagining an example of it, embodied in a person? **Role models help anyone who is interested in becoming a better person to identify what virtues they need to practice and what these embodied habits look like.**

Virtue theory's best insight is that we (humans) can better ourselves. We shape ourselves through practice. Practice means both participating in large-scale actions (like joining a school's efforts to







get solar energy) and doing small actions (like growing a tomato plant for food). According to virtue theories, people become who they want to be by practicing being that way, in big ways and small. Even before governments and organizations offer the programs and structures that help people to live gently on earth, persons and communities can practice participating in the integral ecology vision of Pope Francis's *Laudato si'* (see especially LS 180–81).

*Laudato si'* shows why systemic changes are needed, but it also demonstrates that small actions are important. **Our actions have the power to change us as people. What we do can change our hearts.** Practicing ecologically sustainable habits is the way to sustainable and ecologically aware lifestyles. There are many kinds of virtue theories (Catholic, philosophical, Buddhist) and all of them help to demonstrate that persons' actions all have a way of seeping inwardly into their selves and, in turn, shaping future actions.

## CONCLUSION

*Laudato si'* models virtue ethics. It does not preach it, but it does presume it. The encyclical does not say that virtue ethics will help our ecological problems, and it never lists the virtues one must cultivate. It does assume virtue theory's understanding of morality, and it uses that to help change human attitude and character (LS 107).

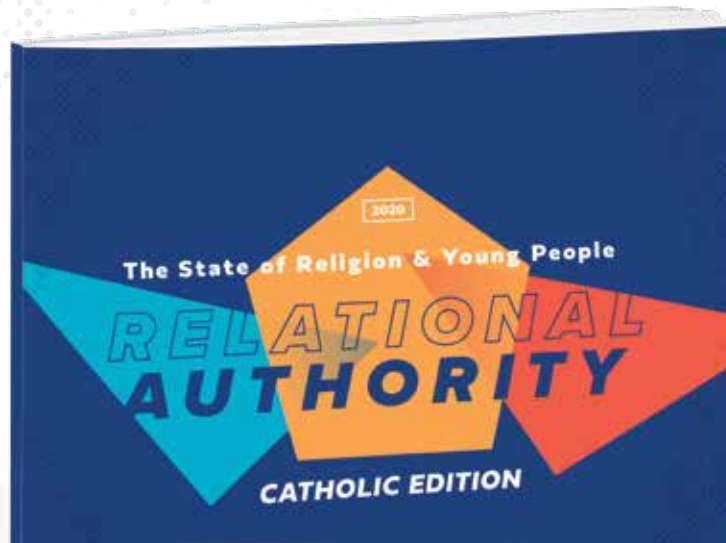
**Attitudes and other character traits like virtues are the narrow, deep, and quiet streams that feed human action and lifestyles.** They come from a less carefully monitored source than the intention or the will, which are the traditional foci of much of Catholic ethics. But as *Laudato si'* shows, we ride the surge of these unwatched tributaries and we always carry with us the quality of their water. The things we do when we are not acting deliberately are important because they have consequences<sup>4</sup> and because, through them, we practice being a certain kind of people. This is the very soul of virtue thought. It is also exactly what *Laudato si'* means when it speaks of an integral ecology.

1. Pope Francis, *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home*, June 18, 2015, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).
2. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).
3. Diana Fritz Cates, "The Virtue of Temperance," in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, edited by Stephen Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 321–39.
4. Habitual and routine actions often have a greater ecological impact than the kinds of actions people carry out after careful deliberation. For example, people may spend several minutes and research carefully while choosing an herbicide for their lawn. But all available herbicides pollute water runoff. This environmental damage is habitually inflicted simply for the purpose of complying with a morally dubious aesthetic—a purpose that does not merit the damage caused. See David Cloutier, *Walking God's Earth: The Environment and Catholic Faith* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014) and Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

*This article is an excerpt from "Calling Forth the Invisible, Spreading Goodness: Virtue Ethics in Laudato si,'" by Nancy M. Rourke, in All Creation is Connected: Voices in Response to Pope Francis' Encyclical on Ecology, ed. Daniel R. DiLeo (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2018). Copyright © 2018 by Anselm Academic. All rights reserved. www.anselmacademic.org.*



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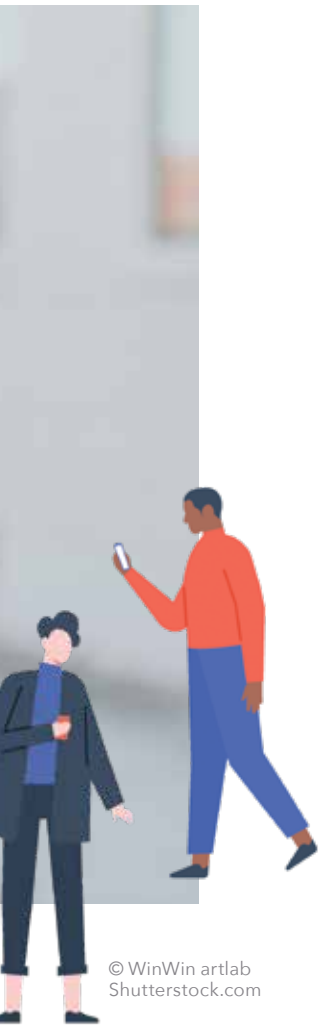


# You are what you tweet

BY JAMES F. CACCAMO

We certainly have come a long way in terms of technology in the past 100 years. If we look around, it is easy to see the many ways in which life is easier now than it was for our great-grandparents. Information and communication technologies have revolutionized how we work, learn, entertain ourselves, and connect with those around us. For better or worse, we live very different lives from people who would have read the religious ethics textbooks of years gone by.

At the same time, religious people are still trying to answer the same fundamental question as a century ago: how to live in a way that enables them to reach the values they hold dear and in response to the truths



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they see in the world. **The core truth for Catholic and other religious ethicists has not changed much: God exists and requires creation of a world in which people are supported and enabled to become their fullest selves.** That means acting in ways that advance human physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development. It also means creating structures in society that enable others to do so as well. Information and communication technologies may provide new ways for people to act, but they haven't substantively changed the goals that people of religious conviction seek.

**Given the evidence so far, it seems that the jury is still out on information and communication technology ethics.** Our gadgets provide opportunities for authentic development and increasing the common good, but they also endanger both. This is what we might expect at the birth of a new technology. Information and communication technologies represent so much potential—for good and bad—but we don't yet have a long enough track record to know just where the promises and pitfalls lie. There is still much to keep an eye on.

At this early point in the development of contemporary technologies, perhaps the most important thing we can do is to be attentive. By this I mean two things. **First, we need to pay much more attention to the habits we are creating around information and communication technology.** Most of the time, using gadgets is not particularly a well-thought-out choice. Many of us who grew up before the digital age began to use information and communication technologies either out of sheer excitement about the brave new world of

computing or because we were forced to for our jobs. Those who grew up in the “digital native” generation have always had these technologies in their lives; they probably seem like a part of the “natural habitat.” In either case, though, few among us sat down before we started using our gadgets and thought about how to use them in ways that enhance human life and do not detract from it. We simply started using them, and habits formed as we went along. Unfortunately, not all of our habits are good ones.

**Figuring out how to use technology in ways that support integral human development and the common good depends on a thoughtful consideration of the impacts of our actions on ourselves and the world around us.** Only by examining our choices, can we steer through the competing goods—not to mention the attractive evils—and discern what is right. Put another way, morality requires intentionality. Otherwise, we are likely to fall prey to the technological imperative (“because it exists, we should use it”) or market forces (“you’ll be a better person with a newer gadget”) so prevalent in our culture. Likely a lot of different tech habits could be considered morally laudable within the parameters we have used here. But without intentionality, we won’t really end up using our gadgets—they will use us.

The second way attentiveness is important lies in attending to the impacts of information and communication technologies as we learn what they are. **Often we are one-sided in our predictions of what technology will do for and to us.** Some are wildly optimistic about how technology will make life better. Others are almost entirely negative about technology, seeing it as the downfall of personal morality and Western culture.



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But if we stand back and look at the evidence, it seems that neither view is entirely accurate: one sidesteps real harms, the other ignores real goods. **If we sincerely want to create good lives and societies in the data age, we need to be attentive not simply to what we want the data to say, but to what they actually say.** In the end, we will become what we tweet. The question is whether or not we'll be honest about what we are becoming.

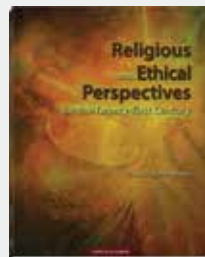




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**Given the newness of many of the information and communication technologies that surround us today, it seems appropriate to approach the whole question of tech ethics with a degree of humility.** We have our guesses about how these things will affect us, but we don't know for sure. We also have our considered opinions and intuitions about what habits and practices will support integral human development and the common good. But again, we have yet to see. We may end up hitting the mark on some things and being really wrong about others. It will take some time to get this all right. One thing is clear, however: only through honesty and attentiveness will people ever learn to use emerging technologies to treat others well and help create a world worthy of the values and truths they hold dear.

*This article is an excerpt from “You Are What You Tweet: Religious Ethics in the Age of Gadgets,” by James F. Caccamo, in Religious and Ethical Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century, ed. Paul O. Myhre (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2013), 201–221. Copyright © 2013 by Anselm Academic. All rights reserved. [www.anselmacademic.org](http://www.anselmacademic.org)*



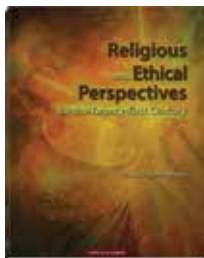
James F. Caccamo is associate professor of theology at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, where he teaches Christian social ethics. Jim's work focuses on the implications of technology and media on spiritual and moral practices.



# Reflecting on “You Are What You Tweet”

Create six small groups and assign each group a different question to discuss. After some time for conversation, invite the small groups to present some highlights of their discussion with the larger group. Encourage the large group to comment and add their own insights to each question.

- 1** How do the technological gadgets in your life increase or decrease the common good?
- 2** In what ways are you attentive to your own habits regarding information and communication technology use?
- 3** Do you agree with the statement “Because it exists, we should use it?” Explain.
- 4** Can technological innovation make you a better or more fulfilled person? Explain.
- 5** Do new technologies ever keep you from being a happy and fulfilled person? Use a couple of examples to explain your response.
- 6** What questions do you have about technological innovations and ethical decision-making?



*These discussion prompts are adapted from “You Are What You Tweet: Religious Ethics in the Age of Gadgets,” by James F. Caccamo, in Religious and Ethical Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century, ed. Paul O. Myhre (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2013), 65–87. Copyright © 2013 by Anselm Academic. All rights reserved. [www.anselmacademic.org](http://www.anselmacademic.org)*





# Food Ethics: Consuming with Compassion

By Julie Hanlon Rubio

**On a hot June evening in St. Louis, I am making homemade pesto for a vegetarian pasta dish. My niece stands in the kitchen telling me about arguments with friends who are vegetarian.**

While she eats a healthy, mostly plant-based, diet herself, she thinks people should be able to eat whatever they want as long as they can afford it; top-down efforts to shape people's eating habits by asking them to limit their consumption of meat and processed foods suggest a "nanny-state" that is overstepping its proper role.<sup>1</sup> Though aware of arguments about the distasteful details of meat production and the health risks of certain foods, she is skeptical about the sources disseminating this information. Furthermore, most people around her are eating the very foods alarmists insist are full of harmful chemicals, and yet they seem perfectly healthy. Is all of this concern about food really warranted?

**Most public discussion of what might be called “food ethics” focuses on health and the “ick factor”—the dirty details of how meat is processed, the risk chemicals pose to personal health, and, sometimes, the reality of animal cruelty.** These are valid concerns, but they are just the beginning. There are many ethical questions we need to ask about food: How much energy was used to make it? What is its “carbon footprint” (i.e., the amount of carbon released into the atmosphere in producing, packaging, shipping, and distributing the food, thus contributing to climate change)? How much fossil fuel did it take to grow the food, keep it fresh, and move it? Were the workers who grew and picked it paid a living wage and treated with dignity? Is it sustainably grown (i.e., can we keep growing it this way in the future)? How much water and land did it take to grow the food? How much water pollution and air pollution can be traced to it? If animals are involved, did they suffer? If we keep eating it, will we suffer?

**The way we eat has a huge impact on our bodies, animals, and the environment.**

**The way we eat has a huge impact on our bodies, animals, and the environment.** Eating affects health, shapes the lives of farm animals, accounts for a large percentage of our carbon footprint, and uses more fossil fuels than any sector of the economy except transportation.<sup>2</sup> The food system that sustains the way we eat—one dominated by industrial agriculture, factory farming, and processed foods—is unhealthy for us, unjust to animals, and unfair to future generations who deserve to inherit an earth just as rich in resources and beauty as the one we now enjoy. Changing the way we eat has great potential to reduce harm to ourselves, other living creatures, and the earth itself.



The changes recommended by ardent environmentalists, however, can be unrealistic and contradictory. Some advocate eating as much organic food as possible to support more sustainable farming methods.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, advocates of a local diet argue that buying from local farmers to avoid transporting and storing foods (when food travels an average of more than 1,000 miles to our stores) is more important. Peter Singer and Jim Mason, on the other hand, advocate striking a blow to factory farming by switching to an all-vegan diet, or avoiding all animals and animal products. Food journalist Michael Pollan opines, “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants,” emphasizing a diet with less meat and more whole foods raised by farmers who care about how their practices affect the long-term

health of the planet. *New York Times* journalist Mark Bittman tries to inspire readers to avoid processed foods and animal products and provides instructions for cooking from scratch, but declares buying local-organic foods optional. A new wave of glamorous vegan diet advocates promise that avoiding chemicals and conventional animal product will guarantee weight loss and a healthy glow. **With so many differing opinions, it is easy to be confused and overwhelmed.**<sup>4</sup>

In the meantime, organic products still account for only 2 percent of all US food sales.<sup>5</sup> Meat consumption remains high in the United States and is growing elsewhere in the world.<sup>6</sup> Most produce is far from local.<sup>7</sup>



One trip to Whole Foods or a local farmers market (where organic produce can cost two or three times as much as conventionally grown produce) is enough to convince most people they cannot afford to eat differently. Food ethics debates are a concern of an elite minority. The vast majority of Americans continue to buy most of their food from conventional grocery stores and discount chains, supporting the very systems most environmental analysts agree are responsible for the worst environmental damage. **Clearly, most people are not convinced that their behavior is unethical, and even those who want to be “green” are unable to imagine a more just way of eating that will work for them.**

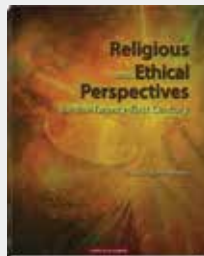
Consider a day in the life of the average college student. If she eats breakfast, she may grab coffee and a granola bar or muffin

from a campus bakery on the way to her first class. Lunch might be a submarine sandwich, chips, and a bottle of water from the campus food court. Dinner out with friends is often a meat-laden pizza or a burger, fries, and soda from a chain fast-food restaurant or the dining hall. The ethical questions above can certainly be raised about her set of food choices. Yet realistically, what other options does she have? Without facilities to cook or transportation to stores that stock alternative foods, and with limited time, knowledge, and money, it seems all but impossible to act differently. And perhaps most important, it may not be clear that the serious effort required to change would be worth it. Even if she did manage to eat differently, would anything really change? Would it really matter?

**I argue that daily food choices are morally significant.** They impact laborers, animals, the environment, and personal well-being. Every day, the way we eat affects our bodies, other bodies, and earth's future inhabitants. As human beings, we have ethical responsibilities not just to ourselves, but to other creatures, including those that will come after us. As a Christian, I believe that I am a part of the body of Christ, which includes not just fellow believers, but all people now living and to come. For the sake of that body, I believe, we have to begin eating in a different way.<sup>8</sup>

1. See [www.choosemyplate.gov/](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/) for the current national campaign, which tosses out the food pyramid in favor of a plate filled with large amounts of fruits and vegetables, and smaller amounts of protein and grains.
2. Michael Pollan, "Farmer in Chief," *The New York Times Magazine*, October 12, 2008, <http://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/farmer-in-chief/>.
3. See <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/Consumers/brochure.html>.
4. Recent books addressing the ethical dimensions of food include the following: Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2007); Nina Planck, *Real Food: What to Eat and Why* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007); Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Peter Singer and Jim Mason, *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale, 2006); Mark Bittman, *Food Matters: A Conscious Guide to Eating with More than 75 Recipes* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008); Rory Freedman and Kim Barnouin, *Skinny Bitch* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2005).
5. Singer and Mason, *The Ethics of What We Eat*, 198.
6. Mark Bittman, "Rethinking the Meat Guzzler," *The New York Times*, January 27, 2008, [www.nytimes.com/2008/01/27/weekinreview/27bittman.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/27/weekinreview/27bittman.html?pagewanted=all).
7. Joanna Blythman, "Food Miles: The True Cost of Putting Imported Food on Your Plate," *The Independent*, May 31, 2007, [www.independent.co.uk/environment/green-living/food-miles-the-true-cost-of-putting-imported-food-on-your-plate-451139.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/green-living/food-miles-the-true-cost-of-putting-imported-food-on-your-plate-451139.html).
8. As a Christian ethicist, I write from the context of my own tradition of Roman Catholicism, which values both philosophical and theological arguments. It is my hope that all people of goodwill can come to ethical debates with their own unique perspectives, respect the unique perspectives of others, and seek common ground.

*This article is an excerpt from "Food Ethics: Consuming with Compassion," by Julie Hanlon Rubio, in Religious and Ethical Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century, ed. Paul O. Myhre (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2013), 201–221. Copyright © 2013 by Anselm Academic. All rights reserved. [www.anselmacademic.org](http://www.anselmacademic.org)*



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## Reflecting on “Food Ethics: Consuming with Compassion”

Use the following prompts to help students reflect on their religious and ethical positions on food consumption. Process as a large group or post the questions around the room and have the students move to the question that most intrigues or interests them. After allowing some time for discussion, select representatives of the different questions to share key conversation points.

- 1 What values currently shape your decisions concerning food?
- 2 Does it make any difference to you to know where your food was grown, how it was harvested, or how it was prepared for your consumption? Explain.
- 3 Would it affect your ethical decision-making regarding meat eating if you knew how the animals were treated before their death or how they were slaughtered? Why or why not?
- 4 What impact does a food’s carbon footprint have on your choices concerning the consumption of food? Should it matter?
- 5 In what ways might your daily food choices contribute to environmental harm?
- 6 What would it mean for you to eat more simply?
- 7 Are the ideas of stewardship of the earth and a responsibility to future generations compelling?
- 8 As the world population continues to grow in the twenty-first century, do people need to adjust their religious and ethical perspectives on the growth, production, and consumption of food? Explain.
- 9 Does the prospect of choosing mostly foods that benefit your health and the environment seem overwhelming or doable or both? Explain.
- 10 Do you agree that your food choices say something about who you are? If so, what do you think your current food choices say about you? If not, explain why you think your food choices and your character are unrelated.

*These discussion prompts are adapted from “Food Ethics: Consuming with Compassion,” by Julie Hanlon Rubio, in Religious and Ethical Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century, ed. Paul O. Myhre (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2013), 201–221. Copyright © 2013 by Anselm Academic. All rights reserved. [www.anselmacademic.org](http://www.anselmacademic.org)*



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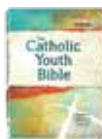
## Are You Caring about What You Are Wearing?

This activity encourages students to examine how the clothing they wear can either contribute to or combat unjust labor practices.

### Materials Needed:

- *The Catholic Youth Bible*®
- copies of a list of clothing companies that operate under sweatshop labor (available online from organizations like SweatFree Communities and Behind the Label), one for each student
- copies of an article that highlights a current concern in sweatshop labor, one for each student
- a sheet of newsprint
- a marker

- 1** For homework prior to this session, ask the students to examine an article of clothing from their closet. Tell the students to write down the type of clothing, the manufacturer's name, and the name of the country where it was made.
- 2** During the session, ask students to quietly read Exodus, chapter 5; the article "Modern Slave Labor" from *The Catholic Youth Bible* near Exodus 7; and the contemporary article on sweatshop labor that you made copies of before class.
- 3** In a large-group discussion, have the students name unjust practices that define sweatshop labor, citing examples from Exodus and the articles. Remind the students that even the small decisions we make, like the clothing we wear, can have an impact on the greater community.
- 4** On a sheet of newsprint, record the names of the manufacturers and the countries where the students' clothing was made. Highlight the companies and countries that tend to use sweatshop labor practices and list those organizations that oppose unfair working conditions. Have the students brainstorm ways they can personally combat the injustice of sweatshop labor.



*This activity is taken from Catholic Social Teaching Activities, which is part of the online resources for The Catholic Youth Bible®, fourth edition.*





# Listen to Our Conscience

“When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?”

Eleanor Roosevelt

It is our conscience, our inner voice that God gave us, which summons us toward justice. As Eleanor Roosevelt points out, by listening carefully to our conscience, we become proactive in working toward peace. When we as a society are passive in the face of impending human misery, we often respond too late and with misguided efforts to avenge the wrong that has been done. What are ways you can be proactive in preventing the suffering of others in your family or community?

**Gracious God, you call us to be proactive in helping our brothers and sisters. Help me listen tenderly to my conscience and follow its biddings.**

Be proactive today. Seek out a way to prevent the suffering of another in your family or community.



*This reflection is an excerpt from Everyday Justice, by Alan J. Talley and Scott Holzkecht (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2009). Copyright © 2009 by Alan J. Talley and Scott Holzkecht. All rights reserved.*



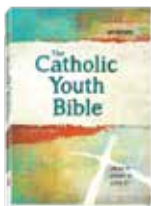


## REALITY CHECK

This activity engages students in exploring social issues to discover whether basic human rights of the poor and vulnerable are being met in society.



- 1 Begin by inviting a student to read aloud Exodus 22:21–27 and the article “Support for All” from *The Catholic Youth Bible* near Exodus 22.
- 2 Ask the students if they agree with this statement: “The basic moral test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members.” Solicit responses from the students in the large group.
- 3 Ask the students to discuss briefly with a partner whether they believe the society they live in passes this basic moral test. Invite the students to share their thoughts with the entire class.
- 4 Assign each student a social issue (housing, education, health care, nutrition, poverty, and so on) to research. Tell the students that their task is to find out how society is addressing their assigned issue—are we passing the basic moral test? Before they begin their research, ask each student to write about how they think society is responding to the issue, based on what they currently know. In their research, the students should be encouraged to discover concrete facts and statistics so they can accurately describe the issue and how society is responding.
- 5 After the students have done their research, invite each student to share with the other students in small groups what they have learned, focusing on the following questions:
  - Did the reality of the issue match up with your initial assumptions? Explain what some of the similarities and differences were.
  - Are we passing the basic moral test as a society? Give evidence from your research to support your answer.
  - What can we do to better take care of the poor and vulnerable in our society?



*This activity is taken from Catholic Social Teaching Activities, which is part of the online resources for The Catholic Youth Bible®, fourth edition.*



# ACTIONS FROM LOVE

*Keep alert, stand  
firm in your faith, be  
courageous, be strong.  
Let all that you do  
be done in love.*

**1 CORINTHIANS 16:13-14**



Being alert, standing firm in our faith, being courageous and strong is hard enough, but adding the instruction to do all that we do in love makes it even harder. But doing everything in love is a key component of our faith. We learn this through Scripture, at Mass, and in our families. Doing everything in love requires discipline and thought. Before taking action, it is helpful to ask: Why am I doing this? What is my real motivation? If the action is truly rooted in love and faith, we can be pretty sure that moving forward is a good idea. If other factors are influencing us, it is a good idea to revise our plan until Christian love is the motivator.

**As I make decisions, Lord, I need your help  
so that all that I do is rooted in *love*.**



*This reflection is an excerpt from By My Side, by Victoria Shepp (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2009). Copyright © 2012 by Victoria Shepp. All rights reserved.*

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