

Christian ethics as an adequate ethical system in the context of modern culture: a theological analysis and critical evaluation

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse the theological basis of Christian ethics and to evaluate Christian ethics in terms of criteria for an adequate ethical system. The article draws attention to the moral crisis facing modern culture, hence the need for an adequate ethical system. Several contemporary ethical systems are evaluated and found to be lacking in many important areas. In spite of the challenge of contemporary ethical systems and ethical dilemmas confronting Christian ethics today, and some problematic areas in Christian ethics, the article finds that Christian ethics is a valid ethical system with a sound theological basis. Finally, an evaluation of Christian ethics in terms of six specific criteria clearly reveals that Christian ethics is an adequate ethical system, which is far superior to the contemporary ethical systems of modern culture.

1. Introduction

Ethics involves standards of behaviour that dictate how one should conduct oneself in a given situation. The word *ethics* is derived from the Greek term *ethos* (ἔθος), which has reference to custom, usage, manner of life, or pattern of conduct (Verbrugge 2000:372). Although ethics resides within the discipline of systematic theology, Grudem (1994:26) correctly distinguishes between the two, in that theology is concerned primarily with how persons should think, while ethics is concerned with how persons should live. In general terms, ethical inquiry is a journey into one's moral nature for the purpose of discovering areas of personal responsibility and how to fulfil them. The aim of this article is to analyse the theological basis of Christian ethics and to evaluate Christian ethics in terms of criteria for an adequate ethical system.

2. The moral crisis facing modern culture

Modern culture, American culture in particular, is experiencing a moral crisis of dramatic proportion. Gallup and Jones (2000:32-34) note the following evidences of the current moral crisis facing American culture:

- (1) Unsettling violence
- (2) Corruption in leadership
- (3) Lifestyle gaps
- (4) Alcohol and drug use and abuse
- (5) Poverty
- (6) Racism
- (7) Family breakdown
- (8) Consumerism and materialism

The moral crisis affects not only secular society, but also the Christian Church. Because this is true, a Christian ethic is of paramount importance to effectively engage the present generation.

3. Some contemporary ethical systems and challenging ethical dilemmas confronting Christian ethics today: a critical evaluation

According to Eckman (1999:6-8), the study of ethics is important for the following reasons:

- (1) Western culture has relinquished any absolute framework for thinking about ethical standards.
- (2) The “slippery slope” nature of so many ethical questions.
- (3) Christians need to understand the integrated nature of ethical issues.
- (4) Many Christians know where they stand on certain ethical issues but they do not know how to defend their position.

Numerous ethical systems set forth criteria for the determination of truth, each with its own advocates and adherents. In this section a brief critical evaluation of some contemporary ethical systems and challenging ethical dilemmas confronting Christian Ethics will be presented.

3.1 Cultural relativism

Cultural relativism holds at its core the belief that ethics is defined by culture. Assertions of what is right and wrong and what make them such become the interpretation of the majority within a given culture. Cultures may indeed learn from each other, however, no particular culture is the sole arbiter of truth. Inherent within this ethical system are at least two fundamental variables: 1) because truth is perceived as relative, there are no absolutes, 2) since cultures evolve regarding their moral positions, truth is in a permanent state of transition.

In critically evaluating cultural relativism Whitworth (1995) makes the following important observations regarding the problems presented by this ethical system:

- (1) It is not enough to say that morals originated in the world and are constantly evolving. Cultural relativism needs to answer how value originated out of non-value, that is, how did the first value arise?
- (2) Cultural relativism seems to hold as a cardinal value that values change. But, if the value that values change is itself unchanging, this theory claims as an unchanging value that all values change and progress. Thus, the position contradicts itself.
- (3) If there are no absolute values that exist trans-culturally or externally to the group, how are different cultures to get along when values collide? How are they to handle such conflicts?
- (4) Where does the group, tribe, or culture get its authority? Why can't individuals assume that authority?
- (5) Most of our heroes and heroines have been those who courageously went against culture and justified their actions by

appealing to a higher standard. According to cultural relativism, such people are always morally wrong.

- (6) Cultural relativism assumes human physical evolution as well as social evolution.

3.2 Situational ethics

Situational ethics is found in two primary streams, atheistic and religious. According to Fletcher (1997:30), the basic premise within this system is that love is the one norm or principle that is always binding and right. In each and every situation requiring an ethical decision, all other principles and norms become subservient to the criterion of love. Eckman (1999:11) observes that situational ethics omits the idea of absolute moral principles, because they place themselves over people. Rather, any action that produces the greatest good for the greatest number is the loving thing to do. It is solely a utilitarian perception of love.

Situational ethics has become the ethics of choice for many within contemporary culture, however, it is also problematic. Jackson (1999) indicates the following logical difficulties within this system:

- (1) It is self-contradictory. This view contends that there are no rules except the rule to love. But what if, in a certain situation, one decides that love is not the appropriate course of action? There are no absolutes—except that one absolutely must love in all situations! But what is the standard by which this mandate is defended?
- (2) In situational ethics love is purely subjective. In Joseph Fletcher's book, *Situation ethics*, love is defined in no less than twelve ways. Who, then, decides what love is in any given context?
- (3) Situation ethics removes God from the throne, as the moral sovereign of the universe, and substitutes man in His place. Situationism completely ignores the biblical view that mere mortals

are void of sufficient wisdom to guide their earthly activity (Jeremiah 10:23).

- (4) Love is defined as some sort of ambiguous, no-rule essence that is a cure-all for moral problems. This line of argumentation is not substantially different from nihilism, since, as Fletcher (1997:55) writes, for the situational ethicist there are no rules—none at all.

3.3 Post-modernism

In terms of ethics post-modernism is uniquely challenging. Post-modernism defines truth in subjective terms. Tolerance is expected of all because all belief systems are perceived as equally valid. Barna (1998:59) notes the following essential characteristics (and shortcomings) of this ethical system:

- (1) There is no grand purpose in life. The reason for living is to achieve comfortable survival.
- (2) Success is defined as the absence of pain and sacrifice, and the experience of happiness.
- (3) There is no value to focusing on or preparing for the future. Every person must live in the moment and for the moment.
- (4) There are no absolutes. All spiritual and moral principles are relative to the situation and the individual.
- (5) There is no omnipotent, all-knowing deity that guides reality. Each person must lean on his/her own vision, competencies, power and perceptions to make the most of life.

Post-modernism poses two difficulties in particular. First, if all belief systems are equally valid, who determines truth when one or more systems collide? Second, if truth is subjective, what criteria determine moral and ethical norms?

3.4 Challenging ethical dilemmas: scientific, medical and technological advances

Scientific, technological and medical advances have created numerous benefits for contemporary society. However, they have also generated new and challenging ethical dilemmas. Grenz (1997:17) confirms this position:

We are confronted by the greatest issues humankind has ever faced at a time when the moral fiber of our society appears to be at its weakest. Ethical questions are assaulting us at breakneck speed at a time when people have lost their sense of mooring, their sense of stability and their sense of possessing some platform on which to stand as they make moral decisions.

Genetic engineering, gene therapy, stem cell research, foetal tissue research, cloning and genetic testing are but a few modern advances the ethicist must address.

One example is in the area of genetic engineering where a cell's genetic structure is altered, with the promise of increased medical benefits. While the pursuit of medical advances is a noble objective, even here the following ethical questions need to be answered (*Ethics and morality* 2008):

- (1) If society has no firm, God-given ethical system, isn't it dangerous to play God?
- (2) In genetic engineering experimentation human embryos are sacrificed. How can this be morally right?

Christian ethics is undeniably confronted today by the challenge various ethical systems and ethical dilemmas. However, these challenges only serve to accentuate the validity and necessity of Christian ethics.

4. Some problematic areas in Christian ethics: a critical evaluation

As an ethical system, Christian ethics is not without its own concerns and criticisms. The following sampling will serve to highlight a few problematic areas in Christian ethics.

4.1 The problem of conflicts

Conflicts are inevitable within any ethical system. Christian ethics is not exempt. For example, if one's family is taken hostage, with the only option for their release being the destruction of the captors, does one violate the prohibition of murder (Exodus 20:13, NIV) to save one's family? Or, does one violate the mandate to provide for and protect one's family (I Timothy 5:8, NIV) by allowing the captors to kill them? Christian ethicists have suggested the following explanations in addressing such conflicts (*Christian view of ethics* 2008):

- (1) God never puts us into a situation where we have to choose between commands. The conflict is only apparent and there is always a way to avoid sin. For example, Daniel and his three friends appear to be in a dilemma when they are commanded to eat meat sacrificed to idols, a violation of their dietary code. Daniel presents his captors with a creative alternative, which allows him and his friends to honour their dietary code and meet the demands of the state at the same time.
- (2) A second approach is the lesser-of-two evils view. There are genuine moral dilemmas which one is faced with in life where both alternatives are clearly wrong. In this situation, the lesser of the two evils is chosen, then, the sin is confessed.
- (3) A third option is called the "greater good" view. Those who hold this view claim it seems to be the model of Christ Himself. He spoke of *greater sin* (John 19:11), *greater love* (John 15:13), *greatest commandment* (Matthew 5:19), and *weightier matters* of the law

(Matthew 23:23, NIV). It is one's duty to obey government, but not when in conflict with a command of God.

4.2 The problem of evil

The existence of evil in the world, while simultaneously asserting the goodness of God, has deterred many sincere seekers from embracing the Christian faith. If God is omnipotent, then, why is there so much rampant evil in the world?

If God is wholly good and wholly powerful, how does one account for the existence of evil? If He is all-powerful, why does He not eliminate evil? If He is all good and the Creator of all that is, how did evil ever originate? ... Up to this point, there is no single answer that has silenced all of Christianity's critics (*Christian view of ethics* 2008).

Resolving the concepts of good and evil has often been a daunting task for Christian ethicists and theologians. One approach in addressing this problem is to look to the Bible. The following three passages facilitate an understanding of the problem of evil.

- (1) Genesis 50:20: You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives (NIV). Here, God appears to allow evil to participate in His plan of redemption.
- (2) John 9:3: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life (NIV)." Here, evil is allowed to ultimately reveal the glory of God.
- (3) Romans 9:17: For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth" (NIV). Here, sin is permitted, yet God's sovereignty is intact.

4.3 The problem of interpretation

A third area that is problematic to Christian ethics is the area of interpretation. In seeking to interpret the Bible's ethical instructions and make them applicable to a particular setting, culture or situation, what role does human subjectivity play in the process? Hoose (2003:4) argues that while there is no such thing as interpretation without presupposition, one must not allow one's exegesis to colour the interpretation of the Biblical text.

Interpretation also involves applying general ethical principles to specific life situations. For example, while the Bible does not specifically prohibit the recreational use of mind-altering drugs, it does indeed mandate the renewing of the mind through the offering of one's body as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:2, NIV). Consequently, one could argue that recreational drug use violates this mandate and should not be engaged in. A similar problem is found in the various ethical instructions that are best culturally interpreted. Paul's directive to greet one another with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16, NIV) could be applied in some cultures as greeting one another verbally or with a handshake.

While some areas of Christian ethics are indeed problematic, satisfactory resolutions to such concerns are available. Christian ethics sets forth a system of ethical principles and moral teachings that are unsurpassed in human history (*Christian view of ethics* 2008).

5. The theological basis of Christian ethics

The theological basis of Christian ethics originates within the biblical text. To validate this statement, biblical support for each of the following six topics relating to Christian ethics will be provided: 1) its nature, 2) its basis, 3) its source, 4) its subjects, 5) its goal, and 6) its motive.

5.1 The nature of Christian ethics: An ethical system of traditional absolutes

At its core, unlike other ethical systems, Christian ethics is a system of absolutes. Absolute truth is universal and objective. It remains the same for every person in every culture in every generation. Christian ethics presupposes the existence of the one true God who has spoken to humankind via specific authoritative and eternal absolute truths. Christian ethics maintains the following absolutes (*Ethics and morality* 2008):

- (1) The statement of Jesus, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me* (John 14:6, NIV). Jesus' declaration sets forth Christianity as the single and sole path to God.
- (2) An authority higher than humankind is revealed in Jesus. The authority of God's word as revealed in the Bible is paramount to all human reason, logic and philosophy.
- (3) The absolute moral standard of the Creator God is a non-negotiable standard, eternally established in the immutable nature of God.
- (4) The belief that God's moral standard is timeless and exists for the well being of humankind.

By its very nature Christian ethics requires the presence of absolutes. Anything less would invalidate the transcendent moral principles lifted up by this ethical system.

5.2 The basis of Christian ethics: God's moral revelation (The Bible)

God's standard of morality is revealed in his Word. This is the origin of Christian ethics. Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false (Psalm 24:3-4, NIV). Within this ethical system the criterion for moral decisions and conduct is the will of God as revealed in the

Bible. Inherent in God's revealed will are the following basic ideas (Whitworth 1995):

- (1) God's moral revelation is based on His nature. God is separate from everything that exists, is free of all imperfections and limitations, and is His own standard. No moral rule exists outside of Him.
- (2) God's moral principles have historical continuity. If God's moral revelation is rooted in His nature, it is clear that those moral principles will transcend time.
- (3) God's moral revelation has intrinsic value. God's standards, like the laws of nature, have built-in consequences. Just as we have to deal with the laws of nature, we will eventually have to deal with the consequences of violating God's standards unless we put our faith in Christ.
- (4) Obedience to God's Law is not legalism. The Bible speaks strongly against legalism since biblical morality is much more than external obedience to a moral code. No one can live up to God's standards without the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.
- (5) God's moral revelation was given for the benefit of his people. Though in the short run it may sometimes appear that biblical moral standards are too restrictive, we can be sure that such injunctions are for our benefit because of His love for us.
- (6) Exceptions to God's revelation must have biblical sanction. Our responsibility is to obey; God's responsibility is to take care of the consequences.

5.3 The source of Christian ethics: The nature of God

Christian ethics finds its origin in the person and nature of God. Ethical ideas such as *good*, *bad*, *right* and *wrong* are essentially connected to the Christian view of God. The source of good choices and behaviour is found in the one whose very nature is the essence of good. When the Scriptures seek to differentiate between good and bad, the reader is directed to the nature of God.

Ferguson and Wright (1988:232) argue that discovering what is right in a given situation requires the discernment of God's will. The fundamental mandate of Scripture is to imitate God. This position is supported in the following Old and New Testament passages:

- (1) I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy ... I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy (Leviticus 11:44-45, NIV).
- (2) Do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy" (I Peter 1:14-16, NIV).

Understanding the source of Christian ethics is now possible to man because God has revealed His divine nature in the Scriptures, in particular, His attribute of holiness.

5.4 The subject of Christian ethics: The nature of humankind

Although God is intrinsically holy, the subject of Christian ethics involves that which is not—humankind. Crook (1999:88) asserts that an understanding of the nature of humankind can be summed up in the following four affirmations:

- (1) Humankind is one part of the natural order of creation.
- (2) Humankind is unique in creation.
- (3) Human beings are social creations.
- (4) Human beings are sinners. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23, NIV).

Each of the following four affirmations is important for a better understanding of the need for a Christian ethic (Whitworth 1995):

- (1) Human beings are not divine. As created beings there is a need for an ethical system that transcends that which is created.
- (2) Human beings are made in the image of God and comprise the pinnacle of the creative process. As such, human beings possess at least four qualities that distinguish them from the animals: 1) personality, 2) the ability to reason, 3) a moral nature, and 4) a spiritual nature.
- (3) As social creations human beings live in community. This requires a standard of conduct for promoting civil interaction within the community.
- (4) As sinners with a moral nature, human beings need an ethical system capable of transforming the sinful moral nature into that which is holy.

5.5 The goal of Christian ethics: The glory of God

The ultimate objective of human existence is to bring glory to God (*Westminster Shorter Catechism* 2008). Scripture reveals that all persons are to *fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man* (Ecclesiastes 12:13, NIV). In addition, the Bible declares that *all the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name* (Psalm 86:9, NIV).

Jesus instructs his followers to,

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16, NASB).

Lifestyle choices and behavioural patterns derived from a Christian ethic produce good works, that is, visible displays of the power of the Holy Spirit in man. When

observed by others these good works become a testimony to the enabling power of God. Ultimately, God is given glory.

Paul further validates the goal of Christian ethics by asserting, *whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God* (I Corinthians 10:31, NIV). By appropriating a Christian ethic as the basis for one's lifestyle and behaviour, the primary objective is to bring glory to God.

5.6 The motive of Christian ethics: Love for God and humankind

The motivation to apply a Christian ethic is found primarily in one's love for God, but also in one's love for one's fellow human beings. According to Crook (1999:97), central to the Christian life is a relationship with God and other people. The two are so intrinsically connected that they cannot legitimately be separated. Validation for this motivational motif is found in the following passage:

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen (I John 4:20, NIV).

In this verse the motivation for Christian ethics is clearly identified, that is, the vital relationship between love for God and love for others.

In order to present a theological basis for Christian ethics this section has attempted to examine this ethical system from six perspectives. It is evident from this brief treatment that Christian ethics contains a substantive biblical and theological foundation.

6. An evaluation of Christian ethics in terms of six criteria of an adequate ethical system

An adequate ethical system is a system that effectively addresses and engages the needs of a given context. Before discussing an adequate ethical system, it is first necessary to understand that there are several things that ethics is not (*A framework for thinking ethically* 2008):

- (1) Ethics is not the same as feelings.
- (2) Ethics is not following the law.
- (3) Ethics is not religion.
- (4) Ethics is not following culturally accepted norms.
- (5) Ethics is not science.

Both Christians and non-Christians accept the following criteria as being essential to an adequate ethical system (*Christian view of ethics* 2008): 1) a standard, 2) justice, 3) a motive-dynamic, 4) guidance or a model, 5) a relationship between rules and results, and 6) harmony. A brief evaluation of Christian ethics in terms of the above criteria will now be presented.

6.1 The need for a standard

Inherent within an adequate ethical system is the necessity for a standard. A standard is a criterion for ascertaining what qualifies an action or behaviour as being right or wrong; it is a universal principle that transcends time and culture. A standard allows certain behaviours and actions to be determined as right or wrong, subsequently allowing the ethicist to make application in a given culture, context or scenario. Without a standard ethics cannot adequately exist or operate.

Christian ethics qualifies as an adequate ethical system in terms of the need for a standard. Rousseau (2004:84) makes the following observation:

To discover the rules of society that are best suited to nations there would need to exist a superior intelligence, who could understand the passions of men without feeling any of them, who had no affinity with our nature, but know it to the full, whose happiness was independent of ours, but who would nevertheless make our happiness his concern, who would be content to wait in the fullness of time for a distant glory, and to labour in one age to enjoy the fruits in another.

Indeed, this superior intelligence can be understood in terms of an omniscient God. Within Christian ethics the very nature of God is the standard by which all moral conduct and behavioural norms are defined. The essence of all that is good resides in the character of God. Jesus validates this truth by declaring, *No one is good—except God alone* (Mark 10:18, NIV). Emanating from the goodness of God is the standard for Christian ethics.

Because this standard is based upon God's holy nature, it is binding on all people. There is no standard beyond Him that can define moral conduct. Christian ethics applies to everyone and is not merely a parochial discipline for Jews and Christians. God's moral revelation extends to all generations. God is the ultimate standard for human behaviour (*Christian view of ethics* 2008).

6.2 The need for justice

The second criterion and a major test of an adequate ethical system is the capacity to provide justice. Ethical justice can be understood from at least three perspectives (Henry 1981:360-362, adapted):

- (1) *Restorative justice* focuses on the restoration of violated rights.
- (2) *Remedial justice* focuses on the present correction of past injustices.
- (3) *Retributive justice* focuses on future and final accountability.

In each of these three perspectives the challenge is to provide justice on a consistent and comparable basis. Although many ethical systems fall short in this area, Christian ethics correctly applied provides adequate justice with equality. In terms of the three perspectives cited above, Christian ethics offers a substantive response (*Christian view of ethics* 2008):

- (1) Regarding *restorative justice*, Christian ethics sets forth a principle that affirms the equality and dignity of all human beings. Paul asserts that for those in Christ and operating under a Christian ethic, *there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:26-28, NIV).
- (2) Regarding *remedial justice*, Christian ethics assumes that past injustices must be amended in the present and that past unjust behavioural patterns must change. Scripture validates this by asserting that *he who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands* (Ephesians 4:28, NIV).
- (3) Regarding *retributive justice*, Scripture declares that at the future judgment, God will judge *every man according to their works* (Revelation 20:12, NIV). Christian ethics offers the assurance that all the failures of human justice will one day be totally rectified, and true justice will be meted out accordingly.

6.3 The need for a motive

A third criterion for an adequate ethical system is motive. According to Henry (1981:521), a motive is defined as the source or reason behind a specific action(s). Becker and Becker (2001:1185) observe that,

Motives play a central role in ethics because they often carry the burden of ... assessment. A [person] will be judged to have acted well or to be morally good as [he/she] acts from right motives ... A

[person] will be judged to have moral worth if [his/her] motive in acting is to conform [his/her] actions to the relevant principles of right or standard of goodness.

For this reason more is needed than mere knowledge of correct moral behaviour(s); there must also be the desire to act morally.

Christian ethics provides an adequate motive to act morally. Although human beings are sinful by nature, after conversion the Holy Spirit enables the Christian to pursue moral behaviour. Paul affirms this when he writes, *for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose* (Philippians 2:13, NIV). The Holy Spirit motivates the believer in several areas:

- (1) The new believer, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is motivated by his or her love for God. This is what makes the believer want to obey God.
- (2) The Holy Spirit's confirmation of God's love for the believer motivates him to focus on the needs of others.
- (3) The believer is also motivated by external factors, such as the promise of eternal rewards (*Christian view of ethics* 2008, adapted).

6.4 The need for guidance (a model)

A fourth criterion for an adequate ethical system is guidance. How does one apply a particular ethical principle to a specific life situation? What process is needed to sort through myriad ethical principles and apply them accordingly? Herein lies the need for guidance to appropriate individual ethical principles. Inherent within Christian ethics are several sources of guidance for successful application of ethical principles.

Henry (1981:278) suggests that guidance is explicit in the ministry of Jesus. To follow Christ implies that He leads and guides as one follows. The following two examples, in particular, validate this aspect of Jesus' ministry:

- (1) Jesus beckons, *if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me* (Matthew 16:24, NIV).
- (2) Jesus states, *my sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me* (John 10:27, NIV).

Furthermore, guidance is a ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, *when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth* (John 16:13, NIV). The believer also receives guidance from the Scriptures, therefore, success in the ethical life requires a familiarity with the Word of God (*Christian view of ethics* 2008).

6.5 A relationship between rules and results

Some ethical systems focus on rules (deontological ethics), while some focus primarily on results (teleological ethics). A fifth criterion for an adequate ethical system is a balanced relationship between rules and results. According to Henry (1981:575), to arrive at a course of moral action, one would typically inquire as to the rules governing the type of action under consideration. The goal of this approach is to determine *what is right*. The goal of result-oriented ethics is the effect. Within this approach good is determined primarily on the basis of the outcome.

Christian ethics sets forth a balance between rules and results. Scripture cautions against extreme positions in both areas. For example, Jesus denounced the extreme rule oriented approach of the Pharisees, yet he also taught that the end result of an action is insufficient in and of itself. One must have pure motives in the process of decision-making. Positive results do not guarantee the goodness of an action, however, in Christian ethics, it is reasonable for the Christian to assume that by following God-given rules, that the end result will be good (*Christian view of ethics* 2008).

6.6 Internal harmony

The sixth and final criterion for an adequate ethical system is internal harmony. Since it is inevitable that conflicts will intermittently arise, the various components of an adequate ethical system should function collectively with minimal internal conflict. Some ethical systems begin to implode when experiencing several opposing absolutes. Fletcher (1991:17-22) argues that Christian ethics possesses this type of flaw, because whenever there is more than one absolute, there will be hopeless conflict between absolutes. Scripture, however, indicates otherwise. In an attempt to lure Jesus into using conflicting absolutes, the religious intellectuals of his time posed the following question:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:36-40, NIV).

Jesus responds by using two principles as though they were one. What appears initially to be a conflicting situation is resolved by applying a Christian ethical principle. Christian ethics teaches that all moral absolutes originate in the nature of God. Since the nature of God also includes the attribute of omniscience, the God who knows all things relating to Christian ethics, produces a harmony that will resolve potential conflicts within the system (*Christian view of ethics* 2008).

This section has attempted to evaluate Christian ethics in terms of six specific criteria. From the evaluation it is evident that Christian ethics is an adequate ethical system and far superior to contemporary ethical systems.

7. Conclusion

This article has drawn attention to the moral crisis facing modern culture, hence the need for an adequate ethical system. Several contemporary ethical systems were evaluated and found to be lacking in many important areas. In spite of the challenge of contemporary ethical systems and ethical dilemmas confronting Christian ethics today, and some problematic areas in Christian ethics, the article found that Christian ethics is a valid ethical system with a sound theological basis. Finally, an evaluation of Christian ethics in terms of six specific criteria clearly revealed that Christian ethics is an adequate ethical system, which is far superior to the contemporary ethical systems of modern culture.

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