

Christian Ethics

Vinoth Ramachandra, Aarhus, Oct 2014

“We *awake* to our moral experience in the beginning. What seems like a beginning is not really a beginning at all. We wake to find things going on, and ourselves going on in the midst of them... Moral experience is not constructed or achieved out of non-moral experience; it is woken up to as experience that has accompanied other experience, present from the beginning and distinct in kind.”

- Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World and Time*

Psalm 119:33-36

“Teach me, LORD, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end. Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all your heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart towards your statutes and not towards selfish gain.”

Deut. 6:20-24

“In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What is the meaning of these stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?’ Tell them: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in the Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the LORD sent signs and wonders- great and terrible- on Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.’”

“Why do we not realise that it is the Christians’ compassion toward strangers, their care of the graves of the dead and the pretended piety of their lives that have done most to increase this atheism... For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg [because of Jewish welfare], and the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.”

The Works of the Emperor Julian

“We are dealing...with a change in the social imagination. Late antiquity witnessed the transition from one model of society, in which the poor were largely invisible, to another, in which they came to play a vivid imaginative role.”

- Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*

“Who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God as something
to be exploited [taken advantage of],
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And found in human form, he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death-
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend...

And every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.”

Matthew 5:43ff

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

“Christian ethics is the systematic investigation of the astounding claim that the world and our self is only rightly seen and intended in the light of what God has done in the person and work of Jesus Christ.”

- Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*

(a) Disability

“If, in Christ, God has opened up his very being in relationship to human beings, there is nothing that can change this transformative fact: not neurological deterioration, not forgetting who and whose we are, nothing. God remains with and for the person with dementia even when the person can no longer be with and for God, at least in a cognitive sense. The significance and personhood of the person with dementia is safeguarded and sustained within the very being of God quite apart from the relationships he may or may not encounter at a temporal level. We might forget God, but God will not and, indeed, cannot forget us. When we can no longer minister to God and to others, the God who is with us and for us will minister to us in our hour of need.”

John Swinton

(a) Disability

(b) The *Rights* of the Poor

Prov.31:8-9

“Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

“Will not one be called a thief who steals the garment of one already clothed, and is one deserving of any other title who will not clothe the naked if he is able to do so? That bread which you keep belongs to the hungry; that coat which you preserve in your wardrobe, to the naked; those shoes which are rotting in your possession, to the shoeless; that gold which you have hidden in the ground, to the needy. Wherefore, as often as you were able to help others, and refused, so often did you do them wrong.”

Basil of Ceasarea (c.329-c.379)

“In cases of need all things are common property, so that there would seem to be no sin in taking another’s property, for need has made it common... Now according to the natural order established by Divine providence, inferior things are ordained for the purpose of succouring man’s needs by their means... Hence whatever certain people have in superabundance is due, by natural law, to the purpose of succouring the poor.”

St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274)

Contd...

“Nevertheless, if the need be so manifest and urgent, that it is evident that the present need must be remedied by whatever means be at hand (for instance when a person is in some imminent danger, and there is no other possible remedy), then it is lawful for a man to succour his own need by means of another’s property, by taking it either openly or secretly: nor is this properly speaking theft or robbery.”

(a) Disability

(b) The *Rights* of the Poor

(c) Conflict, Violence & Healing

“Seekers of truth, as distinct from alleged possessors of truth, will employ ‘double vision’- they will give others the benefit of the doubt, they will inhabit imaginatively the world of others, and they will endeavour to view events in question from the perspective of others, not just their own.”

- Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory*

