

### **MEDICAL ETHICS**

A Roman Catholic Perspective

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#### Hippocratic Oath

This oath is labeled as a covenant (versus a contract) which calls upon the gods (or Higher Power) to bear witness to what the physician freely undertakes, to abide by the promises it contains. It is a formal agreement between the patient and the physician, as well as a commitment to society as a whole. It exhorts the physician to do no harm which resulted in a nearly-universal reverence for the sacredness of life itself and the prohibitions that follow from life as sacred, namely, no abortion or euthanasia. The oath also requires that those who swear to commit their lives to it agree to benefit the sick who seek medical help. Finally, the oath's adherents agree to pass on the knowledge they receive to future generations. This tradition, up until the mid-twentieth century, was universal in its application and even trans-cultural. It prohibited undue harm to patients, safeguarded the sanctity of life and sought to understand human nature as containing the parameters for proper medical treatment.