

The aim of this case-study is to juggle with issues of a moral nature in terms of virtues, vices and the moral action.

Case Study 1: The Cheating Dilemma – A Second Chance or Strict Justice?

Scenario:

David is a bright but struggling student in his final year of senior school. He has always been well-behaved and respectful, with a strong moral compass. However, over the past few months, his academic performance—especially in Religious Education—has significantly declined. His teachers have noticed his lack of focus in class, but none of them are fully aware of his personal struggles at home.

David's parents are going through a painful separation. The constant tension, late-night arguments, and the emotional toll on the family have left him feeling exhausted and distracted. Despite trying his best to keep up with school, his grades have suffered. The final Religious Education test was his last chance to secure a passing grade, and without it, he risks failing the subject and possibly delaying his entry into post secondary level school.

After the test, David approaches you, his Religious Education teacher, visibly distressed. He hesitates before finally confessing, "Sir/Ma'am, I did something wrong. I cheated on the test." His voice is shaky, and tears well up in his eyes. "I didn't mean to, but I panicked. I saw the answers on another student's paper, and I copied a few of them. I know it was wrong, but I was desperate. I didn't want to disappoint my parents even more than I already have."

David continues, "I've never cheated before, and I feel awful. I can't sleep knowing that I passed dishonestly. I just don't know what to do. If I tell the headmaster, I'll fail the subject and my parents will be furious. If I don't, I'll always feel like a fraud. What should I do?"

Now, you are faced with a moral dilemma. David has shown **remorse** for his actions, and his difficult personal circumstances provide important context. However, cheating is a **serious academic offense** that goes against the values of integrity, honesty, and justice—virtues central to Religious Education.

Discussion questions

- David admits his mistake, but should honesty come with consequences?
- Should the school's academic policies be upheld without exception?
- How do we take David's personal struggles into account while ensuring fairness?
- What does true repentance require in this situation?
- Does the fact that he confessed change the moral weight of his wrongdoing?
- Was David's action driven by fear rather than pure intent to deceive?
- Should he have sought help earlier instead of resorting to cheating?
- Should David report himself to the administration and accept whatever punishment follows?
- Should you handle this privately, guiding David toward moral growth while ensuring he learns from his mistake?

- Would failing the exam **help or harm** David's moral and academic development?
- Is there a way to **balance justice and mercy**, perhaps by offering him an alternative way to prove his knowledge (e.g., a retake, an oral test)?
- What does our faith say about **repentance and consequences**?
- In scripture, are there examples where **mercy and justice** were balanced effectively?
- How should religious teachers guide students who struggle morally under pressure?

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Case Study 2: The Gossiping Teacher – Harmless Talk or Harmful Vice?

Scenario:

Mrs. Bennett is one of the most well-liked and respected Religious Education teachers at your school. She has been teaching for over 15 years, and students appreciate her engaging lessons, deep knowledge of religious traditions, and warm personality. Among colleagues, she is known for being friendly, approachable, and always willing to offer advice.

However, over the past few months, some staff members and students have raised concerns about **her habit of sharing personal information about others**. While Mrs. Bennett insists that she is simply “speaking openly” and “sharing wisdom,” her words have started to cause unintended harm.

For instance, during a casual conversation in the staff room, she mentioned that one of her students, Michael, is going through a difficult time because his parents are separating. “Poor kid,” she said, “his mom moved out last month, and his dad is barely holding things together.” Some teachers started treating Michael differently—some with extra sympathy, others with pity—without him understanding why.

In another instance, Mrs. Bennett was talking to a group of senior students about **marriage and faithfulness**. To illustrate a point, she said, “You know, even adults struggle with this. Just last year, one of our teachers had serious issues in their marriage. It was really tough on them.” She didn’t mention names, but word quickly spread, and people began speculating about which teacher she was referring to.

The issue comes to a head when a student, Maria, approaches you privately. “Mrs. Bennett is a great teacher, but... she shares things about people that shouldn’t be shared,” Maria confesses. “I overheard her talking about a classmate’s family problems, and it made me uncomfortable. It doesn’t seem right for a Religious Education teacher to do that. Isn’t gossip supposed to be a sin?”

Maria’s concern leaves you with a **moral and professional dilemma**. Mrs. Bennett is a respected colleague, and her intentions might not be malicious. However, her **lack of discretion is causing harm**. Gossip—even when unintentional—can **damage reputations, break trust, and create divisions**.

Discussion Questions

- Should Mrs. Bennett be more mindful of what she shares?
- Does sharing private information undermine her role as a Religious Education teacher?
- How should teachers model respect for others in their speech?

- Is sharing private details—even with good intentions—a form of gossip?
- Should wisdom guide what a teacher chooses to share?
- Could students and colleagues lose confidence in her?
- Should you or someone **confront Mrs. Bennett directly** about her habit of oversharing?
- Should the school’s administration be involved, or is this an issue best handled privately?
- How can teachers **hold one another accountable** for moral behavior in a professional setting?
- Is there a way to **correct Mrs. Bennett without humiliating her**?
- What do religious teachings say about **gossip, slander, and discretion**?
- Can **truth-telling** be a vice when it is done without compassion or restraint?
- How can teachers use their words to **uplift rather than harm**?

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Case Study 3: The Generous Thief – Stealing for a Good Cause?

Scenario:

Sarah is a quiet, well-mannered student who is widely respected by her peers and teachers. She has always been known for her kindness and strong moral character. She volunteers at the school's charity club, helps organize fundraisers, and frequently speaks about the importance of generosity.

One afternoon, during routine financial checks, the school treasurer notices that a small amount of money is missing from the charity donation box. The funds were meant to support a local orphanage, and the school community had worked hard to collect them. Concerned, the treasurer reports the missing funds to the administration, and after reviewing security footage, they discover that Sarah was the one who took the money.

When confronted, Sarah immediately bursts into tears. "I didn't take it for myself," she insists. "I wasn't stealing—I was just borrowing it. I was planning to put it back when I could."

Sarah explains that her family is experiencing financial hardship. Her father recently lost his job, and her mother's income is barely covering their rent and food expenses. That morning, Sarah found out that there was no food left at home for her younger siblings. In desperation, she took the money from the charity box, intending to buy food for them. She had every intention of returning it once her family's situation improved.

Now, the school administration and the teachers face a **moral and disciplinary dilemma**. Sarah's actions technically constitute **theft**, and if they do not address it, they risk setting a precedent that stealing is acceptable under certain circumstances. On the other hand, **her intentions were not malicious**, and her situation evokes **compassion**.

Discussion Questions:

- Sarah's actions were motivated by a desire to care for others, but does that justify her choice?
- Does fairness require that she face consequences for taking what wasn't hers?
- How should mercy be applied when judging Sarah's actions?
- Even if Sarah intended to return the money, does taking it without permission constitute stealing?
- Can a **wrong action be excused based on good intentions**?
- Should moral standards change when someone is in dire need?
- Should Sarah face a **punishment equal to any other case of theft**, or should the school **take her personal circumstances into account**?

- Would it be appropriate to **offer her an alternative solution**, such as financial assistance for her family, instead of disciplinary action?
- How should the school **balance justice and mercy** in this situation?
- If Sarah's actions are forgiven, how can the school **ensure that other students do not use "good intentions" as an excuse for stealing**?
- What do religious teachings say about **stealing out of necessity**? (Consider scriptural examples such as when **David ate the consecrated bread in 1 Samuel 21.**)
- What role does **restitution and repentance** play in addressing wrongdoing?
- How can **faith communities support those in need** without encouraging unethical actions?

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Case Study 4: The Whistleblower Dilemma – Loyalty or Moral Duty?

Scenario:

Mr. James and Mr. Carter have been teaching Religious Education at St. Mark's High School for over a decade. They are close colleagues and often collaborate on lesson plans, student mentorship, and extracurricular activities. Many students admire them for their deep knowledge, engaging teaching methods, and moral guidance.

Recently, however, Mr. James has noticed some troubling behavior from Mr. Carter. He has observed that during break times, Mr. Carter often **makes inappropriate jokes about certain students**, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, he has seen Mr. Carter subtly **favor some students over others**, giving easier assignments to those he personally likes while being extra strict with students who challenge his views in class discussions.

The situation escalates when a student, Daniel, confides in Mr. James. "Sir, I don't know if I should say this, but... Mr. Carter doesn't treat us all the same. He always jokes about my accent and the way I dress, and it makes me feel uncomfortable. But if I say anything, I'm afraid he'll make my grades suffer."

Now, Mr. James faces a **moral and professional dilemma**. Reporting Mr. Carter could seriously damage their long-standing friendship, and it may create **conflict within the school**. Additionally, since Mr. Carter is a well-respected teacher, some staff members **might dismiss the concerns as exaggerations** or even **turn against Mr. James** for raising the issue.

However, staying silent means **allowing an injustice to continue**. Students, especially vulnerable ones, may continue to suffer unfair treatment, and failing to act could make Mr. James **complicit in moral wrongdoing**.

Discussion Questions:

- If you were Mr. James, would you have the moral strength to stand up for the students, even at personal cost?
- Is it fair for students to be treated unequally, and what duty does a teacher have to address it?
- What does professional integrity require of a teacher who witnesses unethical behavior?
- Would staying silent make Mr. James guilty of inaction in the face of injustice?
- Does Mr. Carter's favoritism contradict the moral values he is supposed to teach?
- Should Mr. Carter's position allow him to act without consequences?
- Should Mr. James **confront Mr. Carter directly**, or would that be too risky?

- Is reporting the issue to the **administration the right course of action**, or should Mr. James try to mediate the issue informally?
- How should the school balance **protecting student welfare** with **avoiding false accusations**?
- What are the **potential risks of speaking up**, and are they outweighed by the moral responsibility to act?
- What do religious teachings say about **speaking out against wrongdoing**? (Consider biblical teachings on accountability and justice.)
- How do **virtues like wisdom and prudence** apply in making ethical decisions in professional settings?
- How should a Christian or religious educator balance **loyalty to colleagues with their moral duty to students**?

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Case Study 5: The Struggling Student – Discipline or Compassion?

Scenario:

Ethan is a 16-year-old student in your Religious Education class. Over the past year, his behavior has significantly changed. Once an attentive and respectful student, he has become withdrawn, frequently skips class, and barely participates when present. His grades have dropped drastically, and he has been caught several times **using offensive language and disrespecting teachers**.

The situation reaches a crisis point when Ethan is involved in a **verbal altercation** with a teacher. During a discussion on moral responsibility, he suddenly lashes out, saying, “This is all nonsense! Religion doesn’t help anyone! If God cared, my life wouldn’t be falling apart!” His words shock the class, and he storms out before anyone can respond.

Afterward, some teachers **argue for strict disciplinary action**. They believe that **allowing such disrespectful behavior to go unchecked** will set a bad example for other students. However, a few staff members suggest that Ethan might be **going through personal struggles** and that punishment alone might not be the best response.

Later that day, Ethan’s close friend tells you privately, “Sir/Ma’am, Ethan’s home life is a mess. His dad left last year, and his mom works three jobs just to keep them afloat. He basically raises his younger siblings by himself. I think he’s just... angry at everything.”

Now, as Ethan’s Religious Education teacher, you face a **moral and pastoral dilemma**. Ethan’s behavior is disruptive and cannot be ignored, but **strict punishment without understanding the root cause might push him further away**.

Discussion Questions:

- Should Ethan’s **personal struggles** influence how his behavior is addressed?
- Should he still face consequences for his disrespect, regardless of his circumstances?
- How can a teacher **correct Ethan’s behavior while guiding him toward healing**?
- Should Ethan’s frustration excuse the way he treated his teacher and classmates?
- Should teachers **assume Ethan is just being rebellious**, or should they **investigate further**?
- If Ethan is ignored, could his **resentment deepen** and lead to more destructive choices?
- Should Ethan face **strict disciplinary measures** to maintain classroom order and respect?
- Should his **personal struggles be taken into account**, leading to a different kind of intervention?

- Could a **restorative approach**—such as a one-on-one conversation or counseling—be more effective than punishment?
- How can **Religious Education teachers help students process anger, grief, and doubt** in a way that encourages moral growth?
- What do religious teachings say about **discipline, compassion, and guiding the lost?** (Consider Jesus' approach to sinners and outcasts.)
- How can a **balance between mercy and correction** be maintained in an educational setting?
- What role should **faith and religious education play in helping students navigate personal suffering?**