

*Identify the different sources of Christian approaches to ethics and the broad ethical theories to which they relate.*

There are a number of ethical systems adopted by Christians today on deciding what is right or wrong? Which principles to follow in ethical dilemmas? etc. The bible remains the key source of guidance for these Christian groups, primarily the Ten Commandments, however some Christian ethical systems don't hold as stern views on the Ten Commandments as others.

The Roman Catholic Church is the only part of the church to lay down precise teachings. They have a deontological, objective stance to most dilemmas, for instance in relation to abortion the Church maintains life begins as early as when the woman's egg is fertilized by the male sperm, so abortion is always wrong no matter what. They withhold the 'divine command theory' in which the 'the word of God' is a moral absolute and unchanging in any circumstances, so suicide is always wrong because it goes against 'the word of God' demonstrated in the Old Testament "*Thou Shalt not Kill*" (Exodus 20:13) They hold actions to be intrinsically wrong, this Catholic approach is often linked to Natural Moral Law theory.

Like Catholic laws Aquinas's Natural Law theory is absolutist and deontological. It underpins catholic beliefs in that it is based on a moral code existing within the purpose of nature, created by God '*...nothing else than an ordination of reason for the common good promulgated by the one who is in charge of the community*', like Roman Catholicism it values actions intrinsically, it evaluates both what I do and why I do it. The 'word of God' (the bible) is held as an absolute in the form of the primary precepts. Aquinas follows the 'divine command theory' (the view that God creates the moral law), according to this view, what makes an action right is that God wills it to be done, so for instance abortion may be against God's will.

However, with these deontological views the Roman Catholic Church also maintains that 'conscience plays an important role in moral decision making with Aquinas' view that conscience is reason making moral decisions, remember how the motive is always important. Conscience must be informed by prayer and worship, the teaching of the church, experience and the inner voice of the holy spirit' because of the motive is as important as the action;

the conscience in a way is the motive. This in a sense this can be linked to virtue theory which asks how you can be a better person, and what qualities make you good, good motive can be one of these qualities making conscience an important tool.

Sacred scriptures are obviously an important source of Guidance for both the Roman Catholic Church and Natural Law theorists because of their belief in the 'divine command'. 'In catholic Christianity the bible is an important source of guidance that cannot be changed, and so the place of the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount and other key texts about Christian behavior form a divine law which no-one can change.'

Moving on, despite coming from this same textual background as the Catholics, liberal Christians hold much more liberal, teleological ('telos' Greek for 'end') and relativist approaches to ethical dilemmas. The Church of England for example allow abortion in circumstances where the mothers life is in danger, they believe some actions are 'the lesser of two evils' and one should go ahead with them, so the Ten Commandments aren't held as a moral absolute, they are concerned with the end or consequences of the action. They see 'love' as an important tool while making there decisions. Ramsey says that Christian ethics are '*an ethic without rule*'.

These liberal beliefs are often linked to Joseph Fletchers situation ethics, it provides an alternative Christian ethic that is consistent with the Gospel representation of Jesus. The approach of situation ethics develops a principle from Jesus' action of breaking the law when the situation demanded it for love. Like the Church of England it takes into account the complexities of human life, and it can make tough decisions where, from an absolutist perspective all actions seem wrong. Understandably so it rejected by the Catholic system, in 1952 Pope Pius XII called Situation Ethics '*an individualistic and subjective appeal to the concrete circumstances of actions to justify decisions in opposition to the natural law or Gods revealed will*'. The Roman Catholic Church still holds the natural law approach.

So in summary, Christian approaches to ethics in general are not consistent, the Roman Catholic Church is the only part of the Church to lay down precise absolutist teachings withholding Aquinas' natural law approach; whereas there are other liberal Christian approaches like the Church of England

which do not view the Ten Commandments as absolutely as the Catholic Church rather they seem more adaptable to love and the situation.

*REFERENCE:*

*Robert Bowie, Ethical Studies, Pg 137-139.*