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CS 601 Christian Ethics

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ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Christian Ethics
CS 601

Syllabus and Initial Instructions

Dr. Brian Edgar,
Professor of Theological Studies

Summer, 2008

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Important notice

Greetings. Your work for this intensive begins well before we actually meet together. There is reading to do and assignments to prepare for. This syllabus provides extensive information and although further information may be provided at the start of the intensive *you should commence work based on the information provided here.*

The Course

This course aims

- to prepare students for ministry by training them to analyze and address the moral life from a Christian perspective

- to enable ministers to equip their congregations for understanding moral responsibility and for practicing ministry with integrity
- to assist in training ministers who will draw all persons, including those who are excluded by society, into the care and guidance of the community of faith under the Lordship of Christ
- to assist in the training of ministers who will exemplify the Gospel-mandated holy life.

Course Outcomes

It is anticipated that by the end of the course students will be able to:

- provide a biblical basis for the moral life.
- describe various historical and contemporary Christian interpretations of social and personal moral issues.
- use the basic vocabulary of ethical analysis.
- use basic tools of social analysis.
- explain the Wesleyan emphasis on the various dimensions of holiness, specifically the expectation for personal integrity, moral concern, and social responsibility.
- recognize and explain at a basic level: the needs, contexts, and insights of various cultural groups and marginalized communities in society and in the church (these may include, but are not limited to, particularity arising from ethnic, gender, class, and geographic locations).
- explain how responses to moral problems and moral integrity shape congregational life.

The course will include the following topics.

- Moral Foundations and Sociocultural Contexts
- Distinctives of a Wesleyan Moral Vision
- Christ and Culture: The Historic Tradition
- Christ and Culture: Justice, Pluralism, and Public Engagement
- The Church as a Moral Community
- Gender, Race, and Ethnicity
- Friendship, Sexuality, and Homosexuality
- Marriage, Family, and Aging
- Work, Environment, and Worship

Professor

May I introduce myself? I am Brian Edgar, Professor of Theological Studies at ATS. I am an Australian and I often teach on-line courses (such as this one) from my home in Ringwood, Melbourne, Australia. However, this will be an on-campus intensive. I will be in Wilmore from August 16 to the end of September.

Prior to taking up this position I taught systematic theology and ethics full-time for eighteen years in undergraduate, Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry programs at a number of Australian theological institutions and, on occasions, overseas. I am also Moderator for philosophy and ethics for the Australian College of Theology (Australia's largest theological accrediting agency – a moderator is responsible for ensuring parity of academic standard between the different institutions accredited by the ACT), an advisor on ethics to the Australia Government's Gene Technology Regulator (who authorizes all artificial gene manipulations), a member of the World Evangelical Alliance's Theological Commission, a Fellow of the Institute for the Study of Christianity in an Age of Science and Technology (Australia) and a double award winner with the Templeton Foundation's program for the

conduct of courses on science and faith as well as being a winner of a Templeton award for writing on science and faith.

I wrote *The Message of the Trinity* (IVP, 2004) in the IVP The Bible Speaks Today series, as well as a number of articles on other topics. From 2004-2007 I was Director of Public Theology for the Australian Evangelical Alliance which involved me in many public policy discussions concerning a wide range of ethical issues. I have been Professor of Theological Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary since July 2007, although I was a visiting professor for a semester in 2005 and have taught on-line since then.

On a more personal note, I am married to Barbara who is a Spiritual Companion (providing prayer companionship on a one-to-one basis one or two days a week through the Wellspring Centre) and, for two days a week, a teacher of English as a second language to refugees and migrants. We have two daughters, Karly, who is married to Pete and who is undertaking her Masters in Church Ministry (after an undergrad degree in ministry and the arts) and Tara who still lives at home and who works preparing and selling chicken-based products.

Contact Professor

You can contact me via *email*: brian_edgar@asburyseminary.edu or you can try *Skype*: brianedgar1 or the ATS on-line chat facility. Bear in mind that, at the moment, I am 14 hours ahead of EDT.

Class web-site

An Asbury Virtual Seminary **web-site for this course** (designated CS601W1 (S308)) will be available to all enrolled students **two weeks before the start of the intensive**. This site will give access to electronic resources which you are required to read and may provide other information which may be relevant to the intensive. You should visit this site at least a week prior to the intensive.

Course time-frame

1. All those enrolled will be notified of the requirements for this subject (i.e. via *this* document) not less than *6 weeks prior to the intensive*.
2. Access will be given to all enrolled students to the Virtual Seminary web-site associated with this course CS601W1(S308) *two weeks prior to the intensive*. At this point –
 - The electronic required reading resources will be available there (*required*).
 - It will also be possible to read other material related to the course (*advisable*)
 - Assignments can be *electronically* submitted (*preferred*).
 - The facilities for dialogue between students can be utilized (*optional*)
3. The intensive takes place 8.30 to 4.30 on **August 18-20**. **The pre-intensive assignment (see below) is required on the first day** (preferably submitted electronically). These assignments will be graded by September 5).
4. Access to the class **web-site** will continue until 5pm **Friday September 12**. This is also the date the **final assignment** is due. This is three weeks after the conclusion of the intensive. These assignments will be graded by September 19. This extends beyond the normal conclusion date for a summer intensive (when *grades*, let alone assignments, normally have to be submitted one week after the end of

the intensive) and thus has had to be negotiated with the administration to allow for any assignment work to be done after the intensive, and, consequently, there can be no exceptions beyond this date.

Graduating students

If you need this course to graduate in August however, you cannot follow the above timetable! You will need to do what is a little more difficult and submit both your written assignments by 5pm Friday 22nd August, two days after the intensive so that they can be graded and submitted to the registrar's office in time for graduation. This means, in reality having the work done prior to the intensive - which can be a little more difficult. **Those in that category should contact me** to confirm that they understand this and also to discuss their assignments as I can provide some additional help and checking prior to submission.

Work load

In a typical on-campus semester based two credit hour course there would be an expectation of around 6 hours of work a week over 15 weeks (that is, perhaps 26 class hours and an expectation of around 4 hours other work each week, as well as work done in the reading and exam weeks). That is, around 90 hours work.

This intensive is condensed to around 22 class hours and, therefore it is reasonable to expect around 68 hours of reading, research and assignments outside class. It is not unreasonable to expect the outside class work to be divided roughly half pre-intensive and half post-intensive. There are approximately 480 pages of reading required before the intensive, and one assignment to be submitted on the first day of the intensive. The rest of the required reading and the final assignment are due to be done by 5pm **Friday September 12.**

Therefore may I encourage you to get working on this subject! You should expect to do not less than 30 hours work prior to the intensive.

Reading Resources

Here are the required resources.

1. Required General texts

1. Dayton, Donald W., *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988) **read pages 1-142 and at least 4 chapters should be read prior to the intensive.**
2. Miles, Rebekah L., *The Pastor as Moral Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) **pages 1-59 and 76 -122** should be read prior to the intensive. That is the minimum pre-intensive requirement, you are expected to read the whole book before the end of the course.
3. Hollinger, Dennis, *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) read pages 9-272. **At least pages 9-148 should be read prior to the intensive.** That is the minimum pre-intensive requirement, however, you are encouraged to read as much as you can prior to the intensive. The whole book is to be read by the end of the course.
4. Boulton, Wayne G., Thomas D.Kennedy, and Allen Verhey, eds., *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) **The required articles are listed below** according to topic area, along with other readings.

2. Required and optional electronic texts

In addition to the required textbooks there is other material which can be obtained electronically either on the web or from E-Reserves folder on the Virtual Seminary web-site for this subject. **The reading from Boulton and the electronic sources is listed below in topic areas** so that it is possible to see how they relate – and so that articles from different sources on the same topic can be read together. Specific readings may be designated as required (either pre-intensive or post-intensive) or optional (for those interested or those undertaking an assignment in that area).

1. Introduction to ethics

1. Boulton pages 1-11 and articles 1, 2, 3, 4, *This reading is basic and is focused on the complexity of ethics and the principle of using scripture. It should be read prior to the intensive.*

2. Christ and Culture – [historic models](#)

2. *The reading in this section looks at historic models for relating to culture. If you follow the hyper-links you will find some background to these texts. Feel free to ignore this background material if you have a good historical grasp but the texts themselves should be read prior to the intensive – noting the comments about how to read them by following the link to ‘historic models’.*
1. [The Didache: The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations](#) (3,000 words). Found at www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html
3. Boulton articles 16 ([Yoder](#)), 40 ([Augustine](#)), 41 ([Kirk](#)), 19 ([Aquinas](#)), 32 ([Luther](#)), 42 and 51 ([Schleithem](#))
4. *This is a long reading that should be skimmed:* John [Calvin](#), *Civil Government* being Book IV, Chap. XX of the Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536). Found at www.lonang.com/exlibris/misc/1536-jc.htm

3. The Wesleyan ethical contribution

1. Richard P. Heitzenrater, “The *Imitatio Christi* and the Great Commandment: Virtue and Obligation in Wesley’s Ministry with the Poor” in M. Douglas Meeks (ed) “The Portion of the Poor” (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995) pp.49-63. There is a PDF available in e-resources folder on the web-site.

The article by Heitzenrater should be read prior to the intensive. The following sermons provide good resource material. Perhaps read one or other of them now. The remainder could be read later. Again, the point of reading these historical documents is a general, ethical one – rather than a close historical analysis.

2. John Wesley, *Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions* pp.274-278 of *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley* (New York: Emory Press, 1831) PDF version available in e-reserves folder
3. John Wesley, Sermon 116, *Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity* (3,900 words) found at <http://new.gb-gm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/116/>

4. John Wesley, Sermon 92: *The Danger of Riches* (2,800 words) found at <http://new.gbgu-mc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/87/>
5. John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (published in 1774) (9,000 words) found at <http://gbgu-mc.org/umw/wesley/thoughtsuponslavery.stm>
6. Dayton, Donald W., *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988) pages 73 to 84 and 99 to 120. Note the instruction above that you do not have to read all of Dayton prior to the intensive, but at least 4 chapters – of your choosing - should be read prior to the intensive in order to get the idea of what he is on about.

4. Marriage and family

Please read article 57 before the intensive. The rest should be read but can come later.

1. Boulton: articles 47, 57, 59, 60 and 61.
2. “Memory, Funerals and the Comunion of Saints” by M. Therese Lysaught. PDF available in e-resources folder.
3. Van Leeuwen “Men, Marriage and Male Parenting” PDF available in e-resources folder.

5. Sexuality

4. *This article won't take long to read. Please do it before the intensive.* “Should we support gay marriage?” Yes! (Semple) No! (Pannenberg). PDF available in the e-resources folder.
5. *Before or after the intensive this is a must read, as you need to get a hold on basic biblical material:* “Homosexuality” from Hayes, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, as found in the E-Reserves.
6. “Does Belief in Women’s Equality Lead to an Acceptance of Homosexual Practice?” Catherine Kroger, PDF available in e-resources folder. *The answer is ‘no’ but don’t let you stop you reading it – but at a time that suits you..*

6. Violence

1. Boulton articles 75, 76 and 77. *Please read the first two of these articles before the intensive.*

The following two articles are optional reading.

2. “Religion and violence: a Protestant Christian perspective” by Ariarajah, S Wesley, *Ecumenical Review*, 2003-04-0155:2, 136 (ATLA0001429361). It can be found by using the title and searching the ATLA Religion Database in Asbury Scholar.
3. "Identity" and global ethnic violence: a theological-missiological reflection by Payne, Michael W., *Mission Studies*, 2002-01-0119:2, 113 (ATLA0001418110). It can be found by using the title and searching the ATLA Religion Database in Asbury Scholar.

7. Work and the environment

Please read the article by Volf before the intensive.

1. “Work, Human Beings and Nature” by Miroslav Volf. PDF available in e-resources folder.
2. Boulton articles 83, 91 and 92.
3. Dayton, Donald W., *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988) read pages 63 to 72.

8. Justice

Please read article 44 before the intensive.

1. Boulton articles 44, 84

9. Gender

Please read article 29 before the intensive.

1. Boulton articles 15 and 29.
2. Margaret Koch and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, “Feminism and Christian Vision” from *After Eden*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) pp. 19-43 See the E-Reserves for this article.
3. Dayton, Donald W., *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988) read pages 85 to 98

10. Race

Please read McConnell before the intensive.

1. Douglas McConnell , “Confronting Racism and Prejudice in Our Kind of People” Find via Asbury Scholar using the title and the ATLA Religion data base. 19pp
2. Miroslav Volf , “A Vision of Embrace:Theological Perspectives on Cultural Identity and Conflict.” *Ecumenical Review* 47.02 Find in Asbury Scholar using the title and the ATLA Religion database. 12pp.
3. Jesse Miranda and William Pannell “Breaking the Black/White Stalemate” by using the title or “racial reconciliation in the church” Find in Asbury Scholar using the Academic Search Premier database. 4pp.
4. Dayton, Donald W., *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988) read pages 7 to 62

Assessment

1. Examination: three short 15 minutes tests conducted on the three days of the intensive based on the required pre-reading. 3 x 5% = 15%.

- The first test will be based on your reading of Hollinger pages 27-88

- the second on Miles pages 1-59 and 76-122
- and the third on Hollinger pages 89-148.

The questions will be objective short answer questions of the kind ‘What, according to Hollinger are ‘the dilemmas of pluralism’? [*The answer to this sample question comes from chapter 11 (a section on which you are not actually being assessed) and is “The dilemmas of pluralism are the present relativization of truth and the difficulty ethic has dealing with a broad pluralistic society.” (See pages 239 and 240).*

2. Attendance/Participation: (10%) That is, full attendance = 10%. Miss *or be late* for any session and deduct 3% each time.

3. Pre-intensive assignment (35%) due first day of intensive. Write no more than 600 words each in response to the following three questions:

(a) What is distinctive about Christian ethics? (*In your answer demonstrate an awareness of the viewpoints of Miles and Hollinger. Also make your own assessment as to what is most important).*

(b) Discuss Miles’ stress on the ethical role of pastors in the light of Hollinger’s discussion of modernity and post-modernity (chapters 4 and 5).

(c) In the Reading Guide (above) there are 10 topics and in each of the topics numbered 3 through 10 there are readings which are required to be read *before* the intensive. Choose any ONE of topics 3 through 10 and *write an evaluation of the pre-intensive required reading for that topic.* (Important note: Before selecting the topic please read assignment 4 and DO NOT choose to your topic evaluation on the same topic that you choose for your post-intensive assignment. So, for example, if you want to write your post-intensive assignment on option 1 avoid assessing here the reading for topic 4).

4. Post-intensive assignment (40%) due 5pm on 12 September. But you can, of course, prepare it or even submit it at any time prior to that.

Option 1. *Note that you should not assess the reading for topic 4 as your pre-intensive assignment AND do this assignment.*

This assignment involves writing a commentary on a case study. You are to write up to 1600 words on the situation described below.

The situation is that you are the pastor of a congregation which has a ministry to children involving creative activities and bible studies. During one of these you talk with Kathy, an obviously upset thirteen year old girl, who is the daughter of Angela, a lady who is both a member and a part-time office worker at your church. It turns out that Kathy is upset that her parents may be separating. She has an eighteen year old brother who also lives at home. Their father, Bob, does not attend church. As a result of this conversation you are able to meet with Angela who indicates that she feels the marriage has always been a disaster and that they should never have married, that she was far too young and only agreed to marry because she was pregnant. She has never felt ‘married’, she wants a divorce and has already established an emotional bond (though not she says, a sexual one) with another man, Martin. There is some ambiguity as to when this relationship started.

You are also able to meet with Bob who, you discover, thinks that the relationship is really OK. He doesn't want a divorce and is sure they can work though it. He sees the main problem as the stress created by his long hours of work to try and pay off their mortgage.

You also find out that others in the church has some knowledge of the situation. Some of the church leaders have been concerned about the appropriateness of Angela's apparently fairly well known relationship with Martin. Especially given that she is still married and is an employee of the church.

Please write a commentary on this situation. There should be a particular concern for the ethics of the various aspects of this situation within a pastoral context. In writing your commentary you are addressing *me*. Some people like to do a commentary of this kind as though speaking to one or other of the participants. But I want you to persuade *me* that you understand the *ethical* principles which are involved. You do need to indicate how they are to be related to the pastoral needs of the situation but do not go overboard on that. This is not primarily a course on pastoral care, but a course on ethics done pastorally. So, as you address the issues you should explain to me your justification for thinking as you do about the issues raised at a level appropriate for a course such as this, even though if you were to actually implement any action you might well simplify your manner of talking.

Option 2: Please provide for me a summation of what you consider to be the most fundamental ethical principles for a Christian to follow. This will typically constitute a list of four or five fundamental ethical principles. You will state what they are and justify them. It is possible to have less (say just one or two) if you can make a good case for these being sufficient. Or you could have more, but you might need to explain whether there is any priority in such a list. It is best if the principles are not only individually valid but also integrated in some way (and not just a 'shopping list' of basically unrelated items). The principles can be expressed entirely in your own way or, you can appropriate what other people have said. But you need to explain why they are important and you are writing this for me (rather than, say, for some hypothetical person in a congregation). *(Note that this topic does not class with any previous assignment)*

Option 3. Describe and critically evaluate the various ethical principles and resources which are available to a Christian who is reflecting on discrimination and issues of race. *Note that this assignment is incompatible with evaluating the reading for topic 10 in the pre-intensive assignment.*

Option 4. Describe and critically evaluate the various ethical principles and resources which are available to a Christian who is reflecting on discrimination and issues of gender. *Note that this assignment is incompatible with evaluating the reading for topic 9 in the pre-intensive assignment.*

Option 5: Why should Christians work with the poor? Does working with the poor mean being poor oneself? *((Note that this topic does not class with any previous assignment)*

Option 6. What factors should influence a Christian's judgment in ethical decision making? Are there any distinctively Wesleyan approaches? *(Note that this topic does not class with any previous assignment)*

Option 7. Discuss the responsibilities of the pastor of a congregation in dealing with the ethical issues which emerge when the nation is faced with the possibility of large-scale military action. *Comment: While there are obviously real, current issues involved here your answer should deal with this question hypothetically – as though the country was facing the prospect of some new, major*

military action. Also note that this assignment is incompatible with evaluating the reading for topic 6 in the pre-intensive assignment.

Mode of Assignment Submission

Assignments 3 and 4 should be submitted to the web-site. They will be posted as text into text-boxes (rather than as document files uploaded). The text boxes cope with footnotes/endnotes quite well. The only reason for not posting them in this way is a complete inability to access the site and/or operate the on-line system! And if you can't access the site you are going to have problems accessing the electronic readings so you had better (a) get help from a friend, (b) get the info commons to help you learn about accessing the sites, or (c) get in touch with me via email.

The following notes are connected via hyper-links to the required reading (above).

Historic models

This historical material which you are to read comes from earlier contexts. The point of this is to see the way in which different contexts bring about different responses and various ethical emphases.

This is not a history course and so we are tending to deal with contexts in a very brief and fragmentary way. This is most unsatisfying from a historical point of view, but we do not have time to explore them further, and *our main point is* not really to develop a comprehensive historical understanding – I will leave that to those who are much better qualified than I – but *to learn some ethical lessons*.

Reading historical documents in this format – extracts without a lot of setting – can be very difficult. Nonetheless, the alternatives (either extended seminary courses that go for six or eight years or not reading them at all and relying purely on secondary sources!) are even worse!

There are also significant educational issues associated with the varying backgrounds of students (some have done a lot more history than others) and the length of some of the texts. So, some students may well have read these documents – or something like them – previously, while others will find them new and challenging. For example, although the material from Calvin is only a small extract from his *Institutes* it still comprises 13,600 words. Obviously, there are times when one has to read somewhat selectively. I am sure that every student understands this and interprets instructions to ‘Read this document...’ in their own way. What I am saying here should not be interpreted as permission to skip over large amounts of material, it is more of the nature of a simple recognition that a certain degree of selectivity is necessary. I have to leave it to you to determine the appropriate level of your reading which allows you to sign off on the material with integrity but without a sense that you are failing if you have not made copious notes on every chapter of Calvin’s discussion of civil government! To some extent you have to be responsible for controlling the amount of time you spend on this reading.

Here are some notes on the various authors who may, or may not be familiar to you.

The Didache: The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations

Every now and then someone claims to have ‘discovered’ a new gospel or document which, they say revolutionises our understanding of the early church. Most of the time the discovery has been well known to scholars, and is not usually as significant as it is made out to be. In 1873 however the modern world got its first look at one of the most important historical documents relating to the life of the early church. The Didache (‘The Teaching’) was discovered in the library of a monastery in Constantinople.

This document “The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles, through the Twelve Apostles” is made up of two parts. The first part, known as “The Two Ways” is of interest to us because it is basically an exposition of Christian morality. It sets out the virtues and vices which comprise ‘The Way of Life’ and the ‘The Way of Death’. The second part is a kind of church manual giving instructions on various aspects of church life such as baptism, fasting, the Eucharist and the treatment of itinerant evangelists and missionaries.

The fact that such a work existed had been known for a long time. There are references to it in Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria and Athanasius. We do not know who the author was and the date is a matter of some dispute, although it probably comes from very early in the second century.

If you read this document bearing in mind that it was a foundational document for Christians it soon becomes obvious how important their moral life was to their faith.

It can be found at www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html

And it is about 3,000 words long. It is worth recalling another document from the same period of the church's history – one of Pliny's letters to the Emperor Trajan in which he describes his attempts to understand the nature of Christianity. Pliny was the Governor in Bithynia (which is now a part of modern day Turkey) and he seems to have been particularly pedantic - which is to our advantage - because we have preserved a number of letters that he wrote to the Emperor seeking advice on all kinds of things. (He says at the beginning of this letter, "It is my custom, Lord Emperor, to refer to you all questions where of I am in doubt. Who can better guide me when I am matters stand, all and enlighten me if I am in ignorance?")

Pliny says that he did not know much about Christians. He knew that it was an offence to be one and had no hesitation in punishing people for it - although he admits "I do not know what the crime is that is usually punished or investigated...."

He tells about a situation where some people brought charges against Christians and so he thought he should investigate. Whatever they were actually doing belonging to any form of a society without explicit permission was a crime. Some said they were engaging in cannibalism - no doubt as a result of confusion over what was taking place at the Lord's supper. But Pliny feels the need to investigate. He says, "I considered as necessary to find out from two major servants who were called deaconesses, by torments, how far this was true ..."

The Christians "maintained, however, that the amount of their fault or error had been this, that it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and recite by turns a form of words to Christ as a god; and that they bound themselves with an oath, not for any crime, but not to commit theft or robbery or adultery, not to break their word, and not to deny deposit when demanded. After this was done, their custom was to depart, and to meet again to take food, that ordinarily a harmless food; and even less (they said) they had given of doing after the issue of my edict."

It seems that it was important for these, generally lower class, probably slave Christians to learn morality. There is no doubt that Pliny was confused by what he found in. Why should a group such as this be punished? The Didache contains some of the earliest non-NT information about what Christians were actually doing and as you read the Didache you will see that it has many, many echoes of biblical material. The very idea of 'the two ways' is can be found in Psalm 1 and in Jeremiah 21:8. Then notice how much of the early part of the book is derived from the Gospels, especially Matthew.

The Didache was considered to be an important and spiritual book. And there is no doubt it contains much that is authentic Christian faith. However, I should note that, personally speaking, one of the strongest arguments that I have come across for the inspired nature of scripture is the fact that those other pieces of literature which belong to that era and which, like the Didache, were often considered for inclusion in the Canon, but which were finally rejected, are, in many respects, a long way away from authentic scripture in their understanding of God's grace.

For example, notice in chapter 6 the advice that is given which obviously reflects the Sermon on the Mount. "For if you are able to bear the entire yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect" (see Matthew 5:48). But the Didache follows this up with "but if you're not able to do this, do what you are able". My point is that this latter phrase does not sound like the New Testament at all! Now it may be, as a matter of fact, the way that people operate! It may be what you and I actually do, but it is *not* what the Lord taught. He could never say, 'just do as much as you can'. He expected more! and

If you have the responsibility to write a church manual for today you would, no doubt, include many practical details in the same way that the Didache includes material in chapters 7-16, but what would you include if you are going to have a first section, like the Didache, on the moral life of the believer?

It is also interesting to note in the second part where there are instructions concerning teachers, apostles and prophets that there are important moral tests for those who claim divine authority.

The Authority of tradition by John Howard Yoder, found in Boulton, Wayne G., Thomas D.Kennedy, and Allen Verhey, eds., *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) pages 91-102.

John Howard Yoder is well-known as an anabaptist writer, and, traditionally, anabaptists are not usually considered to be big on tradition! At least, not as tradition is usually understood. In actual fact, their desire to return to the New Testament means that in their own way they are extremely traditional. Yoder is probably best known for his book "The Politics of Jesus". In this article he discusses tradition in the light of various ecumenical discussions and of the understanding of the Catholic church.

Since the Reformation there has been considerable dispute between Catholic and reformed churches concerning the relative role of scripture and tradition. This article points out that developments have taken place which have brought these two sides together. He asks, however, whether there is genuine or only apparent consensus about this.

The Catholic church, of course, has seen a role for tradition which the reformers and their heirs have seen as problematic. However, times change. In fact, there was a significant change in the Catholic position at Vatican II, which, I am sure that you know, was an historic meeting of the Catholic church 1962-1965 which brought profound changes. Many significant documents were prepared at this time including *Dei Verbum* – the dogmatic constitution on divine revelation - which can be found at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html (this is entirely optional reading).

The final version of this document surprised many people. The first draft of it took the traditional Catholic view that there is a double source of revelation – scripture and tradition. This was traditional Catholic teaching which gave tradition a significant place and which stood *contra* the Reformers "sola scriptura". But after much discussion the draft was rejected and the final document abandoned the two source scheme. There is now only one source of revelation concerning Jesus Christ and that is scripture – although tradition continues to have an important role because it is the way that is transmitted to us today. Without suggesting that the Catholic Church has suddenly become Protestant the question can be asked whether Catholicism and Protestantism came closer because of this. On the one hand the answer is 'yes' because for both Scripture is seen as dominant. On the other hand the answer could still be 'no' because the question is now how Scripture is interpreted. In is

As you read it Yoder on the role of tradition note that this is not “merely” a theological matter, it is intrinsically *ethical*. The ethical role and importance of tradition is illustrated in the way that Yoder discusses the legitimation of war with respect to the tradition of the church.

Augustine: Excerpts from *The City of God* and *The Morals of the Catholic Church* and *The Cardinal Virtues* by Kenneth Kirk found in Boulton, Wayne G., Thomas D.Kennedy, and Allen Verhey, eds., *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) pages 234-237 and 238-241.

Aurelius Augustinus (354-430) was born in Tagaste in Numidia, North Africa of a pagan father and a Christian mother (Monica, who is famous for her influence on Augustine). Educated at Carthage he was to become a lawyer but decided to devote himself to literature and to teaching. He abandoned Christianity and took a mistress. His subsequent spiritual journey went through a number of stages. He was influenced by Cicero's *Hortensius*, the philosophy of the Manichees and by Ambrose, bishop of Milan. He became a Christian in 386, returned to N.Africa in 388 and established a kind of monastery, became a priest in 391, a bishop in 395 and died in 430. He is notable for his disputations with the Manichaeists, the Donatists and the Pelagians. His most famous writings are *Confessions* and *The City of God* but he wrote much more than this. A large selection can be found in P.Schaff (ed.) *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vols 1-8 (GE75).

- "First believe, then understand" (*On the Creed*, 4)
- "Our hearts are restless till they find their home in thee." (*Confessions*)
- "I must now carry my thoughts back to the abominable things I did in those days, the sins of the flesh which defiled my soul. I do this, my God, not because I love those sins, but so that I may love you." (*Confessions*, 2.1)
- "Since it was not given to them to believe, the means of believing also were denied them." (*On the Gift of Perseverance*, 25)

There are four concepts which provide the foundation of Augustine's ethical theory: law, love, character (or virtue), and well-being. Our focus in these readings is upon virtue. For all this seen a major part of the Christian ethic is the development of virtue. An evil person could appear to obeying God's moral law but they may do so for the wrong motives. The character which drives the motives is therefore more important in ethical theory than just the actual behaviour.

Greek ethical thinking focused upon four cardinal virtues. Augustine deals with these virtues but deals with them from a Christian perspective. It is critically important that the virtues result from their desire to love and honour God. Otherwise the best virtues will be reduced to “splendid vices” because they will arise and be motivated by pride rather than the love of God.

Augustine discusses the relationship between the four cardinal virtues and Christian love.

Kirk discusses the cardinal virtues on pp. 238-241 – you might find it easier to read Kirk first and then Augustine. Either way, you should now read them.

Excerpts from *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologica* by Thomas Aquinas found in Boulton, Wayne G., Thomas D.Kennedy, and Allen Verhey, eds., *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) pages 109-118.

Aquinas (c.1224-1274) is the greatest Philosopher and Theologian of the Medieval Church. Born in Italy, he studied in Naples and became a Dominican priest in 1244. He taught for most of his life at Paris University and at Rome. He was related to the Emperor and the King of France. He was Canonised in 1326, made a Doctor of the Church in 1567, commended for study by Pope Leo XIII in 1879 and declared Patron of Catholic Schools in 1880. His many writings cover most philosophical and theological categories. Later we see the development of Thomism and then Neo-Thomism.

The *Summa Theologica* is the most influential of his works. It is a systematic presentation of Christian doctrine in philosophical terms. It was later declared the official teaching of the Catholic Church. He also wrote *Summa Contra Gentiles*. His views cover many philosophical and theological categories including discussions of faith and reason, epistemology, metaphysics, God and ethics.

Our interest at this point is still on virtue. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* he focuses upon humanity's felicity – our ultimate joy, greatest happiness. This does not lie in moral actions *per se* – but in what they are (or should be) ordered towards - the contemplation of God. (This should relate to the material on Bonhoeffer dealt with earlier).

Aquinas writes his *Summa Theologica* according to a very particular style. He poses questions and always begins his answer with a series of objections which you know he is going to disagree with. But he allows the objections to be heard and then states, 'On the contrary ...' and follows this with 'I answer that...' where he discusses his own point of view. Having stated what he believes to be the right position he then deals with the objections previously raised one after the other. When reading *Summa Theologica* you can often save a lot of time by understanding this and perhaps reading his answer out of order – it can be useful to read what he really thinks before dealing with the objections (which are often of lesser consequence for us).

Our interest in these excerpts from Aquinas primarily relate to the question of natural law. In traditional natural law ethics, appeal is first made to basic human values that are recognised as goods for which human beings can choose to act, if they wish to flourish as people. These human values are basic in the sense of being self-evident to human beings, and may be referred to as pre-moral goods because they exist before moral decisions are made on whether or not we will participate in them. One of these pre-moral goods, for example, is reason. By using reason, we can identify the principles of practicable reasonableness that, if we obey them, allow us to participate in the other goods in a rational matter.

Now see what Aquinas has to say about natural law.

***Treatise on Christian Liberty* by Martin Luther found in Boulton, Wayne G., Thomas D.Kennedy, and Allen Verhey, eds., *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) pages 187-194.**

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was the major leader of the German Reformation. His father was a peasant, but was successful in mining which afforded his son an excellent education. Luther studied Law as his father wished. A brush with death in a thunder-storm in 1505 lead Luther to vow to be a monk. He studied theology at Erfurt and then lectured at Wittenberg. He visited Rome in 1510-11 and became disillusioned with Catholic piety. In 1512 he completed his D.Th. From 1507 to 1512 he struggled to work out his salvation by a monastic rule, confession and self-mortification. Subsequently he had a spiritual experience in which he recognised Scripture's teaching of justification by faith alone. In 1517

he protested against the Church's sale of indulgences and nailed 95 theses for disputation on the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral. There was public debate. He faced charges of heresy and excommunication. His initial aim was to reform the Church, but his theology, his supporters and Catholic opposition meant a division was inevitable.

- "Let us abolish all party names and call ourselves Christians after him whose teaching we hold I hold, together with the universal Church the one universal teaching of Christ who is our only Master."
- At Worms: "Unless I am proved wrong by Scriptures or by evident reason, then I am a prisoner in conscience to the Word of God."
- "The soul needs only the Word of God for its life and righteousness, so it is justified by faith alone and not any works."

His famous *Treatise on Christian Liberty* begins with the twin statements: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." The rest of the text is designed to explain how these apparently contradictory statements relate to each other.

See what he has to say. Personally, I think this is great reading!

Read *The Schleithem Confession* found in Boulton, Wayne G., Thomas D. Kennedy, and Allen Verhey, eds., *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) pages 285-287 and also John Calvin on *Civil Government* being Book IV, Chap. XX of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) which is found at www.lonang.com/exlibris/misc/1536-jc.htm

These two readings go together because the Schleithem Confession is just the kind of approach towards civil government which Calvin rejects in that section of his *Institutes* which deals with civil responsibilities. The Brethren who produced this confession were on the 'left-wing' of the reformation. The mainline reformers frequently found themselves opposing both the Catholic church and more radical reformers.

While *The Schleithem Confession* is relatively short, the extract from Calvin's *Institutes* is fairly long. It is actually the very end of the *Institutes*. It appears as the last section of book for which deals with the means of grace by which God blesses us. It follows discussions of the church, the sacraments and discipline. I suggest that you read somewhat selectively with perhaps more of a focus upon the following paragraphs: 1-5, 8, 14-16, 24-26.

From Calvin's point of view then good government, including Christian involvement in it is not contrary to spiritual health. God works through both the government and the church. The issue of the relationship between church and state remains a vexed one. For Calvin, there was no problem in saying that the government had the responsibility to "rightly establish religion". Thus there was a complementarity which the more radical reformers believed involved a serious confusion.

Read them both and see what you think.