

THE CHRISTIAN ETHICAL STANCE

Notes from, *Ethical Issues in Six religious Traditions*, Peggy Morgan & Clive Lawton eds. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2001.

The chapter on Christianity was written by Trevor Shannon
Starting on p. 175

Christian Ethics and Morality are not about winning God's approval!

The basic belief is that God loves people as they are. This was demonstrated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, overcoming people's fallen nature and original sin. A Christian accepts that God loves them and responds by trying to live in accordance with God's commands. (They have been sanctified)

In the case of a moral dilemma – a Christian will often make the same decision as someone of

another faith, or an atheist. The difference is in the reasons for making the decision.

What would Jesus have done?

Jesus said to his disciples, So if I, your Lord and

- Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet (Jn 13:15)
- Paul takes up the theme, "Follow my example, as I follow Christ's (1 Cor.11:1)

'Is the decision in accordance with the law of love?'

"I give you a new commandment: love one another; as I have loved you, so you are to love one another. If there is this love among you, then all will know that you are my disciples' (John 13:34)

All three synoptics record Jesus summary of the Ten Commandments “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength” and “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

(Mark 12:29-31, Matt.22:37-9, Luke 10:27-8)

Once again Paul takes up the theme ‘All commandments are summed up in one rule, “Love your neighbours as yourself”. Love cannot wrong a neighbour: therefore the whole law is summed up in love’ (Rom.13:9-10)

Paul also wrote the great ‘Hymn of Love’ (1 Cor.13:4-7)

– a love which is central to all Christian morality;

Love is patient, love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude, nor selfish, not quick to take offence. Love keeps no score of wrongs,

does not gloat over other men's sins, but delights in the truth. There is nothing that love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope and its endurance.

John talks about the love that is demanded of Christians being a gift from God to be received and shared (1John 4:7, 16, 19)

In an ideal situation, a Christian might make the following steps in decision making

1. Prayer in praying for guidance a Christian is demonstrating the belief that God can guide the individual through the work of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus promised the disciples would guide them into 'all truth' (John 16;13)

It is also showing the belief that God's Holy Spirit

can speak to people through their consciences.

2. The Bible – the Word of God is an important source of guidance, seen from infallible to be studied in context and applied to particular circumstances (situational)

3. Traditional teaching – does not exist on all moral issues. Often it is teaching from one part of the church eg there is often clear guidance for Roman Catholics, where it is believed that God's Holy Spirit guides people by working through the tradition of their church as a body rather than as individuals.

The fundamentalist view is one that states once it has been stated in the Bible it must remain true for all times and in all situations

Others believe that all rules are guidelines to be applied individually and that the particular circumstances of each case must be taken into account – situation ethics.

There is not, never has been, and never can be ONE Christian ethic. Basing one's response on love gives flexibility of action and variety to the possible answers to a problem.