

# Ethical Decision - Making

Based on *Toward Transfigured Life*, by Rev. Dr. Stanley Harakas  
11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Curriculum / St. Nicholas GOC Bethlehem, PA  
Written by Ellen Tatalias / Email: wisdom@ptd.net

***"Open the door of your conscience and see the judge seated in your mind."***

## **St. John Chrysostom**

It is believed that each of us, in the course of a single day, makes over 5,000 decisions. But have you ever wondered what kind of reasoning you use to arrive at the right decisions? Certainly, most decisions we make are inconsequential, i.e. the clothes we choose to wear or the restaurant we chose for dinner, but what about the more difficult decisions, such as, choosing our friends, studying for a test (or cheating), telling the truth (or lying), or even more serious issues, such as war, abortion, genetic-engineering, and other controversial social and political issues? The Orthodox Church asks us to examine ourselves before making an important decision in the following way:

- I. **Church tradition and Canon Law**— What does the Church teach us about this issue? This is the place to start.
  - ✘ It has been inspired by God and expressed through the Church Fathers.
  - ✘ It saves us time and energy. (Why "re-invent the wheel?")
  - ✘ It has stood the test of time.
- II. **Consequences** - What will happen to me if I do this?
  - ✘ What are the "short-term," as well as the "long-term," consequences to this decision?
  - ✘ Think about the long-term consequences of abortion, or historical events, like the Treaty of Versailles, which supposedly ended a war, but really laid the groundwork for World War II.
- III. **Intent** - What do we want to happen?
  - ✘ Are our goals shaped by a Godly vision: Are they "kingdom-centered"?
  - ✘ St. Paul-Consider his "vision" for Christ's Church; Patriarch Photios (888)-With what did St. Photios have to deal?; Are our goals pleasing to God? Do we see the world through the eyes of Christ?
  - ✘ Is it "my" way or "Christ's" way?
- IV. **Motives** - What is the "real reason," the underlying motivation?
  - ✘ "It is not from the results, but from the motives that God will judge us." - St. John Chrysostom
  - ✘ Be suspicious of the underlying motivations of pride, hatred, jealousy, envy, greed, and revenge.
  - ✘ Greatest motive: LOVE. We are called to be rooted and grounded in love, just as Christ loved us. If we are motivated by unselfish concern for others, "powerful" forces are work.
- V. **Means** - Am I using appropriate methods to achieve my goal?
  - ✘ Karl Marx - the founding principle of communism: "The ends justify the means. The goal is everything."
  - ✘ If the goal is everything, then cheating, stealing, gambling, lying, etc. are considered acceptable. The Church says that the means must be as pure as the ends.

An Orthodox Christian will take into consideration all of the above before arriving at the "right" decision.