

- 736 Humans as rational beings are capable of understanding the aim and consequences of their actions. As a Christian grows spiritually, communicating with the Creator, he or she acquires an ever-deeper sense and knowledge of self, and better understands that one's actions can either bring one closer to or further away from God. Such a "walking before the face of God," that is, a life in constant interaction with God, is the very foundation of Christian consciousness.
- 737 Humans are endowed with a personal will and they orient themselves, Consequently, their moral actions have a voluntary character. A person's every voluntary decision determines the kind of person he or she becomes. For example, a person who courageously performs an act of heroic love becomes a hero, while a person who willingly agrees to commit murder becomes a murderer.
- 738 there is an indissoluble connection between the moral value of a person's every individual act and the ultimate goal of one's life. The ultimate goal is a calling to eternal life in the Most Holy Trinity; while the Christian's fundamental choice is the voluntary response in faith to this calling from God. This choice is the foundation for all other life decisions. Individual actions ought to flow from this fundamental Christian choice, and they should reflect and confirm it daily.
- 739 Every moral action is directed towards a concrete determinate end. A moral act is good if its aim coincides with the ultimate aim of Christian life and brings a person closer to participation in the life of God. If the aim of the action is not oriented towards God, the choice of such an action renders both the act and the person who performs it morally wrong and sinful.
- 740 We judge the moral goodness or sinfulness of human actions on the basis of the action's content (what exactly a person wishes to do), its aim (to what end a person wishes to perform the act), and its intention (which makes concrete a person's choice and directs the individual's will toward a stated goal). Also important are the circumstances in which a person performs his or her actions, inasmuch as they can have a bearing on whether the individual is more responsible or less responsible for the action.
- 741 It is important that the Christian understand what exactly he or she is doing and whether it contradicts one's fundamental choice and God's commandments. If the content of a person's action corresponds to one's call to holiness, then the act is morally good.

742 Intention is the directing of an individual's will to a specific end. It exposes the internal reasons for the action and reveals why a person performs the act. Intention is always the internal measure of a person's conduct, but it is not always externally apparent. Intention can lie at the heart of more than one act—it can direct a number of human acts to a chosen end. The aim of an act answers the question, to what end is a person doing something. This is the anticipated result that the person hopes to achieve through their action. For example, a person desires to give alms (the intention), and in doing so sacrifices a certain sum of money (the content) in order to help a neighbour (the aim).

743 If even one of the criteria for the moral assessment of human actions—content, aim, or intention—opposes the ultimate aim of Christian life, then such an action must be regarded as sinful. It would be a mistake to judge the morality of human actions by assessing only the intentions that prompt them or the aim that a person strives to achieve. Actions that contradict God's commandments are sinful and ruinous for the person who performs them by the very content of such actions (murder, adultery, and the like), regardless of intention, aim, or circumstances. The circumstances of an action (environment, social pressure, coercion) influence the moral weight of the action, but they do not determine it.

4. Cooperation with God in the Work of Salvation

744 The cooperation of humanity with God in the work of salvation involves joining human effort to God's grace. In Christ, a personal dialogue and union between God and humanity occurs when human efforts are joined to God's grace. Grace, acting within a person finds expression in his or her actions, and a person's vocation lies precisely in the willingness to allow grace to inhabit and act within him or her. A person is called to remain open to grace in all his or her actions and to always confirm this openness by saying "yes" to God every day.

745 Grace acts where an individual provides personal assent. All stages of the spiritual life require cooperation between human freedom and the grace of God. Grace cannot be achieved or merited as a result of zealous spiritual labour. Such labour is necessary, but God's grace is given to a person solely as a gift, and not as a reward for something. The very essence of relations between God and the human race is reflected in the giving of grace.

746 The capacity of a human being to receive the gift of grace depends on one's degree of openness and commitment to God. In accepting God's grace, a person cooperates with it and grows in it. Perfect cooperation