

Paper 3: June 17th 2019 Afternoon: Christian Moral Principles

Religion is characterised by morals as well as beliefs. There are different approaches to morals in Christianity. *Some Christians celebrate diversity and good intentions. Other Christians identify more authoritative factors. In the Roman Catholic Church, the authority of the words of Jesus, spoken to the apostles and handed down through the Church holds high authority. For many Protestants, the Bible holds the highest authority* with different traditions giving different weight to the Church and Reason. **Other Christians base right and wrong on the single authority of love.**



1. Theonomous Christian Ethics place God and God's commandments at the centre of the moral life. The word comes from the words for God and Law. It is a deontological theory which states ethics is governed by God's Laws / Commands. St. Paul and Augustine said that humans were sinful and ignorant post Fall and **cannot live good lives based on the reason (the mind) and make the right decisions for ourselves, but need God to reveal the source of living. God's commands and direct words are found in the Bible - Sola Scriptura (by Scripture alone) - the Bible is what a person needs to live a good life. "God put words in your mouth." (Jeremiah 1). God is the Bible author . It is a set of truth statements (propositional revelation) that reveal God's message to the world and therefore it is logical it should be followed. It is the literal, inspired, "breathed in" word of God. The Bible is infallible and its commands apply at all times(Biblicism/Fundamentalism).** St. Paul said "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." (2 Timothy 3). St. Paul said no prophecy in scripture is caused by the prophet or human will but is "spoke from God" (2 Peter 1). **By using the Bible as the only source of morality, clear unquestionable guidelines are given. Biblicism (or Fundamentalism) is the idea that the Bible is the revealed word of God and the writers of Bible are directly inspired by God.** Ethics is in real life situations in the Bible (Eg the story of David and Bathsheba where David commits adultery). **God's Covenant is expressed in the Bible. This is a special agreement / promise with humans that requires special behaviour. In the Old Testament, ethics are social and personal as seen in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) and the prophets standing for justice. In the New Testament, Jesus establishes a new covenant based on the inner law of love, faith and peace. Jesus died for principles. St. Paul spoke of the Christian life as "a living sacrifice." (Romans 12). Christians embrace the whole not just favourite passages. Some Christians see the Bible as different types of text which need interpreted but are still inspired by God (though not dictated) but still accurate.** The Bible is a source of guidance but does not have to be literal. Authors use own words rather than the exact word of God. It was written in particular times and cultures. It looks at different situations from different angles in different places . This explains apparent contradictions. *Different styles of writing written by a people in specific contexts but God can work in different ways. Church or reason could assist interpretation with modern issues today.* Maybe God should not be limited and can write in more than one way.

2. Heteronomous Christian Ethics

Coming from the Greek words for several and law, this states that there is a variety of sources of authority and morals. *The Bible remains important but because it was written so long ago, additional sources are required.* More than the Bible is needed and used. The Bible is part of the Christian tradition in which humans from very different periods of history have been inspired by God to write and reflect. *This process does not end with the Bible as the world changes.* Ethics becomes a combination of biblical teaching, Church teaching and human reason. The Bible was a product of this as Christian leaders gathered to choose and arrange the New Testament. **The key criteria for authentic tradition was having a direct link to an apostle (or aposticity).** Some books were discarded.

a) The Church: The Catholic Church believes the Church has authority, given by Jesus, guided by the Holy Spirit, to interpret the Bible and announce moral principles and the Divine Law to help sinful humans. This is called Sacred Tradition guided by the Holy Spirit. Vatican II said Text and Tradition needed each other. *This teaching or catechism was given by Jesus to Peter and the apostles (apostolic succession) and this spoken tradition was handed down to the early Church then continues to bishops and Popes.* It helps sinful humans. The teaching, traditions and practices of the Church is called the **Magisterium**. The Church is “the pillar of truth.” **A 1996 Papal Letter (encyclicals) from Pope John Paul II called Veritatis Splendor (1996) said moral law known to all peoples through reason, natural law and conscience.** Some Protestants believe councils or synods assist interpretation and the Church, Prayer, Preaching and Worship guide too.

b) Reason/Natural Law: Catholics also use reason and Natural Law to identify revelation. The most important area in ethics is in understanding Natural Law. God has a core understanding for the universe and gives order and purpose only God knows in **Eternal Law**. God and has revealed some things in the Bible (**Divine Law**). **Natural Law is a further tier.** All things have a natural purpose and flourish when they achieve this. **Aquinas said humans know God’s eternal law through our reason (unique to human beings).** This law is seen in the self-evident principle **to do good for human flourishing and avoid evil.** Natural Law contains primary precepts/premises worked out by reason, verified by the Church and shared with humans and all beings – **the desire to live and survive.** The second precepts are shared with animals - **to reproduce and bring up the young.** The third set of precepts is unique to humans - **to develop reason and know God and to live in an ordered society.** *Human laws are not self-evident but deduced from these principles which include the protection of innocent life, the goodness of marriage, the wrongness of adultery and respect for property.* St Paul said the Gentiles had the “Law written in their hearts.” (Romans 2).

c) Conscience: Catholics also give authority to conscience (the inner sense of right or wrong, the inner voice where we recognise the moral quality of an act) to make moral decisions. Aquinas said conscience was **reason used to work out the right thing to do.** J.H. Newman said conscience had more authority than the Pope as it came before him.

d) Liberation Theology using sources other than the Bible. Eg Marx. See LT notes.

e) Protestantism: Many Protestants agree with the use of Church, reason and tradition (eg Anglicanism) to interpret the Bible today through councils, synods, preaching, prayer and worship but the Bible still has ultimate authority. Some Protestants believe that the Bible can speak to current situations if appropriately analysed. **Bible study groups as well as preaching and private reflection are stressed.** American theologian Stanley Hauerwas sees Christians as “resident aliens” in society living in communities shaped by and developing the Christian Story. He gives the **example of a pregnant teenager wanting an abortion. She is part of the Christian family, the Body of Christ.**

3. Autonomous Christian Ethics: This comes from the Greek words for “self” and “rule.” The emphasis is on the individual. This approach **can see nothing distinctive about Christian Ethics.** Catholic theologian **Hans Kung** (who was banned in 1979 for rejecting the authority of the Pope and believes euthanasia is not against Jesus’ teaching) *states there is nothing in Christian Ethics that cannot be found in a person of good will and advocates a global ethic. Bible is not specially different from other inspiring literature.*

Christians may stress Jesus’ command to self-sacrificial, servant, unconditional or agape love (the Greek word) based on other-centredness as the motivating factor to apply to ethics. In **Mark 12, Jesus sums up the law as being about love – love of God and love of neighbour. God has this type of love for humans and we try to reflect this.** Jesus sacrificed his life and loved enemies/outcasts. *“Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”*(Jesus, John 15). In **1 Corinthians 13, St. Paul states love is patient, kind, never envious, never boastful, never arrogant, never rude. It does not take pleasure in wrong but in good. It is resilient, believes, hopes.** Pope Francis has stressed Love and Compassion. Love is a built-in moral compass, directing us said JAT Robinson. **It is a fundamental and extreme human emotion so God might well have expected it to drive us.** Other thinkers stress Love can empower the Christian to put people first in challenging circumstances. Especially when mainstream, society needs challenged.

For Paul Tillich, love was central not fixed, traditional laws. It was underpinned by justice and grew out of wisdom. We learn from the laws of the Bible but love, ultimate fairness for all, needs to be central to our person-centred ethical decision-making. Joseph Fletcher adapted Tillich to determine his person-centred situation ethics. **Fletcher states goodness is not revealed but part of being human. For Fletcher, love is the central principle that stops Christians into falling into under or over reliance on rules.** Christians should follow the rules unless more loving to do otherwise. They transform situation into one of love. He advocates 4 working principles: 1. Pragmatism (acting to make a situation most loving). 2. Relativism (no absolute duties that make rules more important. Everything relative to love). 3. Positivism (Human need first). 4. Personalism (Humans made in God’s image to be respected).

Based on Aristotle, some argue that ethics is about developing virtue and character. This is more important than following rules and laws. Stanley Hauerwas said it is who we want to be not what we do which is key. We focus on who we want to be not what we wish to do. Some say this was Jesus’ key message – develop character for life. Aquinas helped virtue helps decisions. Rules cannot be formed for everything.

1. **Criticisms: Many say we must be careful about taking the Bible too literally** eg Jesus said if your right eye causes you to sin, cut it out (Matthew 5).
2. **Why are humans not free to live their lives?**
3. **If the Bible is the direct word of God, why different styles of writing.**
4. **Modern situations are not covered by the Bible. Plus modern science.**
5. **The facts in the Bible do not match modern scientific knowledge.**
6. **Some people “cherry pick” parts of the Bible.**
7. **Cannot tell how different parts of Bible should be authentically interpreted.**
8. **Karl Barth warned against giving the Bible divine status** (bibliolatry) which only can be attributed to God. God’s Word (revelation in the world) has worked through different writers of the Bible. The Bible is a witness to the word not the Word itself. It is supreme source of moral truth not The Truth.
9. **Is Church Tradition equal to the Bible? Jesus criticised traditional teachings.**
10. **Problems with tradition in the past. Lead to The Reformation. Corruption.**
11. **Does God reveal to the Church each day?**
12. **When do we interpret the Bible at face value and when to go to the Church?**
13. **What sources are correct sources of authority? Which Church and leader?**
14. **Where there is disagreement, who has authority ultimately?**
15. **Are there absolute rules if we follow tradition? Reason flawed too.**
16. **How are contradictory commands/ rules in the Bible reconciled?** “Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” (Exodus 21). The Old Testament permits war and retributive justice. Capital Punishment part of God’s judgement on those who blaspheme by destroying human life made in the image of God (Genesis 9). The death penalty is for those who undermine social and divine order for adultery, disrespect to parents and a stranger who enters the temple. Deut. 20 sets out rules of war and says Israelites can kill foreign women and children. But in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) retribution is replaced by Reconciliation . The old law is revised. Peacemakers are blessed and enemies loved.
17. **We interpret the Bible subjectively.**
18. **What are legitimate sources of morality?** Some sources more important?
19. **Tradition too much shaped by men.** (Ruether).
20. **Christian ethics more than love – this is an over-simplification.**
21. **People might interpret love in different ways.** It needs reason alongside.
22. **How are different people’s loves negotiated? Need reason alongside.**
23. **Autonomous ethics can be individualistic/ selfish/ simplistic/unrealistic.**

Is Christian Ethics personal or communal? The Bible gives individuals a way of life to live according to need. Jesus spoke to individuals and Christians and Situation Ethics apply reason to moral issues individually. Prayer is individual. **On the other hand, the Bible shows how a community lives, Jesus spoke to groups, the Bible should be shared and studied in groups, there are community rules in the Bible that are interpreted together. Shared study and worship key.**

Is Christian Ethics Distinctive? Where the Bible, Resurrection and Incarnation are stressed in theonomous ethics, though there may be similarities with other religions, Christian Ethics is very different. Using love can be distinctive but this may be the same way as other people approach love. *Christianity does call people to be counter cultural and to challenge society and love enemies.*