

‘Christian Ethics And Their Practice’

1. Introduction

We have already examined the basis of Christian ethics¹. In this we saw that the true nature of law is creational, and that the moral law derives from the creation of God in that this law constitutes the functional principles of the universe. These are outworked in (a) Love to God, and (b) Love to our neighbour. Both of these will cover concern for the whole creation. To love God is to obey, and to obey is to live in conformity with the nature of man as formed in the image of God. This will cause man to be concerned both for his neighbour and the universe in which he lives.

In our survey we saw what ethics meant to Israel, and how obedience is rooted in covenant and covenant love. We saw the new covenant which supersedes the old has the same intrinsic law, but the motivation of love and grace is the most powerful in the universe. When it was said ‘the law came by Moses but grace and truth by Jesus Christ’ there was no denigration of law. In fact, paraphrased it meant, ‘The law, when it came by Moses was, to the people of Israel a great and glorious gift from God, yet immeasurably greater than that gift was the gift of grace which came by Jesus Christ’. It is on this basis that Christian ethics are to be considered.

2. What Are Christian Ethics?

Viewed from one point of view Christian ethics are unique. They exist as an ethic never shaped this way before in history. From another vantage point they are seen simply as the richest expression of the outworking of love, that is to say of the initial essential laws of the universe, that is to say the true moral way of human living.

When we say they are unique we mean that man's rebellion has made the true ethic of life irrational, and the false 'ethic' (so called) rational. Hence when one opposes the true ethic which is rooted in the nature of God, he will never see it. Hence we say the Christian ethic is revelational, with all that the word 'revelation' connotes. The first element of revelation comes through Moses (law) and the second through Christ (grace). The first is necessary as the foundation for the second. The basic ethic at the heart of both is the same. The measure of revelation is greatest in the case of the latter.

3. The Power That Motivates For Ethical Obedience

These were discussed fully in our last paper. We simply repeated that

(a) Man is freed from all (moral) enemies.

¹ See Living Faith Study No. 29 "The Basis of Christian Ethics" (N.C.P.I. 1978).

- (b) Man in the New Covenant lives in the fulness and (enabling) power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit reveals his emancipation from evil, and keeps it fresh to him, thus giving him (moral) power to reject the evil and live the good.
- (c) Man is now motivated to obedience by love and gratitude. The love of the Cross has liberated him. That same love constrains (disciplines) him. He lives in the context of love, so that love and obedience are intimately the one, and loving obedience evokes further responses of love and obedience. Man also has the motivation of hope for when he sees what he will be, he seeks now to be what he then will be. Living in the freedom of obedience he is motivated not to return to slavery.

Finally, man works in the context of the people of God. He is part of the holy people, and the corporate life lived motivates him, and enables him. Only by understanding the nature of Christian ethics, and the motivation to obedience can one then proceed to look at the ethical issues which arise today.

4. Ethics Anthropocentric Or Theocentric?

An ethic which is revelational must necessarily differ from one which is rationally worked out in any culture or society. Most ethics have a utilitarian element. The society is generally better off when ethics are practiced. It will be 'better off' according to its own mores. A humanistic ethic will differ greatly from a revelational ethic. This is well illustrated in Matthew 19:1-9 where Jesus agrees that Moses allowed divorce as concessive, and primarily because the hearts of the husbands were hard. He then points out the difference, virtually, of making choices (a) According to where and how men are, i.e. within the kingdom of man, and (b) 'For the kingdom of heaven's sake', i.e. an ethical obedience which has only the Kingdom in mind. By that we mean that which prays 'Thy will be done'. The perspectives and dimensions of man's kingdom and God's Kingdom are greatly different. Also whilst there is no moral power in the first, there is plentiful moral power in the second.

An anthropocentric ethic may rise, comparatively speaking, to great heights. One of the reasons is that it may be unconsciously influenced by formulated ethics which have sprung from revelation. However, the final question will be, 'How does it benefit man?' whereas the theocentric ethic will ask, 'How does it glorify God?' or, 'How does it fulfil the will of God?'

5. The Law of Christ

The law of Christ can be no less than the law of the Kingdom. In our last two papers we have seen

- (a) The law of love is really the creational law of the universe in that the moral law is the functional law of the universe. Since God is love and He is creator, then what He creates must be in the love principle.
- (b) The law of Israel is really the creational law worked out in God's covenant people.
- (c) The law of love in the Christian covenant (the new covenant) is also the creational law.

Hence the law of Christ is the law of love, and is the perfect law of liberty and is the royal law, and is the 'law of the heart' as seen in Jeremiah

31:31-34. So see Romans 13:8-10, Gal. 5:13-15, James 1:22-25, 2:8-13, 1 John 2:7-8.

Paul speaks of being 'enlawed to Christ' (I Cor. 9:21) and this must surely mean that the law of the Spirit, or the law into which the Spirit leads is the law of the new heart, the law of Christ, the law of love, as against any mere externalising and legalising of the law of love. This accords with Jer. 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:24-28, Romans 8:15, Gal. 5:16, 18, 25.

We may conclude then that the law of Christ is objective in that it is the love of God outworking. It is subjective in that each person has to know and experience and practice this law as a son of the Father, a subject of Christ, and as led by the Holy Spirit. In this sense the ethic outworked can be said to be situational. Yet the question asked in the situation is not, 'Will this hurt my neighbour, or will this benefit my neighbour?' but 'Is this according to the nature (and so the will) of God?' Any situational decision which is anthropocentric will appeal to humanistic thinking, but any situational element which is theocentric will be valid because it is based on that which is revelational. This, of course, is not to say that knowing 'what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God' is always an easy or simple matter.

When now, we seek to work out some of the ethical problems that face the Christian it must be in the light of the bases and principles we have stated to this point, that is those in this introduction and the two former papers.²

6. Practical Obedience To The Law of Christ

Whilst believers have an inherent knowledge of things as they are, especially the matters of their salvation (I John 2:20, 27, cf. I Cor. 2:12), yet they need also to see what is their condition and position in the new life in Christ. This knowledge is obtained from reading the Scriptures.

These Scriptures tell the new man in Christ³ that

- (a) He is a new creation.
- (b) He is freed from guilt, being under grace.
- (c) He now lives under the aegis and aid of the Holy Spirit.
- (d) His conscience is a reliable aid only when in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 9:1), otherwise it can be strong and be a stumbling block, or weak and be a hindrance (Rom. 14, I Cor. 8).
- (e) He is a creature of love, and it is natural for him to love. Not against these matters, but as determining the outworking of them the new man is
- (f) Indwelt by sin which is stronger of itself than man of himself.
- (g) He is still opposed by all evil powers which exist objectively. Then as against these forces which oppose him he is empowered by the Spirit (Acts 1:8) and assisted by grace (11 Cor. 12:9, Titus 2:11f, cf. I Peter 5:10).

² That is Living Faith Study No. 28 and 29, 'The True Nature of Law', and 'The Basis of Christian Ethics.'

³ See Living Faith Study No. 21, 'The New Man in Christ'.

If a man does not live in faith, i.e. if he is not led by the Spirit, and so constantly renewed in his mind, then he will gravitate towards the humanistic (and utilitarian) ethic, and miss the revelational ethic which is the ethic of Christ as revealed by the Holy Spirit.

All of this means that the man in Christ must seek to know the Scriptures and at the same time listen to the voice of the Spirit. Normally all of this will happen within the context of the church, the people of God, since the ethic is never merely individualistic. It is personal, but personal within the context of the corporate people of God. In this context of life, the experience of love, the gifts, ministries and graces the ethic is best known.

7. The Issues Which Confront The Believer

(i) Introduction

There are certain issues which seem apodictic, such as murder, rape, theft, lying, and so on. Other issues do not seem so clear such as war, politics, abortion, euthanasia, and the like. Even those which seem clear such as murder and theft can be discussed casuistically. For example, is taking life in war not under prohibition by God? Is it not murder? Are there no extenuating circumstances in which theft might be acting according to the law of love? Might not adultery under some circumstances be an act of love? These are questions which are not only being posed, but answers are also being given, and not all Christians agree on the answers.

Where the Scripture is clearly prescriptive, and the prescriptions are understood in the light of the nature of God, man, and creation, as also in the light of forgiveness, grace, and new life, then the conscience is enlightened, and the will of God is known for that person. Only then may one proceed in the light of the revealed ethic. Everything else, to that point, is coming to know the ethic. From that point it is obeying and living the ethic.

(ii) Principles of Discovering the Ethic

How does one discover the ethic? We have seen, elsewhere, that the law is implanted in the heart. This is the truth of the new covenant. Paul avers that the pagan also has it written upon his heart (Rom. 2:15). Love has been placed in the heart (Rom. 5:5), as also has the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5, Acts 2: 38). As we have pointed out, all these things notwithstanding, enlightenment from the Scripture must influence the discernment and judgement of the believer.

If to this he adds the element that we are always learning, always growing, always maturing, then our knowledge will be incomplete at any point. This does not mean that Scripture and the Spirit are not giving direction, but that we are not always at that point where we perceive and understand fully. Hence the injunction that if any man lacks wisdom he is to ask God. This can (and will) be given at any point no matter what the degree of maturity or the capacity to discern from what one knows. Hence the need to be well-versed in the Scriptures holistically rather than atomistically.

Again, legalism must be as much avoided as its opposite antinomianism. Law is essential to life and creation. Legalism is that approach which makes law to be an end in itself, or which detaches it as such, from God, and makes the conscience (and so, the subject) subject to law as a legalistic system.

Often legalism is the attempt of a person to satisfy God by the acts he executes without reference to the functional and purposeful nature of law, It can be a self-justifying device. To discover the ethic one must be free of this. Antinomianism fails to see the essential nature of law, and believes the person is free from commitment to it. Such so-called liberty leads to dangerous license (11 Peter 2:19).

Finally we need to remember that we are not seeking to define an ethic for the world. We see that as already defined for all mankind in the nature of God, man and creation. Man has not been released from such, even though he is fallen. The ethic we are concerned with is the ethic of the Kingdom. Only he has entered it who has repented, received the forgiveness of sins and the grace of God. This ethic is one which takes into consideration the truth of God on the one hand and the fact of a world in which sin abounds on the other. It will therefore be an ethic of both grace and law.

On these bases then we may proceed to examine some of the ethical issues which confront us today.

(iii) Marriage, Family, and Divorce

The reader is referred to wider reading on this subject⁴ (as indeed all the issues here discussed) as many previously accepted interpretations of being man and woman are in question, and the Scriptures referring to them are being debated in a new way.

Matthew 19:1-6 (cf. Matt. 5:31, Mark 10:1-12) gives Jesus' view of marriage. It is rooted in the creational principle. The order of marriage is (i) The leaving of the parents. (ii) The cleaving together. (iii) The becoming one flesh. This is the true order, and obviously any tampering with it would be inadmissible. Again divorce is inadmissible except for unchastity. It is debated as to what 'unchastity' (i.e. *porneia*) is. Some scholars claim that it is fornication alone. This in the narrowest meaning of the word could mean (a) Sexual relationship before marriage in which case the offending one has precluded the right conditions for marriage, and the non-offending one is free of the marriage. (b) The element nominated in the O.T as 'indecent' (Deut. 24:1-4), which might include things such as homosexuality, bestiality, and the like. It is to be noted that adultery in the O.T was punishable by death, and that would, in any case, clear the marriage.

Without looking at the negative elements of divorce we see that marriage was hedged about with sanctions, because it was intended to be of a permanent nature, and by no means provisional. In forbidding the putting asunder of what God had joined the Scripture shows the nature of the bond. It is not the bond of two persons so much as certain elements which make for the fulfilment of the marriage. The fulfilment of the marriage was, normally speaking, the implementation of the creational mandate given to man in Genesis 1:26ff, and partly repeated in Genesis 9:1f.

Marriage then is a union, not only of persons, but the elements God has given them by which they may fulfil His will. 'It is not good for man to be alone' means he and she need to be together to fulfil the function for which they were created, and this is not limited to their relationship which itself is the basis for their operations. Since the mandate is given to the entire

⁴ See 'The Role & Purpose of Man & Woman (G. Bingham, N.C.P.I 1975). See articles in 'Interchange' 1977-78. See especially No. 23, p.149-174 'Divorce & the Bible' by B. Ward-Powers. Any discussion should be in the context of man and woman's purposive roles in God's plan. All books on the subject should be evaluated on these grounds.

human race, then many elements of it can obviously be fulfilled by those who are not married. Certain elements of course are limited to marriage such as procreation.

If the positive elements of marriage are understood then the debate concerning divorce will be on another level. For example, the life of the family demands, normally speaking, the full relationship between husband and wife so that they can function together as parents, and the children may also function as children within the family.

The whole matter of the family derives from the creational mandate 'Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth'. This must surely mean families which have purpose. It does not then much matter whether they are a series of nuclear families or a grouping of nuclear families in the natural household congregation, or the nations (families) which had distinct identity. All of these are created to fulfil the will of God. They take, then, their identity from this fact, as this fact also is fulfilled by the life and work of the families.

Unless this wider view is taken of husband-wife purposeful relationships, and then parent-children, and intra-family relationships which themselves draw from and contribute to inter-family relationships, then the understanding of personal being and the true modes of males and females will be obscured. In fact the nature of divorce will also be obscured.

In the Jewish economy husband-wife relationships were protected and encouraged. Likewise the family way of life was set out, with provisions for male and female children. All children were understood to be under the tutelage and protection of the parents, especially the father. For a man or woman to 'leave their mother and father' meant they had reached sufficient maturity to take on marriage, and their marriage was supported by the parents. Hence they were now free, on marriage, to set up their own home unit, and, hopefully, their own family through procreation. It is doubtful whether Jesus said anything which was at variance with the Jewish economy. In himself, of course, he revealed new dimensions of the father-son relationship, and promoted the wider family relationship in the building of the church.

When it comes to divorce then the reprehensibility of this must be seen in that Jesus speaks clearly against it. Malachi 2:16 quotes God as saying, 'I hate divorce'. Jesus says that when it happened it was because of the hardness (obduracy) of the hearts of the husbands. That divorce does happen is self-evident. If Jesus prohibited putting asunder of what God had joined then he meant it could be put asunder.

Jesus' exceptional clause in the matter of divorce was 'for porneia', which as we have said is debated. It should also be seen that the law of Moses did not so much positively allow for divorce as it sought to preserve the reality of the exceptional situation. A reading of Deut. 24:1-4 showed that such a divorce had to be serious, and by no means an expedient.

The statement of Jesus seems to stand clearly enough. It is the statement of Paul in I Cor. 7 which presents problems. Again the term 'separation' is debated by scholars, some claiming that it means divorce, and others that it means separation without divorce. It is clear that in vs.10 and 11 Paul points back to Christ's teaching, quoting him. From v.12 to 24 Paul is showing that even when married to an unbeliever the first thought should not be separation or divorce, but being content to remain in the state in which one was called (i.e. converted). Only when the unbelieving partner himself (or, herself) decides to depart should separation be considered. Of course there is the question of whether separation is not in fact a sundering of the relationship.

It has often been pointed out that divorce per se does not put asunder. It is generally only the pronouncement that the relationship is already asunder!

Finally, the matter of marriage, parenthood and familyhood should be understood in the light of the Kingdom of God. Questions which arise within marriage such as authority, obedience, and the like can only be determined properly where the parties are living under such criteria as the beatitudes and the fruit of the Spirit. In the context of these the questions are not vexed ones. Indeed in such situations they will rarely arise.⁵

(iv) Sex, Fornication, Adultery, Homosexuality

The problem with the word sex is its immediate association only with the biological act of coition, whether heterosexual or homosexual. If we mean by sex maleness and femaleness, then sex has to do with various categories such as son, brother, father, uncle, grandfather, etc., as also its female counterparts. In other words, the biological aspect of coition would refer only to the husband-wife relationship.

If by sex we mean maleness and femaleness in the context of marriage then the connotation of sex is wide. In the Scriptures marriage is the only accepted connotation for this way of sex. Within marriage, however, sex is not limited to sexual intercourse. It is in the true sense the whole of marriage, this including relationships, interests, enterprises, carried out in the way of true functionality. An archetype for husband-wife relationships is found in the relationship of Christ and his Bride (the church). Here the husband is head and the wife subject to him. It has been argued that the subjection of the wife is a result of the fall (Genesis 3:16), but whilst the mode and degree suggested there may have something to do with the fall it is scarcely likely that this is the case with Christ and his Bride. This must be of the normal functional order of marriage, and Paul says it is from this that we should derive our understanding and practice of marriage (Ephes. 5:32, 33).

Sex then will include the procreation of children, where fertility is possible. It will include the life of the family, for the family's relationships stem again from the parents, and in their functional order. The father-son order has been well demonstrated and taught by God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. The whole fact and meaning of sex, then can be derived from the Biblical archetypes of Father (God) Son and Elder Brother (Jesus Christ), Husband and Wife (Christ and the Church), Mother (Jerusalem above, the Church, the People of God). Each of these relationship correlates with functionality.

Homosexuality is a vexed question. Sometimes attitudes to homosexuals are confused with the objective facts of homosexuality. Leaving aside the question of attitudes homosexuality is not accepted in Scripture. Sodomy was associated with pagan worship, particularly that of Molech, and is condemned in Lev. 18:22, and 20:13, and its penalty is death. Passages such as Rom. 1: 26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 1 Tim. 1:9-10 (cf. Jude 6-7, 11 Peter 2:6-8) speak of homosexuality and its acts, and these are considered (amongst other things) to be sin. Illicit sexual operations are also condemned, including fornication and adultery.

No doubt utilitarian anthropocentric ethics can make out a good case for accepting what seems to be aberrant behaviour. However in the context of the Kingdom of God these are not acceptable. Those who do such things will not enter the Kingdom. In Romans 1:20ff the rejection of God brings idolatry and in the wake of this comes (a) Sexual immorality and (b) Sexual perversion. If we take the relationship of male and female in its widest context then we

⁵ Problems within the marriage and the family are not the subject of this study. LFS 32 'The Basis & Practice of Christian Counselling' deal with such questions.

can see the deficiencies and aberrations of immorality and homosexuality. It is also interesting that idolatry is often referred to as adultery or fornication, as though the reprehensible nature is not so much in biological acts as in the damage done to basic (functional) relationships. In Genesis 4:1 Adam is said to know his wife doubtless in the act of intercourse. Knowing in the deepest sense belongs to the intimate experience of becoming 'one flesh'. Whilst the act is physical (and in a good sense) it is at the one and same time spiritual. That is it is the union of two as one, with all that connotes for life, relationships, sharing and achievement.

Attitudes to fornicators, adulterers and homosexuals differ from the fact that they are what they are. Jesus was gracious to sinful people and sought to lead them from their slaveries. He did this by accepting sinners (Luke 15: 1f) and bringing them (where they would respond) to forgiveness. The Epistles are speaking of another situation, that is one where people have already been delivered from their sinful habits and aberrations (cf. I Cor. 6:9-11). Thus Paul forbids Christians to eat with adulterers (I Cor. 5:9-13) who were Christians. There is no permissiveness amongst those of the N.T church, or should it appear it is condemned as incongruous with the faith and holiness. Hence such commands as 'Shun immorality' (I Cor. 6:18) and 'Shun youthful passions' (11 Tim. 2:22).

As for sex within marriage the Scriptures have only commendation. It is clear that such relationships are not only for procreation (I Cor. 7:2-7, but at the same time marriage is for procreation, and this is highly commended (Psalm 127:3f). Passages such as Proverbs 31:10ff, 5:15ff, and the Song of Solomon all speak of the delights of true ethical living in the realm of authentic sex.

The sex ethic takes note of the fact that God is holy, and that purity carries with it a powerful grace. This is essential to true marriage or fornication would not be considered so evil. Paul's statements in I Cor. 6:12-20 show that to have a physical relationship with another, outside of marriage is to have a union with that one which is mimicking the 'one flesh' union of true marriage. Paul infers that it causes a relationship which is contrary to the creational intention.

A glance at the purity of Christ and his church should indicate that the ethic which is Christ's should be that of each of his people.

(v) Abortion

(a) What Abortion is

'Abortion is the expulsion from the womb of the mother of a living foetus which cannot survive outside it. Natural abortions occur not infrequently and are normally termed 'miscarriages'. Artificial abortion is abortion induced by artificial means of any kind, whether by external interference or by taking medicines or drugs internally.' ('Dictionary of Christian Ethics', p.1.)

(b) Biblical Views on the Foetus

No direct view of the value of the foetus can be adequate unless the Biblical view of man is understood, i.e. that man is made in the image of God, and has honour, dignity and authority as his norm. Even the fall of man has not obliterated this. See Gen. 1:26-28, Psalm 8, and then I Cor. 11:7, Gen. 9: 6, James 3:9. Man's situation, because of his sin (as with nature) will be subject to frustration, pain and even vanity (see Gen. 3:17-19, Heb 2:5-8, Rom. 8: 18-23). That is, all things will not be perfect - hence plagues, wars, sorrow,

suffering, over-population and famine, as well as the tragedies of childbirth with difficulty and death to mothers. We simply say that we must not over-simplify the problem of abortion since it does happen 'naturally', and many things which happen 'naturally' are also reproduced 'artificially', e.g. birth-control through contraceptives, etc.

It is difficult to legislate about the matter of the foetus. Passages like Jer. 1:5, Gal. 1:15, Luke 1:41-44, as also the account of Jacob and Esau (in the womb - Gen. 25:22), as also the fact that the Lord is said to open or close the womb, show that the action of God begins at least in the womb. When the foetus becomes significant is difficult to say. At the very least it is human life - at any stage - and is therefore sacred. Psalm 139:13-16 (R.S.V.) makes it clear that God is at work in the womb. To expel the foetus, then, is something which demands the most careful consideration.

Abortion has been advocated for the following reasons: to remove the unborn foetus in order to save the life of the mother - this is called therapeutic abortion. When the mother has her mental or psychological health endangered by the pregnancy - this is called psychiatric abortion. Some suggest social abortion is necessary when there is too much economic pressure upon the family, or simply because a mother does not want a child. Rape or incest have been cited as reasons for abortion although there is a vast difference between these two. Again eugenic reasons for abortion are advanced where there is a possibility of the child being born deformed or mentally retarded.

(c) The Case for Abortion

The case for abortion - related of course to the above paragraph - is as follows: -

- (i) **Horror stories.** A woman who will have an abortion should do this legitimately as the guilt-pressures and the danger of unclean and inexpert surgery by 'back street' operators is quite considerable.
- (ii) **The Hard Case** argument suggests that rape, incest or deformity is putting a pressure that is intolerable.
- (iii) **The 'Woman's Rights'** case is simply that one should have liberty of will.
- (iv) **The 'Bad Law'** argument is that when a law is flouted by general pressure it should not be continued. This is related to the
- (v) **Statistical argument** which cites enormous numbers of women aborted. It is suggested that the number of illegal abortions will be lessened by accepting the principle of abortion.

(d) The Case Against Abortion

The various points above also have answers. With '(i)' the point is that the anti-abortion laws have been framed to protect the child (at this point the foetus) and the mother cannot complain if she suffers because of her illegal acts. '(ii)' It is rarely that the 'hard case' situation arises and it is certainly no argument for a wide legalising of abortion. '(iii)' which relates to the woman's 'rights' may ignore the rights of the foetus or as yet unborn child. It is said that the foetus is only 1-3 inches long after six weeks when most abortions take place and cannot realistically be called a human being. It is doubtful, however, whether size is the determinant as to

the foetus being human or not. Life is the basic consideration. In fact the debate as to the nature of the foetus is an historic one and still being pursued. The Ethics Section of the Harvard Divinity School - Kennedy Foundation's International Conference on Abortion (1967) declared: 'From the present available data, we can only conclude that human life begins at conception or no later than 'blastocyst' (8 days after conception). The foetus therefore, at least from blastocyst, deserves respect as human foetal life.' H. Thieliicke says, 'The foetus has its own autonomous life, which, despite all its reciprocal relationship to the maternal organism, is more than a mere part of this organism and possesses a certain independence.'

The Bad Law argument - '(iv)' is scarcely valid in that there are numerous murders, tax-evasions, etc. yet the penalty for these wrong things is not thereby invalidated. The Statistical argument - '(v)' - is based on shaky grounds since such figures are speculative and cannot really be gauged. In any case the vast majority of abortions are on the grounds simply of woman not wanting children. 80% of abortions in Australia, say Professor Henry Mayer, are on married women who would have normal children. The further argument that many an unwelcome child (at birth) has become wanted and beloved is perhaps beside the point, but what is questionable is whether the unwanting parent has the right to terminate the life-growth of the foetus.

(e) General Comments

Church history has shown a steady rejection of abortion. It was frankly called murder. Didache 2 forbids killing the unborn or the newly born child or exposing it. The same rule is in Barnabas 19:5. The Apologists confirm this and Tertullian calls abortion homicidium ('Apol.' 9), and Mincius Felix ('Octavious' 30) even parricidium the worst murder, the murder of a blood relative. Athenagoras explains that the embryo is already a human being and object of divine love and providence ('Supplicatio' 35).

Thieliicke ('The Ethics of Sex', p.245) says 'We should not think only of the life of the nascent child, but also the status of the already existent parenthood. This status means that the 'office' of fatherhood and motherhood has been entrusted to the parents and that they are now enclosed in that circle of duties which obligates them to preserve that which has been committed to them, but also endowed with a blessing which is to be received in gratitude and trust - even though it be a gratitude expressed with trembling and a trust that is won through struggle.'

The positive way of looking at the problem is to recognise that we do not live in a Christian society and so the basic absolutes which we believe are found in the Scriptures are not those of the community. On the one hand we are practically faced with the vast number of abortions (as Australian society has faced the issue of gambling by introducing betting shops), and on the other hand is the clear Christian thinking that looks upon abortion as virtual destruction of human life, however unformed. The deeper questions of 'ensoulment' and when the foetus is truly a human being and whether a viable foetus (one able to live out of the womb) only constitutes true human life, are probably difficult to state. The 'soft' and permissive society conditions the attitudes of modern legislation and alters the nature of what might otherwise be moral argument.

(vi) Euthanasia

(a) What Euthanasia Is

From the Greek word its meaning is 'easy' or 'gentle' death. Its most

primitive forms have been in the exposure of the very young, and in the abandonment of the aged. Today it takes two forms:-

- (i) Compulsory, i.e. the giving of euthanasia in some way (privately or officially) without the consent of the person. This was seen in its most terrible forms during World War II. Where it relates to the seriously deformed or mentally defective children it has been called 'mercy killing'. and is often extended to adults who are thought to be incurably ill, or who are in intense pain which defies sedation.
- (ii) Voluntary. This refers to the request or desire of an incurably sick person for an easy and painless death. This is not viewed as suicide as such, but obviating the needless extension of a suffering that seems to be pointless.

The practical facts are that in no country is either form of euthanasia legal. Indeed its practice would be considered as murder. Whilst not an easy position to resolve it is evident that human sympathy in some cases would demand the cessation of life, and when the request comes from one who seems conclusively to be in pointless suffering the problem is intensified. Thomas Wood ('Dictionary of Christian Ethics', p335) says that to take one's own life (actual suicide) is -

- (i) ' to sin against God, one's own Creator and Redeemer, a rejection of His love and a denial of His sovereignty.
- (ii) An offence against the proper love of one's own person, made in God's image to share His glory, a violation of the 6th Commandment, an act of despair which precludes repentance.
- (iii) An offence against mankind in that it deprives one's family and society of a member prematurely, and also denies them any opportunity of ministering to one's need.'

Whilst voluntary euthanasia is not perhaps all that pertains to suicide it carries most of these implications and perhaps the most basic is that the giving and taking of life (in an absolute sense) belongs primarily to God and not man.

Human life is held dear by most, if not all states. Euthanasia - if legalised - would begin to cheapen, as indeed to a great degree legalised abortion has lessened reverence for life that is not viable. At the same time there are deep problems. For example, if a doctor continues to supply drugs which will maintain life and suffering intolerable to the patient, and without which drugs the patient would 'naturally' die, would the withholding of these drugs be legitimate, or would giving a drug to a patient who asked for painless cessation of life constitute murder on the one hand or suicide on the other? This is not a simple matter. It is perhaps best to say that it is not possible for us to evaluate totally the purpose, need and value of suffering in any of its forms. It is not safe to conclude dogmatically that it is of no value. Many of these mysteries are hidden from us. We might have to put the terrible (i.e. suffering) over against the more (morally) terrible, i.e. virtual murder, virtual suicide, or a decision which may not be that of God or His law.

It has been recorded that some cases where euthanasia has been administered, but from which there has been recovery, has shown the decision to be entirely wrong, e.g. in the case of seemingly incurable diseases. Perhaps this should

not be a factor greatly conditioning thought about euthanasia, but it cannot be totally ignored.

(vii) The Christian, the State, and Politics⁶

(a) Introduction

The doctrine of creation and the story of the first family make it clear that mankind was commanded to spread across the face of the earth in order to subdue it and exercise stewardship over it. It was sin which destroyed relationships, otherwise, we assume, the normal order would have been a loose confederation of families sharing the resources of the earth in an even manner. Genesis 10:9-10 shows Nimrod hunting men to build a kingdom. Genesis 11:1-9 shows man trying to build his kingdom against the order for the world which God had given to Adam.

The covenant people of God, Israel, had God as its leader. This theocracy was not intended to be less a theocracy when Saul, first of its kings, was appointed. Even when this position deteriorated, Israel, ideally speaking was a nation in which there was no division between the state and the church.

In the New Testament we find that Jesus and his disciples did not seek to overthrow the existing order by force or politics. Jesus did not attempt to evade the judgement of the State, even though it proved an unjust one. He made the pronouncement, render to Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's - whatever we may make of that statement. He paid taxes (Matt. 17:24-27).

In the Acts and the Epistles we find the followers of Jesus accepting the rule of the State. Whilst in Acts (3:19-20) Peter says to the Sanhedrin 'We ought to obey God rather than men' he is not seeking directly to change the order of that time. He simply means that since the Sanhedrin are the leaders of God's people their leadership should concur with that of their true Messiah, Jesus. The Book of Acts has been described as *apologia* regarding the obedience of the Christian people. The State is nowhere defied, as such. The apostles submit themselves to imprisonment (cf. 16:19ff). Their conduct everywhere is exemplary.

The Christian attitude to authority is set out in such passages as Romans 13:1ff, Titus 3:1-2, I Peter 2:10-13, cf. Jude 8f. It is simply this, that the powers that be are ordained of God. No matter what their personal lives may be, they are God's servants for good, to punish the evil. Daniel 2:21 says that God 'changes times and seasons: he removes kings and sets up kings'. That prerogative does not belong to man, although, obviously God may use the rebellion of man to accomplish His purposes.

(b) The Dimension of Evil

A study of the Kingdom of God shows (as in Daniel 2:21) that God is King over all His creation, albeit rebels remain within it. Many treatments of the Christian, the State, and politics, pay little or no reference to the positive

⁶ There is a vast amount of writing on this subject, most of it contemporary. Jacques Ellul's books 'The Technological Society', 'The Political Illusion', 'The Meaning of the City' and 'The Politics of God and the Politics of Man' are helpful reading. Liberation theology (e.g. Robert Alves, *Christian Realism: Ideology of the Establishment*) speaks of action to change the order of things. Other writers seek to penetrate and influence the order.

fact of evil in the world, and evil which seeks to demean man, and divide the order of authority and government. Whilst God is sovereign over these elements nevertheless the government of people does not take place in a moral vacuum. Hence the Christian has to decide whether or not he should share in what is sometimes called 'secular government'. The non-participating Christian still has the problems which arise from government such as the political ideologies (socialism, capitalism, etc.) and moral problems such as abortion, euthanasia, drink, drugs, and so on.

One view is that Christians should use every means, both peaceful and violent to rid a nation of abuses, and institute the best way of life. Some would concur with this principle excepting the use of violence. Other Christians believe the State is ordained of God and so espouse a conservative approach, leaving things to work out under the sovereignty of God. Yet others take a separatist approach, seeing government as an evil which is here in a fallen world, and obeying where the Scripture demands obedience, but expecting nothing from the State.

It is expected that in any view the presence of evil must be kept in mind. That is, if certain expedients are used they will partake of the imperfect nature in the world, and will be complicated by the planning forces of Satan and his powers.

(c) The Principle of Participation

I Tim. 2:1-2 says 'First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.' This must mean that we are to have regard for all men. In Gal. 6:10 Paul says 'Do good unto all men', and this accords with Matt. 5:

43-48. Whilst Paul adds 'and especially to those who are of the household of faith' this is because the Church was a persecuted minority needing every bit of support it could get.

Christ's prayer for his own that they should not be taken out of the world but kept whilst in it, and that he had sent them into it as the Father had sent him into it reveals that Christians cannot opt out of the problems of life. They are in this world by creation, and they are even more committed by redemption. The figures of 'light' and 'salt' are penetrative elements designed to have a dynamic effect upon the community. The fact of 'light' is dealt with in such passages as Luke 8:16-18 (cf. Matt. 5:16) and Ephesians 5:8ff.

Some Christians believe that believers should penetrate every strata of society and take as much participatory and administrative power as possible. It is also argued that Christians should use their gifts to excel and even lead in the realms of art, music, literature and, generally, all culture. This would include national and local government, agriculture, industry, medicine and education, including research areas. No one could really argue against this. Some see such a venture as too much of a participation in a world that opposes God. This is really over-simplifying the case. Much is given over to secular and materialistic powers by default. Church history shows, undoubtedly that when the Christian faith was made a legitimate religion by Constantine, the church then became secularised to a great degree, since it was virtually an agency of the State. This, however, is vastly different to Christian men and women penetrating society, and living their lives before other human beings, and bringing their gifts and skills to contribute towards the whole of life and the whole of humanity. The 'hold the fort' mentality does not seem to have a very worthwhile place here. Whilst Christians should keep themselves from the

worldliness of the world they should remember that it is God's world (by creation, providence, and redemption) and therefore they should not abandon it to the ungodly.

(viii) The Christian and Social Involvement

The principles we have stated above apply in social involvement. A Christian ought to be involved in all that is not evil, especially as he sees its being as a part of God's created world. We have seen in our previous paper, and partly also in this study that the world operates functionally on its basic inherent laws or principles. Christians then should seek to uphold that. They must remember of course that the sovereignty of being that God gives to every creature is not to be violated by wrong intrusion.

Israel, of course, had its own internal social situation. It was a people, a covenant people, and a people of a theocracy. The Pentateuch is filled with injunctions which work out the practical ways in which a man may (must) love his neighbour (as himself). Israel undoubtedly had a mind to the poor, the stranger, and social injustice was always against the known law of God. Whilst the Pentateuch systematises this social justice and calls for practical concern the prophets inveigh against any departure from it. Thus prophet after prophet denounces rituals where there is no corresponding social justice and righteousness. For example, see Amos 3:12, 15, 4:1, 6:1, 3-6 in regard to luxury, pride, indulgence by the wealthy and compare with Exodus 22: 26f. See also Amos 5:11-12, 8:4-6. Micah (3:1-4, 9-11, 2:1-2, 6:12) makes what has been called 'the most comprehensive statement of the ethical teaching of the prophets' in 66-8 (cf. Jer. 26:16-19).

We may conclude then that the system of Israel was one which made for justice and social concern.

When, then we come to the Gospels, and particularly in the sermon on the mount we see that Jesus emphasises love for all, and personal concern. He himself tells many stories which speak against oppression of the poor (e.g. Dives and Lazarus) whilst he was concerned to rehabilitate men and women from their various afflictions. He warned against riches and avarice as he did against moral evils.

In the Book of the Acts we see the early church. No sooner has it commenced than there is an arrangement for the indigent widows, and this is found as late as the Prison (Pastoral) Epistles. The oneness of believers in their concern for one another is seen clearly in the first chapters of Acts, and continues. See Acts 6:1f, 11:29, Gal. 2:10. In fact in all history there is probably no example as rich as seen in Acts 2:44-46, and 4:32 where it was seen that no one remained in need whilst the church was able to share its goods to meet that need. This principle is clearly stated in I John 3:17 so that love becomes the determining factor in helping the needy. This principle would be involved wherever the fact of love obtained. For example hospitality amongst Christians was not mere socialising, but helping in such needs as intense poverty, flight from justice, refugee states, and so on. The one giving hospitality would be in great danger. Giving is therefore part of the essential life for the church. Very little of this would be for church organisation and buildings since the churches were in homes, and a church-building was not even a concept in the mind of the ecclesia. 'Do good unto all men' covered a wide scope. Matt. 25:31ff is a parable told not to tell the Christians they should help the poor, the hungry, the naked and the imprisoned, but that they would help, and be scarcely aware of their having given! This principle is stated in Matt. 6:3 and Luke 6:38.

We should also be aware of the fact that by the time of the Pastoral Epistles a proficient system has grown into being whereby elders and deacons look after the personal needs, and the physical needs of all the church. The system for widows still remains. The Epistle of James warns against showing favouritism to the rich and insists on giving care and love to the poor. There is more than a hint of this in I Cor. 11:20-22, 33-34. We can conclude then that social conscience of the Christian was very sensitive.

It is patently obvious that the Christian's involvement in the social needs and patterns of his world must be required on three grounds:- (a) Creation, (b) Redemption, and (c) The Eschaton Creation places equal responsibility upon all persons for other persons. It also demands the collective security and well-being of the human race shared by all. Hence the social responsibility does not belong to any particular group either 'secular' or 'spiritual'. Redemption renews or regenerates sinful man, so that he is aware of the creational mandate (Gen. 1:28ff) afresh. Also he has discovered the truth of God as love, and this must work out in his world of operations (e.g. I John 3: 17). If anyone cares for the created world and its needs then it should be the redeemed man. The Eschaton or the coming end-age, or the climax of things is prophesied as the perfect and the complete. The principle of hope demands that what the redeemed will be makes demands upon them now to be becoming that. Whilst their becoming perfect is the sovereign act of God and cannot be achieved by them, yet they are expected to begin acting in a manner consonant with what they will be, and with what they are in the process of becoming. It has been said, 'The Christian must concern himself with the next to last things even if (or, because) he is concerned with the last things'.

This paper is too limited to be in any sense prescriptive. It must remain principal Nevertheless in the following paragraphs we may at least examine the need for social involvement on a broad canvas.

(a) The 'How' of Social Involvement

It is patently foolish to speak of the church becoming involved in the social needs of man. This has been going on for centuries. Church agencies have long sought to do this, and are deeply involved to the present time. Individual persons who are Christians are doing acts of mercy and compassion whether in their vocations or out of them. The debate, however, is whether Christians ought to be involved in social action, i.e. in bringing in social justice and services, as well as bringing down establishments which seem to dominate human freedoms, and replace them with governments and groups which will establish conditions commensurate with man's needs. Whilst Christians may be generally agreeable to a gradual reaching of this point, it is contended that they are to be more active, even, if necessary, to the point of using violence. What has to be kept clearly in mind is the fallenness of man. With this we must remember that it requires conversion before a man is a new creation. To believe we can legislate and take social action which will change a society without first changing men's hearts is going in the face of the theological facts. H. O. J. Brown ('Christianity Today' - 10.4.70, p.5) says 'It is worth observing that as soon as we begin to ignore the fallenness of man, we no longer feel any need for radical 'cure' of resurrection and a new creation. Present-day evils must be understood as shadows on the bright landscape of evolutionary advancement, the result of environmental disadvantages, educational handicaps and so on. They require understanding and treatment, not judgement'. At least that is the view of social activists.

No Christian ought to oppose anything which will help to alleviate man's unfortunate condition, and for this reason he ought to accept his responsibility to be both light and salt in the community. He ought not to s-o accept the fact of predicted wars, international evils, etc. that he accepts them

fatalistically and so feels he has no moral responsibility in regard to them. However what must be determined by the Word, the Spirit and conscience is how he goes about fulfilling his moral responsibility. This should never lead him to neglect his primary responsibility to evangelise, to make the saving proclamation, and to live that life of holiness demanded by God. It is not even that he gives the 'leftovers' to social involvement, but that they must be authentic only in the entire stream of his life and witness. He must never love the world (I John 2:15) nor depart from his Biblical understanding of it, its judgement and destiny, any more than he may opt out of its needs. He has been sent into it. He must be involved in it in the light of the missionary mandate of our Lord, and the present leading of the Holy Spirit. Nothing can substitute for a personal walking in the Spirit in regard to his practical social involvement at any particular point. He must stand or fall to the matter of conscience.

(b) The 'What' of Social Involvement

The 'five giants on the road of social reconstruction' have been nominated as disease, ignorance, squalor, idleness and want. The services governments relate to meet these problems are health, education, housing, employment and income maintenance. Social problems relate to those handicapped physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. Such need treatment, education and care. All need love. Many attempt to meet needs out of inadequate motives, and whilst we must not demand (in practice) an ideal motive, yet the personal ambitions and motives must to some degree determine the end result.

Areas which are immediate and practical in social concern are crime, drug addiction, alcoholism, delinquency, marital problems, trends in society that make for a breaking down of morals, i.e. permissive trends, abortions, censorship, and so on. All of these have their origins in the 'five giants' nominated above, but often problems arise where affluence is present; indeed are more vicious in its presence. It must then be said that man's frustration that arises from meaninglessness (existential despair and emptiness), futility and fear of the future are causes of many evils. Some Christians use the disciplines of escape (asceticism, withdrawal from society, etc.) whereas they should use the disciplines of conflict - i.e. not use their theology as an escape from the world, but as a power to meet it in its need, whilst not being fooled into wrong goals, and wrong modes of action. The Gospel will meet individual needs where there is a response. Nor should the Christian be baffled and defeated by the immensity of the task. He must continue to believe in the sovereignty of God, and also the doctrine of God's wrath and judgements in history. Berdyaev's statement here is apposite:- 'The sinfulness of human nature does not mean that social reforms and improvements are impossible. It only means that there can be no perfect and absolute order before the transfiguration of the world'.

As Shirwood Wirt says, 'The evangelical believes that the fashion of this world is passing away. He looks upon this world as a proving ground for a better one. He involves himself in the socio-political order, shorn of perfectionist illusions, but hoping to achieve some positive goals and a measure of peace for mankind. He links the struggle for social justice to man's emancipation from his own nature. He finds no evidence in Scripture that man can be transformed by altering his environment. Here he nails down the great fallacy of Marxism; for the dialectical materialists have never understood the truth about human nature.'

(ix) The Christian and War

(a) Introduction

It should be noted in this study that the question is not 'Is war right or wrong?', but 'How shall a Christian relate to the matter of war and peace?' It is too simplistic to give the answer that war is wrong, or the answer that it is right. The matter is too complex for either of these generalisations. The other consideration is that we have to trace the origins of the opinions that war is right, or war is wrong, and to see whether these origins are Biblical or not.

(b) The Bible and War

1. **The Old Testament.** In this the writers clearly applaud the victories of Israel over their enemies. Abraham's triumph in early patriarchal history, as Israel's defeat of the Canaanites is seen to be a triumph of God's people. Later Saul is told to exterminate the Amalekites. Without doubt God is with Israel in these battles - He Who is 'the Lord of Hosts'. See Numbers 21:14, II Chron. 13:12, 6:34, 20:22, I Chron. 5:22, Psa 144:1, Deut. 20:13, Judges 5: 4-5. The battle cry for war can be 'the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon' (Judges 7:18, 20). Again war is used against Israel by God using its enemies - Hab. 1:6, Isa. 10:5f, Jer. 25:1-9, Ezek. 21:8-23. It has been said that the God of the N.T. differs to that of the O.T and it is only the writers of the O.T who rationalise war as right. This, however, is an over-simplification.

The rationale of war given is a clear one. War is used against the enemies of Israel but only where there is opposition to God's plan for her. The iniquity of the Ammonites was set for judgement anyway. Israel is to be punished for idolatry as they of Israel are God's special people. David is not allowed to build the temple because his hands are blood-stained (I Kings 5:3) and the consummation of history is to be destruction of weapons on their transformation into uses of peace (Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3). Isaiah 11:9 'Neither shall they learn war any more'. However, Messiah will do some warring - Daniel 7:10, Zechariah ch.14, Psalms 2, 110⁷. The O.T seems to see no contradiction in war existing and God still being known as the God of love, mercy, truth, righteousness, holiness, and peace.

2. **The New Testament.** The materials here are used by those who oppose war and those who do not. The question is whether either side really has a total Biblical rationale of the matter. Scriptures such as Matt. 5:39, 43ff, 8:10, Luke 14:31ff, 22:36, 19:41, are Scriptures which can be taken to mean non-resistance, as a principle (i.e. pacifism) and love of enemies will not allow one to fight them. At the same time the use of military illustrations is not repugnant and a case may be made out for the use of the short sword of defence (Luke 22:36). However, all of these points are too flimsy to base a total doctrine of war or peace. The fact of the existence of war is accepted realistically - John the Baptist addressing the soldiers, Peter preaching to Cornelius, and Jesus predicting the destruction of Jerusalem as well as saying 'There will be wars and rumors of wars - see that you be not troubled'. Battles are described in the Book of the Revelation and the Son of God himself goes forth to

⁷ The question here is whether this warring is to be taken literalistically, i.e. whether it is physical war or spiritual (moral) warring. This also relates to the Book of the Revelation. It may even be that spiritual and literal warfare are both involved

war (e.g. Rev. 17:14, 19:15f) and conquers. The language of this book is apocalyptic as also is Daniel 7 and so the thought of physical bloody wars is not -clearly indicated. Without doubt Jesus did not espouse fighting in his particular cause - 'Put up the sword, for all who take the sword shall perish by the sword.' The statement may be taken two ways:- (i) Sheer realism without commending or criticising the use of the sword, but warning in this particular case (cf. Gen. 9:6, Rev. 13:10); (ii) A clear warning that war is destructive and wrong. At the same time Christ uses a whip to scourge evil-doers from the house of God, and this would seem to indicate a type of justified punishment, always remembering, of course, his particular office of Messiah (cf. Micah 3:1f).

(c) Church History and War

Whilst the N.T. abounds in the figurative use of war to illustrate battle with Satan and his hosts, Jesus wars against the strongman (see also II Tim. 2:3, I Tim. 1:18, I Peter 2:11, II Cor. 10:3-4, Ephes. 6:10-20, yet very early on Christians rejected soldiering. Whilst tradition speaks of at least a Christian cohort yet Lactantius writes c. 300 A.D. 'It is not lawful for a just man to engage in warfare,' and Basil (c. 350) says that soldiers were excluded from communion for three years after discharge. When Christianity was legalised as a religion in 312 A.D. the Church generally took the view that the State may resist an unprovoked attack, and Christians assist in such a defensive war.

(d) The Principle of Killing

The command 'Thou shalt not kill' is taken by some to cover all life. Not killing is based by some on 'reverence for life itself'. The primary gift to man is not however (biological) life, but the image of God in which he is made. For this there must be reverence, i.e. basically for God Himself. Gen. 9:2f makes it clear that animal life may be killed for man's use, and nature makes it clear that without this pattern the animal kingdom (i.e. the carnivores) would die. Sacrifices and meat eating are enjoined in the Old Testament. The killing of man is forbidden not so much because man of himself is to be respected but rather because his killing is a sin against God, i.e. he is made in the image of God. Whilst Gen. 9:5-6 stands there must be killing but killing cannot here be nominated as murder. The doctrine of punishment places law in the hands of those authorised by God to punish - e.g. Rom. 13:1f, Titus 3:1, I Peter 2:13-14, John 19:11, Prov. 8:15, Dan. 2:21, 4:17. The question is not 'Is killing right or wrong?' but 'What expedients must be used in a world that is sinful and fallen?' Niebuhr ('An Interpretation of Christian Ethics') says that pacificism is a cleavage between the ideal and the actual. An absolute Christian ethic cannot be maintained in the world. 'Love absolutism' cannot always prevail. Such idealism is incompatible with 'a responsible relationship to the political order.' That it is wrong to murder is clear; that it is wrong to kill in some situations is difficult to maintain, e.g. when a demented person is senselessly killing others, or when defense is justifiable. To allow another to kill senselessly might be taken as participation in killing. This simply illustrates the difficulty of maintaining a simplistic non-killing ethic.

(e) Wars - Just and Unjust

If within a people or a nation policing of offenders is accepted, because of man's sinfulness, then policing on an international level may also be envisaged. The ticklish matter of 'just' and 'unjust' wars is difficult to resolve, since citizens of a country are emotionally involved in patriotic loyalty and

cannot be sufficiently objective. A 'just' war might be said to be one which resists oppression and defends righteousness and freedom. Whilst killing in war is evil it is pleaded that the evil of tyranny, especially that which results from such forces as Nazism are worse evils and a choice between two is necessary. A realistic recognition of man as he is will determine a person's view, e.g. whether a view of depravity is taken, or a humanistic view of man's innate potential of good. The problem that complicates the decision about 'just' or 'unjust wars is that it is rarely, if ever, that the evil is on one side. So many elements complicate the matter entirely. Such elements could be aggrandisement by one country against another, armaments interests, sub-Christian views of retaliation (for wrongs done or imagined), racial hatred, and personal lust for power by leaders or nations.

(f) The Pacifist Position

There are Christians who are pacifists. The question of whether Christianity is pacifist is a wider question. Some reconciliation of the use of war in the Old Testament and the forecast of war to the end-time in the Scriptures has to be worked out by one who would be a pacifist or a non-pacifist. The whole question of righteousness, as of love, must be sorted out, with an understanding of penal elements within the context of nations and international relationships. Realistic views of man's sin and depravity must be taken and then decisions made. In this regard it is to be considered whether pacifism springs from a Christian or a humanistic source, and if from the latter whether it is, nevertheless consistent with general Christian teaching where the Bible does not give a specific direction. A further consideration is that wars spring out of the evil of man and simply to accept them as a necessary evil in passive fatalism is a contradiction of the moral powers the believer possesses and may even become moral (immoral?) acquiescence.

The pacifist believes in non-resistance, non violence, non-killing. He claims that man being evil does not excuse wars. Positive pacifism alerts others to war's evil and seeks to outmode war. Retaliation is sub-Christian as also selfish aggrandisement and all national and racial hatreds. Whilst wars may be predicted as continuing this is no reason for acquiescence in any. Christ took the way of non-resistance and accomplished his goal. Because pacifism has not worked, nor may not work is no reason why it should not be espoused and followed. Evils such as slavery have been diminished by teaching. If all refused to fight wars would cease and governments would wish to gain the support of their people by not fighting. It is not a utilitarian question but a (totally) moral one.

(g) Pacifist or Not Pacifist?

Each person must abide by his own convictions whilst he is sure they are right. He does not go against his own conscience for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. He is responsible, however, to make sure - as far as possible - that his convictions are correct. That honest believers see two views in the Bible is patently clear, i.e. war is right (in some circumstances) and war is wrong (in all circumstances). These conclusions ought to be reached only when the total Biblical portrayal is considered. No conclusion is valid which omits the fact of man's depravity, of constituted authorities and of the working of penal elements of God's wrath in history. The question may not seem, finally, to be an 'either-or' but a concession that whilst war and killing are evil of themselves it may be simplistic to work from this basis alone. The whole matter of morality and judgement is also involved.

(x) The Christian and Racism

(a) Introduction

Racism is simply the attitude that there are races which are inferior to one's own. This superiority has its roots generally in colour, caste and culture with the related factors of languages and religions. Racism may manifest itself in segregation, an overt attitude of superiority and a patronising of the (so-called) inferior race. The negative 'backlash' is the resentment by the race deemed inferior and the upward struggle to assert its own basic rights. This may result in a compensating racism in the depressed race and consequent violence in the struggle to achieve equality. It may even develop into a compensating superiority.

(b) The Roots of Racism

John Stott is quoted as saying ('Christian Graduate', Sept. 1969, p.6), 'I dare to say that no man is altogether free from some taint of racial pride, because no man is free from sin. . . a sense of racial superiority is natural to us all, even if it is secret and undiscovered.' At the same time the author of this article says, 'Try as I may, I cannot unearth, so as to put my finger on, any racial prejudice or distinction in myself.' It would seem that all evil attitudes spring from man's inherent sin, but that he need have no sense of superiority. The question is whether in fact colour, caste, and culture are the occasions of his superiority (expressing itself) rather than the causes. If this is seen clearly there may be hope for its correction.

Does man have any real reason for superiority of any kind? From the Biblical point of view - no! The question of equality as such is not even raised in the Bible, but the question of God being Creator, men being creatures; God being Father, men and women being (anthropologically) brothers and sisters is raised. Man is the image and glory of God (I Cor. 11:7) and must not be denigrated or despised. The Pentateuch legislates for right relationships both within the economy of Israel and to those outside it. Man's personal dignity must be recognised and maintained. This is the very essence of the moral law.

1. **Colour.** Old and New Testaments have no emphasis on colour distinctions or superiority and inferiority. It has been supposed by some from Genesis 9: 20-27 that the Hamites were to be slaves and this was related to the fact that they were black. In fact it is not all Hamites who are cursed but Canaan the son of Ham (see vs.22, 25), and whilst Gush (i.e. the Ethiopian, black man) in 10:6 is mentioned as the son of Ham (likewise the Egyptian), Cush is not identified with the curse as is Canaan. There is no indication that the Canaanites were of different colour to the Israelites. It has been observed that this is the curse of Noah, not God, and may even have been uttered in a post-drunken stupor (9:24, etc.). In Jeremiah 13:23 the colour of the Ethiopian's skin is mentioned but without prejudice. Ethiopians are clearly highly regarded as in Jeremiah 38-39, and Acts 8, the latter being a worshipper of God with whom clearly Philip did not despise to sit in the chariot. The exegesis that Ham means 'dark' cannot be substantiated. Those who press it say that it comes from the Egyptian word khem ('dark') but in any case this seems to refer to the dark soil of Egypt in contrast to the light-coloured earth of Palestine ('Christian Graduate' quoted, p.7). Commonsense indicates that pigmentation as such cannot be a cause either of human superiority or inferiority.

2. **Caste.** This is the doctrine of a superior breed of humanity, a section which is inherently or divinely equipped and endowed for privilege and

lordship. Without doubt such castes and 'superior' races have been known continually in the world's history. Whether divinely appointed or not they have taken the ascendancy and sought to maintain it. This is particularly so in the Indian caste system of the Hindus. It would seem that Israel is such a divinely appointed race-caste, but many Scriptures show clearly that this was never intended by God. The Covenant of Abraham is basically for all the nations of the earth, and the covenant with Israel as shown by Exodus 19:5-6, Deut. 7:7, Ezek. 36:32, Isa. 42:6, cf. I Pet. 2:9-10 (etc.) is shown to be with a view to the eventual salvation and blessing of all nations, Israel being a servant and witness but not innately superior. Paul is anxious to show this in passages like Gal. 2:2-16, Rom. 3:23, 28-30, 4:9ff, Gal 3:26-29 and it should be seen that the Jew was not superior to the Gentile. The physical facts must be noted that in certain times in history certain factors combine to put a nation in the ascendancy, but certainly no race (whatever) has remained in such a place, permanently.

3. **Culture.** Without doubt the history, religion, racial and social acts and characteristics of a people are enshrined in their culture. Culture is not then, of itself, wrong. It is true, however, that it is almost a reflexive action in a person to react against another's culture without pondering the matter. Even where a non-indigene capitulates to the (foreign) culture he generally reacts against his own. Culture shock means the initial reaction to a culture other than one's own, involving rejection of it and (possibly) an attempt to understand and accept it. The flight for culture is the attempt to defend and preserve one's exclusive way of life. Culture conflicts are seen in the Scriptures in the Jewish and Samaritan differences, in the difficulty with Gentiles who became Christians in dropping their previously accepted standards for the new and higher Christian morals. Paul certainly battled for these Gentiles that they should not have to take on the entire Jewish culture. He was discerning and astute enough to see what elements were essential and non-essential.

(c) The Doctrine of Creation

Without doubt our common ancestry makes foolish the claims of any race or people to innate superiority because of colour, caste, or culture. The doctrine of man being in the image of God gives a general level to all human beings. It may well be that any race may descend below the levels of human attainment - the norm (e.g. the Cretans, see Titus 1:12-13) - but this does not mean they are innately inferior. The mandate to love and to care means racism in any form is abhorrent to Biblical thought. Men should be concerned for the dignity of the entire race. 'Do good to all men' embraces all social acts and attitudes. The regeneration and 're-creation' of man is in order that the original and normal relationships of man to God and man to man might be restored and resumed. Thus Colossians 3:9-11 and Gal. 3:26-29 are both significant passages. The 'old man' is primarily and corporately Adam and then each man's personal participation in him. This 'nature' or humanity' involves man in strife that relates to colour, caste and culture (racism) but the 'new man' is Christ and the believer's participation in him. In this realm there can be no room for any 'racist' elements such as are expressed in Jew versus Gentile, slave versus free, male versus female.

(d) The Doctrine of the Church

Directly related to the doctrine of the (anthropological) brotherhood of man is the doctrine of the church. The Scriptures above, plus the general theme of Ephesians of the family and the summing up of all things in Christ, as also the teaching of the church, makes it clear that members of Christ's Body are

essentially one. On two grounds then - the creational and the redemptional - there is no room for racism of any kind or degree. However Gal. 3:28 does not dissolve the facts of race, condition, culture and sex. These remain, but they are not valid grounds for division. The essential oneness of the Body and its members is the esse of the church.

(e) The Present Pact of Racism

Without doubt there are many factors which combine to make racism. Such liberating movements that represent the young being freed from the domination of the old, women from the domination of men, Roman Catholics from the Protestants (and vice versa) are all expressions of the desire to be free of these dominating factors. We must see, nevertheless, that in some cases these things are the occasions rather than the cause of revolutionary action. This thought should not eclipse the fact that often there is domination. The American Black-White situation is a real one. Whilst certain elements may have been 'blown up', nevertheless, no one can count the depth of human evil and hurt done in denigrating the dignity of man. Ford Foundation's Roger Wilkins says, 'Racism is in every nook and cranny in this country and each of us blacks has to deal with it every day of our lives. Any overview of black life in this country that does not include the word 'pain' is hopelessly deficient.'

('Time', April 6, 1970). We who feel the problem is only in America should remember the fact of caste in some countries, the fierce and bloody actions of communalism in many countries, the differentiations concerning colour in many lands and the sense of superiority races possess concerning themselves. The aboriginal problem is a live issue in Australia.

Professor W. E. H. Stanner (the Boyer lectures for 1968) expresses his view concerning the aborigines. He says, 'I expressed the opinion that in more recent years two forces have been at work concurrently. One is a real and growing appreciation of the distinctive qualities of aboriginal culture, thought and problems of life. The other is the surfacing of old and new tensions between us. Over the last 30 years, we have been trying to attract them into some sort of union with us. We call it 'assimilation' and think of integration as an intermediate stage and perhaps as a less complete union. But it is easy for us to overlook that a long humiliation can dull the vision, narrow the spirit, and contract the heart towards new things. Some of the aborigines do not understand our offer; some think it is not genuine; some, that its terms are not very attractive; some prefer to cling to their old identity until they are more sure what identity they could have within our new proposals for them. There are deeper difficulties still. We are asking them to become a new people, but this means in human terms that we are asking them to un-be what they now are. But many of them are now seeking to re-discover who and what their people were before the long humiliation. It is a search for identity, a way of restoring self-esteem, of finding a new direction for the will to survive, and of making a better bargain of life on a more responsive market at a more understanding time.'

The Christian then, will have to accept the tensions inherent in contemporary society because of past and present attitudes to the race question. An excellent article in 'His', March issue 1970 shows that 'Black Power' is primarily a movement designed to restore the dignity of the black people, to excise the inferiorities wrought by white treatment, and to place the black people on the basis of equality with other colours. It may necessarily involve excesses of bitterness being worked out, even in violence, and ought to be seen in this light. It is suggested that these things being worked through the emphasis on colour should eventually fade, especially where society has accepted colour, or better still has become unconscious of it. This present paper, of course, cannot deal exhaustively with the subject, but the main point is

clear - racism is wrong and unchristian. The positive answer is divine love worked in and through the experience of God's people. It must involve a strong rejection of all elements of racism and a practical insistence (and not a paternal or patronising one) on the measures which will destroy this evil, and build true amity between peoples. At no point must it be naive enough to ignore the continued presence of human depravity and its accompanying egotisms.

(f) Conclusion

The question of racism is complicated, not presenting an easy or quick solution, other than divine love working through all men. Nevertheless all men of God are obligated to involvement with a view to ameliorating the situation. At the least this must begin personally within each believer and then work out in practical measures.

8. Ethics Conclusive And Inconclusive

In our last study (LFS. 29) we appended a critique of situational ethics. The question is, 'Are there elements which are situational?' and the answer must be, 'Yes, especially in certain situations.' There are more ethical problems than we have even begun to raise. The series listed above are simply examples of many more. In those we have dealt with it is clear that not one can be brought to absolutist ethics. For example, we may well say, absolutely, 'Thou shalt not murder,' but then is it right under some circumstances to kill? For example, if a man is running berserk with a machine-gun, destroying large numbers of people because he is irrational, would it not in fact prevent murder of others if someone shot the man? If a maniacal person was seeking to destroy a family would it not be right for the father to even kill the killer? In the case of the mid-wives in Exodus chapter one the Pharaoh had commanded them to kill the male children, and in not doing so they lied, and it is evident they are commended for this since God prospered them. Is not then a lie a lie? The answer must surely be that the sin of Pharaoh in murdering the male children was so evil that to tell the truth (factually) would have been participation in this sin. The phrase 'the lesser of two evils' is not a mere cliché. In some cases this determines the ethic.

We re-emphasise then, that the basic ethics which arise from the functional (moral) principles of the creation have to be seen and practised in the light of man's fallenness and his imperfect world. It is not always that the issues are clear cut, nor does the Scripture make a pronouncement upon each problem, much less deal with matters which have arisen with the cultural and technological accelerations that have come to man over the past few centuries.

The Matter of Conscience

Paul makes it clear that it is dangerous for a man to go against his own conscience. See Romans 14:13-23, I Corinthians 8:7-13. In Romans 9:1 he indicates that the conscience is only wholly reliable when the Holy Spirit is present and indicates the true course of action. Some consciences are unreliable (e.g. the seared conscience of I Tim. 4:2, and the opposite to the 'good conscience' of I Tim. 1:5 and 19. In this latter, true faith is missing.).

In Romans 8:14 Paul shows that true believers are led by the Spirit of God. Thus the true law of God is made known in the heart and mind, especially at the point of need, by the Holy Spirit. If one walks in the Spirit and is led by the Spirit then one is not under the law as such, but knows what the true law is at the very point he needs to know. This means that anthropocentric ethics

do not obtain, but that which is, as we have said, revelational. This is revelational through the Scriptures, and by the Spirit. In modern discussions it is easy to slip into anthropocentric rather than theocentric thinking.

We also repeat that in many cases we lack wisdom. When we submit to the truth of the Scriptures, and seek to know the mind of the church in regard to them and the puzzling situation, we have to have recourse to the 'wisdom which cometh down from above' (James 1:5, 3:17). In this sense any given ethic may be said to be situational. However it is not a man-centred, but a God-centred ethic when wisdom is asked from God. This special wisdom exercised in any given situation is best received and known in the context of a wide and general knowledge of the Scriptures and the mores and practice of the Church.

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–BIBLIOGRAPHY–

Refer to the Bibliography of LFS 29.

Add to these, the following:-

HENRY, C. F. H.	'The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism'
COLLINS, GARY (ED.)	'Our Society in Turmoil'
MOBERG, D. O.	'Inasmuch'. Also, 'The Great Reversal'
GISH, A. G.	'The New Left and Christian Radicalism'
CAMPBELL, E. T.	'Christian Manifesto'
GROUNDS, Vernon	'Evangelicalism & Social Responsibility'
PIERARD, R. V.	'The Unequal Yoke: Evangelical Christianity and Political Conservatism'
SALLEY, C. & BEHM, R.	'Your God is Too White'
WIRT, S. E.	'The Social Conscience of the Evangelical'

Numerous works exist on the single themes such as Abortion, Homosexuality, Racism, and so on. They are too numerous to list.