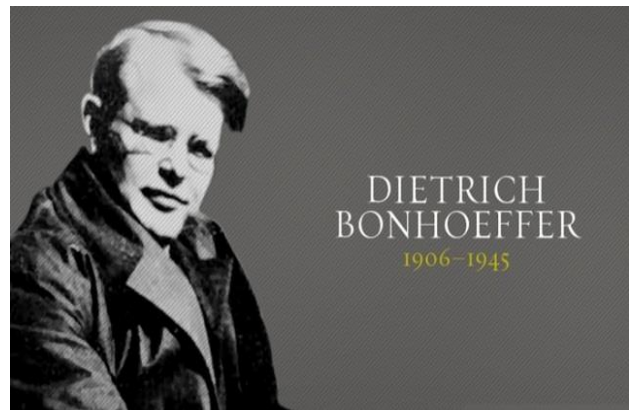
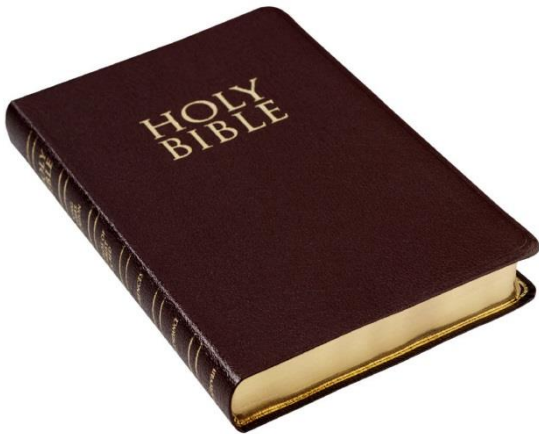


Developments of Christian Thought

3: Living

Christian Moral Principles & Christian Moral Action



Name:

Teacher:

Section 1: Learning Intentions

A01 Key Knowledge:

The diversity of Christian moral reasoning and practices and sources of ethics, including:

- The Bible as the only authority for Christian ethical practices. As the Bible reveals God's will, then only biblical ethical commands must be followed
- Bible, Church and reason as the sources of Christian ethical practices. Christian ethics must be a combination of biblical teaching, Church teaching and human reason
- Love (*agape*) as the only Christian ethical principle which governs Christian practices. Jesus' only command was to love and that human reason must decide how best to apply this

A02 Key Skills:

Learners should have the opportunity to discuss issues related to diversity of Christian moral principles, including:

- whether or not Christian ethics are distinctive
- whether or not Christian ethics are personal or communal
- whether or not the principle of love is sufficient to live a good life
- whether or not the Bible is a comprehensive moral guide

Glossary of Key Concepts / Technical Terms

| | |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bible | The Christian scriptures consisting of the Old and New Testament |
| Church | The building in which Christians worship. However, the Church also represents the Christian community throughout the world. |
| Reason | The human being's capacity to reach conclusions and make judgments based on logic, knowledge and morality. |
| Agape | Agape is selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love. |
| Sola Scriptura | A Christian theological doctrine which holds that the Christian Scriptures (Bible) are the sole infallible rule of faith and practice. |
| Natural Law | A body of unchanging moral principles regarded as a basis for all human conduct. |
| Magisterium | The official and authoritative teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. |
| Papal Encyclical | A kind of letter concerning Catholic doctrine, sent by the Pope on behalf of the magisterium |
| Ethics | Moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity. |
| Morality | Principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behaviour. |
| Principles | A fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behaviour or for a chain of reasoning. |

Christian Moral Principles

Introduction

An important aspect of the Christian life *is how we ought to live*. Many people would argue that the Christian faith gives us a special set of values, and provides us with a guide about how we should conduct ourselves individually and as a society. In other words, it provides us with some moral principles.

There are three ways in which Christians have understood where Christianity gets its values and codes of behaviour:

1) The Bible:

Some Christians believe it is to the Bible only that we should look for our instructions about how to live. The Bible is the sole authority for how we should live our lives – nothing else. This way believes in *sola scriptura* (only scripture). Many Protestant traditions tend to follow this understanding.

2) The Bible, Church and Reason:

Other Christians say that we do not just have the Bible – the Bible is accompanied by two other sources of authority. For these Christians we can look towards the guidance of the Church, and our reason is reliable enough to help us understand some of morality. In this view, we have Bible, Church and reason complementing each other to give us a code to live by and set of values. This is the understanding of the Catholic Church, and some elements of the Anglican tradition.

3) Love (agape):

Others claim that there is only one guide – love. We should in every situation try to do the most loving thing. There are no absolute rules and commands like the Ten Commandments. The only real command is to love. In other words, the most important thing is always act out of love for others. This understanding is associated with some modern liberal Protestants, especially Joseph Fletcher.

Task:

Create a tree map to outline the three main sources of authority that different Christians use

1) Sola Scriptura – The Bible Alone

The Bible has provided a rich source of moral commands and principles, the most famous are the Ten Commandments. These commands give a code for living in society. You should not, for example **'bear false witness against your neighbour'** and you should **'honour your father and mother'**. You should not kill or steal. These commands or sayings provide a basis for the smooth running of society.

It must be remembered that these commands cannot be understood unless we know about some of the background beliefs of the Jewish people of the time. The commands take place against the background of a tribe of people who believe that they have a *covenant* with God. They are in a special relationship with God and this implies that they have special obligations and duties. Some of the commands are to do with this relationship. The first command of the Ten Commandments says, **'You shall have no other Gods before me.'** The believer must ensure that in all things God is primary.

This emphasis on your first duty being to God is expressed in the Jewish *Shema* prayer which is the central prayer of the Jewish faith. It contains the command to love God and ensure that He has a central role in a person's life. It is found in the book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament:

"...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

What we have said so far is something almost all believers would agree on, so we need to examine the more controversial claim that it is the Bible only that should be the source of our moral principles. Often behind the *sola scriptura* claim are two principal ideas:

| A pessimistic view of human reason | A Biblicist view of scripture |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Due to the fall, humans have to rely totally on God's Word. They cannot rely on reason because it has been ruined by sin. | The Bible is seen as having been dictated by God. It therefore contains God's own direct speech and it alone must be used for moral instruction. Because it has been directly dictated by God, the Bible is seen as infallible. It cannot be in error. |

Here we have a combination of a high view of Scripture and low view of human powers of reason – they combine to form the belief that it is only the Bible that is trustworthy.

In a nutshell we have

- A low view of human powers of reason. We cannot trust our own powers to give us the truth in moral matters.
- A high view of the Bible – it is the Word of God, and the only reliable source of moral principles.



2) Bible, Tradition and Reason.

According to Catholic teaching, the Bible is central, but it is not alone. We can rely on other sources as well as the Bible. The Catholic theologian will point out an obvious difficulty with the *sola scriptura* understanding. That is the Bible is a difficult book and needs interpretation. For example, in the Ten Commandments we are told not to kill, but in other parts of the Bible the people of Israel are told to slaughter whole cities. What should a Christian do? Is all violence forbidden (pacifism) or is violence sometimes justified?

Again, in the Old Testament, there is a rule forbidding eating a goat which has been cooked in milk, but hardly any Christian thinks that that law applies anymore since in the New Testament St Peter has a vision which allows non-kosher animals to be eaten. This seems to imply that moral principles can change and adapt to suit the times – this is a long way from the Biblicist insistence that all the moral laws are easily read from the Bible and simply cannot change.

The Catholic theologian believes that the Bible must be interpreted. We cannot simply sit down on our own and read off straightforward rules about how to live since, as we have seen, the Bible is complicated, and some parts of the Bible revise the understanding of previous parts. So how can the Bible be interpreted? The Catholic Church says the answer is through a combination of prayerful reasoning and the teachings of the Church which is passed through the generations (tradition).

In a nutshell we have:

- The Catholic understanding is not Biblicist or *sola scriptura*. The Bible is a difficult book and needs to be interpreted.
- Church teaching (tradition) complements the Bible and gives us more understanding about how to live.

Task: Answer the following question:

1. Explain (using examples) why Catholic theologians think that the Bible requires interpretation.

Success Criteria:

- Refer to at least two examples
- Using the term *sola scriptura*, reason and tradition

Natural Law

One of the central ideas in Church moral teaching is that humans are *not* totally depraved. The idea of 'total depravity' is common to some forms of Protestant Christianity (especially Calvinism). In the Catholic Church's understanding however, all people – Christian or not – still have a moral sense of right and wrong. In other words, human reason can still reason correctly about what is right and wrong even if the Bible is not known and even if that person does not know the teachings of the Church. One of the Biblical passages which form the basis of this teaching is Romans 2:15:

“[God] will punish the unbeliever when they sin, even though they never had God’s written laws, for down in their hearts they know right from wrong. God’s laws are written within them; their own conscience accuses them...”

Thomas Aquinas is one of the most influential proponents of Natural Law. He teaches that some moral principles which he calls the Primary Precepts are understood to be true by all people regardless of their religious beliefs. He says that everyone of sound mind will agree for example that these Primary Precepts are true:

| | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| W | = Worship God |
| O | = Orderly Society |
| R | = Reproduce to continue species |
| L | = Learn through education |
| D | = Defend innocent life |

Everyone can know that these are true moral principles since our deep sense of right and wrong has not been totally lost. Our reason is still trustworthy in the basic rules of how to live.

Task: Answer the following questions:

1. What does the Catholic Church mean when it says that humans are 'not totally depraved'?
2. What is human reason and how do we use it?
3. Write out the quote from St Paul's letter to the Romans and explain what the quote is teaching.
4. Define the term primary precepts. What are secondary precepts?

The Official Teaching of the Church – the Magisterium

Aquinas thinks that reason is good enough for us to work out the basics. However, it is not enough for us to know all the moral rules. We need the Bible (revelation) and the teaching of the Church. Unless we have these we will make mistakes. The Church has to complete the natural moral law with its teachings and its interpretation of scripture.

When the Church feels ready to make an idea or moral teaching official it will write a **Papal Encyclical** which will express the official views of the Church. Since the Church believes that the Holy Spirit continues to guide and help the Church, this teaching has authority over all members of the Church.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* expresses the view like this:

“To the Church belongs the right always and everywhere to announce moral principles”

The Catholic Church would say that we need the teachings of the Church in order to live properly. For example, it is not part of a person's natural moral law that we should meet once a week and keep a particular day special and holy for God. The Church thinks that we need God's revelation in the Bible for that (it is one of the Ten Commandments to 'keep the Sabbath day holy').

In a nutshell we have

- The Church believes that a basic sense of right and wrong is part of every person. There is a natural law.
- To this must be added to revelation (scripture) and the teaching of the Church (Magisterium and tradition) for us to properly understand how we should live.

3) Love is the Only Guide to Ethical Behaviour

This view is very sceptical of both the approaches we have examined. It is suspicious of any approach which tries to find specific, absolute commands about how we should live. This view thinks that there are few, if any, specific moral rules. Instead of obeying the Bible, the Church or reason, we should try to do the most loving thing in the varying situations we find ourselves in.

Many of the proponents of this view think that Jesus taught a similar love centred ethical philosophy. Jesus commands us all to love, rather than giving a complex set of commands:

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15: 12-13)

We must use our reason to try to find out what the most loving thing to do is, and this might change from situation to situation, and so the version of this theory put forward by Joseph Fletcher is called Situation Ethics.

Joseph Fletcher: Agape

Fletcher believes that all human beings can agree on what is the most loving thing to do or in his words *‘love is the only universal’*. He means that love is a common theme that everyone, no matter what their background or nationality can understand when they are making moral decisions. If we act lovingly then our actions are morally right.

Joseph Fletcher saw his approach to ethics as grounded firmly in the Christian Gospel. He believes love is an active principle – it is a doing thing rather than a noun or a thing in itself. He argued that Jesus himself taught his message of love not only through his teachings to his disciples but also in the actions throughout his life. For example, when Jesus broke Sabbath laws by healing the man with the shrivelled hand or when he allowed his disciples to pick corn on the Sabbath he did so out of love. He was willing to break the law because he acted upon the principle of situation ethics – a decision based on what is the most loving thing to do.

Agape is the word used in the New Testament for pure, unconditional Christian love. It is love which is disinterested and seeks only the benefit of the one who is loved. Agape is often best understood as the love shown between a mother and her child. This is the willingness to put the needs of the child first due to her unconditional love for them.

Fletcher says that Christian love is ‘goodwill at work in partnership with reason.’ He makes it clear that agape is not like a desire we may have for another person but it is a giving love. It is different from ‘liking’ because **‘love wills the neighbours good’** and this is irrelevant of whether we like our neighbour or not.

The essence of agape love is self-sacrifice. Agape love is unique and is distinguished by its nature and character. Agape is love which is of and from God, whose very nature is love itself. In simpler terms Christians can gain an understanding of agape through the death of Jesus. The death of Jesus was a sacrifice – he willingly gave up his own life as a loving action for the rest of humanity.

Task: Answer the following questions

1. **What does Fletcher mean by the phrase ‘love is the only universal’?**
2. **Explain how Jesus taught his message of love – use examples**
3. **What does the term agape mean? How is agape best understood?**
4. **Why is agape different to desire or liking?**
5. **What is the essence of agape love? How can Christians understand agape?**

Task:

Create an extended mind map outlining the different ways in which Christians make moral and ethical decisions.

Success Criteria:

- **Refer to sola scriptura, Church, tradition and Love**
- **Include scholars and evidence to outline the different views**

Are Christian Ethics distinctive?

This question means are Christian Ethics only available to Christians using Christian sources or are the principles available to all people regardless of religion, culture or background:

| Yes | No |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Certainly the Biblicist view and the Catholic view would say that Christian ethics is distinctive. Both views think that we need revelation to find out what we ought to do. We cannot just use our natural human powers to find out what is ethically right. Instead we need to use the Bible and the Church as our guide to work out the best and most appropriate way of living.</p> | <p>St Thomas Aquinas argued that humans do tend to agree that there is some form of natural law. Things that we would all consider to be good, bad, right and wrong. There seems to be a universal recognition of morality. Every sane and rational person would recognise and agree that certain things are good and others bad. In this sense Christian Ethics are not distinctive but available to all people.</p> |
| <p>The Biblicist view is likely to say that human reason is <i>totally unable</i> to come up with the right rules of ethical behaviour. According to St Augustine, human reason is depraved and corrupt and so only the Bible can help us find out what we ought to do. The Biblicist is likely to say that people's belief in any of the Ten Commandments is due to the continuing subtle influence of the Bible. Without it, we could have decided that cannibalism is good and that selfishness is a virtue. It is only because of the Bible's subtle influence on culture that we continue to think in religious ways about most moral problems and mistakenly think that this is due to our excellent reasoning powers.</p> | <p>Joseph Fletcher would be less likely to see Christian ethics as distinctive since it does not think that ethics should be about absolute commands and rules. He thinks that all humans should be able to see that love is the central guide to human behaviour. For example, Fletcher may argue that the Christian duty to have a special day is not a moral command at all; rather it is only a matter of religious culture or tradition rather than being a distinctive bit of morality. It is better to base decisions on what is the most loving thing to do and this is available to all people as '<i>love is the only universal</i>'.</p> |
| <p>The Catholic Church would appeal to the 'faith ethic' view – it says that Christian ethics teaches us <i>distinct</i> ways of living that could not be discovered by unaided human reason. The world outside the Church does not have the same resources and so comes to different conclusions about issues such as abortion and euthanasia. The faith ethic view does not think that the aim of Christian ethics is to agree with what the world thinks, but to <i>challenge</i> it with a different set of values and ways of behaving.</p> | <p>St Thomas Aquinas states that there are four forms of law: Eternal Law – laws known to God, Divine law – laws of the Bible, Natural Law – laws found through reason and Human Law – the laws of our nation. It is the human law which seems to show that Christian Ethics are not distinctive. Societies have established human laws based on what they consider to be right and wrong. The fact that this has happened offers proof that we have a shared sense of right and wrong irrespective of religion.</p> |
| <p>Aquinas thinks that reason is good enough for us to work out the basics. However, it is not enough for us to know all the moral rules. We need the Bible (revelation) and the teaching of the Church (magisterium). Unless we have these we will make mistakes. The Church has to complete the natural moral law with its teachings and its interpretation of scripture. When the Church feels ready to make an idea or moral teaching official it will write a Papal Encyclical.</p> | <p>Jeremy Bentham would argue that Christian ethics are not distinctive because we can make decisions on right and wrong based on other methods. Bentham uses the principle of utility and suggests that decisions should be made on what produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number. This principle is available to all because, as Bentham states, we are all governed by two masters, pain and pleasure.</p> |

Are Christian ethics personal/individual?

This question means: Are people able to make moral decisions personally or do they require support from the Christian community (Church)?

| Yes | No |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The Biblicist understanding of the Bible has tended to influence theologians and ethicists to take an individualist or personal view of Christian ethics. The picture put forward is something like this: each person, on their own, reads scripture. They are helped by the Holy Spirit. They are commanded by God via scripture to behave in a certain way. They might read the story of the Good Samaritan and think that now they have to help those who live far away. In this understanding, each person has to read scripture and God will speak to them personally, in their situation, and they will receive a word from the Lord, so they know what to do. This is a very common understanding of Christian ethics in some parts of the Protestant church.</p> | <p>The Catholic Church believes that the individual needs support in order to understand the Bible and see how it applies to life. A person must be part of a Church so that the Bible can be seen through the lens of tradition and the wisdom of the community. (And remember that tradition implies a 'passing on' of practices and beliefs from generation to generation, so this means that it is not just the Church today which is part of the Community of Saints, but the Church of past ages as well.) Here the emphasis is upon <i>collective</i> action and collective organisation, rather than the actions of an individual.</p> |
| <p>Joseph Fletcher would argue that Christian ethics are personal. One of his four presumptions is personalism. He argues that the Bible should be read as a guide not a rule book. Individual circumstances are so varied that each individual needs to judge for themselves what God's will is.</p> | <p>Thomas Aquinas argues that Christian Ethics are universal rather than personal or individual. Everyone has an innate awareness of actions that are considered right and actions that are considered wrong. Aquinas argues that there are four forms of law which we can use in order to act in the correct way. They are the divine laws of God, the eternal laws made available through the Bible, the natural laws understood through reason and human laws which are the rules of the state.</p> |

Is the principle of love sufficient to live a good life?

This question means: Is love (agape) the only principle we need to make good moral decisions?

| Yes | No |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>It is flexible in that it gives personal freedom to people to decide what the most loving action is. In this sense it is a very helpful method because you are not constrained by the difficulties of having to rigidly follow the rules of the Bible or the Church. Many of the Church or Biblical teachings do not seem consistent with a modern approach to ethical decision making. The principle of love is far more practical.</p> | <p>The Catholic theologian would argue that the principle of love is not sufficient. It has a role to play as it is based on the teachings of Jesus but we must look to other forms of authority such as the Bible, Church teaching through the magisterium and natural law which according to Thomas Aquinas can be found through human reason.</p> |
| <p>It is based on one simple rule, namely agape (love). Joseph Fletcher argues that this simple rule brings positive outcomes, maintains justice and also puts the needs of others (our neighbour) first. The Biblicist view requires people to abide by the laws of the Bible because they are dictated by God. However, many of these laws have no real application today whereas love, according to Fletcher, is universal and can be applied at all times.</p> | <p>The rule of agape can be highly impractical. Situation ethics may in fact offer justification for not only breaking religious laws such as the 'commandments' but also civil laws. If society begins to adopt this ethical system over and above the laws of the land then the basis of our society would crumble.</p> |
| <p>Joseph Fletcher would argue that Jesus seemed to apply the principle of love when teaching others how to live a good life. He was prepared to set aside some rules in some cases, usually because a person mattered more than the rule. So he was prepared to associate with and touch people traditionally viewed as unclean, the sinners, the sick and the tax collectors. Furthermore, Jesus put the principle of love into practice when he healed the man with the paralysed hand on the Sabbath day and prevented a woman from being stoned to death that had committed adultery.</p> | <p>Many protestant theologians would argue that the Bible is the only source of authority that should be used when making decisions on how to live a good life. This is known as sola scriptura and argues that the Bible is the direct word of God and all commands from the Bible should be absolute. In other words, the Bible commands in the Decalogue how we ought to believe so this is the only form of authority we should use.</p> |
| <p>Situation ethics, by its own definition is a practical and flexible system for making moral decisions. For example, Fletcher's working principles of pragmatism and relativism show that decisions are made situationally and highlights that absolutes such as 'Do not kill' or 'Do not steal' do not always bring about the most loving outcome. The principle of love is sufficient because decisions are then made based on love rather than on rules which are sometimes difficult to apply. For example, in the case of euthanasia, it is illegal in the UK but the action may be the most loving.</p> | <p>The Catholic theologian believes that the principle of love is not sufficient. The Catholic Church points toward other areas of authority which direct people on how to live a good life. For example, it is not part of a person's natural moral law that we should meet once a week and keep a particular day special and holy for God. The Church thinks that we need God's revelation in the Bible for that (it is one of the Ten Commandments to 'keep the Sabbath day holy'). So the Church uses the Bible and informs Christians how they should live their lives.</p> |

Is the Bible a comprehensive moral guide?

This question means: Should Christians only use the Bible as its source of authority?

| Yes | No |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Many Christian theologians would appeal to the doctrine of the fall and original sin when answering this question. They argue that due to the fall, humans have to rely totally on God's Word. They cannot rely on reason because it has been ruined by sin. The actions of Adam and Eve that have infected humanity and drove a wedge between humanity and God mean that the only source we can rely on and trust is the Bible.</p> | <p>Karl Barth warns of a possible error in the Biblicist view of scripture. There is a danger, in Barth's eyes, that a high view of the Bible will result in what he calls Bibliolatry – that is, the worship of the Bible. He warns that the Bible is a <i>witness</i> to the truth, rather than being the truth itself. The Bible talks about God, and it is to Him that we should look for our help and salvation. The Bible cannot save anyone – it can only point towards the real source of salvation which is God. The Bible, then, is vitally important but it must not be confused with God Himself.</p> |
| <p>Many protestant theologians argue that we need to take a theonomous approach to Christian ethics. The Bible is seen as having been dictated by God. It therefore contains God's own direct speech and it alone must be used for moral instruction. Because it has been directly dictated by God, the Bible is seen as infallible. It cannot be in error. Therefore, the Bible is a comprehensive moral guide.</p> | <p>Joseph Fletcher would argue that the sola scriptura approach is too rigid and not appropriate when making moral and ethical decisions. He would argue that Jesus seemed to apply the principle of love when teaching others how to live a good life and was prepared to set aside some rules in some cases, usually because a person mattered more than the rule. Furthermore, Jesus put the principle of love into practice when he healed the man with the paralysed hand on the Sabbath day and prevented a woman from being stoned to death that had committed adultery.</p> |
| <p>The Bible has provided a rich source of moral commands and principles, the most famous are the Ten Commandments. These commands give a code for living in society. You should not, for example 'bear false witness against your neighbour' and you should 'honour your father and mother'. You should not kill or steal. These commands or sayings provide a basis for the smooth running of society and highlight that the Bible can be a comprehensive moral guide.</p> | <p>Catholic theologians would argue that the Bible is central but it is not the one and only comprehensive guide. The Catholic teach suggest that we should use a variety of authorities when making moral decisions. For example, Thomas Aquinas said that natural law is another way in which we can be guided. He argues that the primary precepts are absolute laws that we can all work out by applying our reason. These laws are available irrespective of a person's religious beliefs.</p> |
| <p>The Bible contains the direct teachings of Jesus. If we accept that Jesus is the son of God and divine then any of the actions and teachings of Jesus should be used when making moral decisions. When the Church claimed that Jesus was God's Son (and indeed that He was his <i>only</i> Son), they were developing this idea, and giving him a unique and very high authority. They were thinking of Jesus as having the authority of God. Therefore, as the</p> | <p>Catholic theologians would also argue that the tradition of the Catholic Church should also be used as a form of authority. The official teaching of the Church is known as the magisterium. This is the office of the Church that establishes beliefs and principles. For example, it is not part of a person's natural moral law that we should meet once a week and keep a particular day special and holy for God. The Church thinks that we need God's revelation in the Bible for that (it is one of the Ten Commandments to 'keep the Sabbath day holy').</p> |

Assessment: Assess the view that the Bible is a comprehensive moral guide for Christians (40 marks)

Success Criteria

There are three ways in which Christians have understood where Christianity gets its values and codes of behaviour:

The Bible:

Some Christians believe it is to the Bible only that we should look for our instructions about how to live.

The Bible, Church and Reason:

Other Christians say that we do not just have the Bible – the Bible is accompanied by two other sources of authority – Church and Reason.

Love (agape):

Others claim that there is only one guide – love. We should in every situation try to do the most loving thing.

Arguments suggesting it is a comprehensive moral guide:

- Infallible guide as it is the direct word of God – sola scriptura
- Due to the fall of mankind we cannot rely on reason – we must rely on the Bible
- The Bible is seen as having been dictated by God. It therefore contains God's own direct speech and it alone must be used for moral instruction.
- The Bible contains the direct teachings of Jesus. If we accept that Jesus is the son of God and divine then any of the actions and teachings of Jesus should be used when making moral decisions.
- The Bible has provided a rich source of moral commands and principles, the most famous are the Ten Commandments.

Arguments suggesting it is not a comprehensive moral guide:

- Catholic Church argue that the Bible is the Word of God but it is not the comprehensive guide – we should use our reason and the Church.
- Karl Barth's issue of bibliolatry – we worship the book rather than worship God
- Joseph Fletcher – situation ethics preferred to sola scriptura
- Catholic theologians would also argue that the tradition of the Catholic Church should also be used as a form of authority.

Extended Reading – Complete a close reading of the following Dialogue Articles:

How to do a close reading:

Read with a pencil or highlighter in hand, and annotate the text. "Annotating" means underlining or highlighting key words and phrases—anything that strikes you as surprising or significant, or that raises questions—as well as making notes in the margins.

Do Christians only need the Bible? Catholic News Agency Article

Most Protestant Christians believe that the Bible is the only source concerning faith. According to them, there is no need for Apostolic Tradition or an authoritative, teaching Church. All that they need is the Bible in order to learn about the faith and to live a Christian life. The "Bible Alone" teaching can be appealing in its simplicity, but it suffers from fundamental problems. A few are considered here.

First the Bible itself states that not everything important to the Christian faith is recorded in it. For example, not everything that Christ did is recorded in the inspired Books:

But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. [John 21:25; RSV]

According to John 20:31, some things have been recorded in the Gospel in order to come to know Christ; however, John 21:25 suggests that there is still more to know about Him. At least for St. John the Apostle, there was more that he needed to teach which was not recorded in the Bible:

I had much to write you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face. [3 John 13-14]

Also St. Paul instructs Timothy on how to orally pass on the teachings of the faith:

...what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. [2 Tim. 2:2]

St. Paul even commands (2 Thess. 3:6) the Thessalonian Christians to follow the oral Traditions of the Apostles:

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us (Apostles), either by word of mouth (oral) or by letter (Epistle). [2 Thess. 2:15]

These commands promoting Oral Tradition would be quite strange, if only the Bible were needed to pass on the entire Christian faith.

A second problem with the "Bible Alone" teaching is canonicity - i.e. which Books belong in the Bible? It must be remembered that the Books of the Bible were written individually along with other religious books. Centuries later the Church compiled together the inspired Books under one cover to form the "Bible." A big question in the early Church was which books are the inspired written Word of God. (Inspired=written by men but authored by God; See Catechism of the Catholic Church 106.)

Scripture did not come with an "inspired" Table of Contents. Nowhere in the sacred texts are all the Books listed. There are some Books cited in the sacred writings but these lists are vague and incomplete (Acts 28:23; 2 Peter 3:16). There are also references to books not found in the Bible, such as St. Paul's Epistle to the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16). St. Paul even encourages the Colossians to read this epistle, but still it is not in the Bible. Jesus in the Gospel never attempts to list the "official" Books of the Old Testament (OT). This issue was hotly debated in His day. Today Protestant and Catholic Christians disagree over which Books belong in the OT. Catholics follow the list in the Septuagint (2nd century B.C. Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture) while Protestants follow the list used by the Pharisees. A list from Jesus could have eliminated this problem, but no such list is found in the Gospel. As a result the

Bible needs a visible authority outside of itself to list the inspired sacred Books. This authority must be guided by the Holy Spirit since these Books are from the Holy Spirit.

Some Christians claim that the Table of Contents in their Bible lists the inspired Books. Even though found in modern Bibles, the Table of Contents is still not inspired. It is not the Word of God but words added later by human editors, much similar to footnotes. The Table of Contents is basically the opinion of the publishing editor. Others may claim that the closing verses in the Book of Revelation, specifically Rev. 22:18-19, cap off the Bible and define all the preceding Books as inspired by God. But do these verses apply to the whole Bible or only the Book of Revelation? Another flaw with this idea is that not all Bibles have the same number of Books. As alluded to above, Catholic and Protestant Bibles contain different numbers of OT Books, yet all these Bibles close with the same verses: Rev. 22:18ff. Both cannot be right. Finally the Book of Deuteronomy contains similar verses (4:2 & 12:32). Does this imply that the Books after Deuteronomy are not inspired by God? No.

A third problem with the "Bible Alone" teaching is proper understanding of critical Bible passages. Most Protestant Christians promote personal interpretation of the Bible, i.e. anyone can interpret these passages by himself. Unfortunately this leads to chaos. For example over Baptism, some Protestants accept the validity of infant Baptism, while others do not. Some believe in the necessity of Baptism for salvation, citing Mark 16:16, while others disagree by citing John 3:16. They all claim to be Bible-based, but still they disagree over fundamental issues regarding salvation. Sadly the "Yellow Pages" phone directory is a witness to the many "Bible-Based" churches who disagree with each other over key issues of the Christian faith. Personal interpretation of the Bible naturally leads to a mire of human doctrines as a result of differing personal opinions.

The Bible was not written as a catechism. It is a collection of many different styles of writing - poetry, history, parables, letters, songs requiring different ways of understanding. Sometimes Jesus in the Gospel purposely taught in figurative language and parables, which makes literal interpretation impossible. Even St. Peter admits that St. Paul's Epistles can be difficult to understand:

...Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. [2 Peter 3:15-16]

Finally the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:30ff needed St. Philip to explain the Book of Isaiah. Obviously not everyone can understand the meaning of Scripture by simply reading it. More is required. These difficulties in the Bible demand an independent visible teaching authority that is guided by the Holy Spirit. Even the Bible points to the importance of the Church for teaching the Truth. According to St. Peter in the Bible:

First of all you must understand this, that no prophesy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. [2 Peter 1:20-21]

At least prophecies in the Bible are not a matter of personal interpretation. These prophecies must be properly interpreted by "men moved by the Holy Spirit" since the Holy Spirit is the Author. These "men" are the Bishops of the Church - the successors to the Apostles (Acts 20:28-32). Finally the Bible does not call itself the bulwark of the truth; however, St. Paul does make reference to the Church in those terms:

...the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth. [1 Tim. 3:15]

According to the Bible, the Church is "the pillar and bulwark of the truth." All Christians, including Catholics, should read the Bible in order to grow more in the faith; however, we still need the Church. The Church is needed to accurately pass on Apostolic Tradition (Romans 10:17), define the canon of the Bible (i.e. list the inspired Books), safeguard the accurate transmission (e.g. translations) of the Bible and interpret key passages, all with guidance from the Holy Spirit according to God's Will. The Church is needed for other reasons too. It must be understood that the Church is not merely men making arbitrary decisions but men executing authority from God guided by the Holy Spirit. The Church may at times be tested by scandals or scarred by the sins of men. We may sometimes disagree with the policies of the Church, but she is still the instrument of the Holy Spirit. This visible Church is the one built by Jesus Christ on St. Peter, the rock (Matt. 16:18-19; John 1:24).

Section 2: Learning Intentions

A01 Key Knowledge:

1. Bonhoeffer's teaching on the relationship of Church and State including:
 - Obedience, leadership and doing God's will
 - Justification of civil disobedience
2. Bonhoeffer's role in the Confessing Church and his own religious community at Finkenwalde
3. Bonhoeffer's teaching on ethics as action, including:
 - 'costly grace'
 - sacrifice and suffering
 - solidarity

A02 Key Skills:

Learners should have the opportunity to discuss issues related to Christian moral action in the life and teaching of Bonhoeffer, including:

- whether or not Christians should practise civil disobedience
- whether or not it is possible always to know God's will
- whether or not Bonhoeffer puts too much emphasis on suffering

Glossary of Key Concepts / Technical Terms

| | |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dietrich Bonhoeffer | Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German, protestant Christian |
| State | A nation or territory considered as an organised political community under one government. |
| Obedience | Compliance with an order, request, or law or submission to another's authority |
| God's Will | God's intention for His people to follow his guidelines |
| Civil Disobedience | The active, professed refusal to obey certain laws, demands, and commands of a government, or of an occupying international power. |
| Confessing Church | A movement within German Protestantism during Nazi Germany that arose in opposition to government-sponsored efforts to unify all Protestant churches into a single pro-Nazi Protestant Reich Church. |
| Finkenwalde | A community/Church set up by Bonhoeffer |
| Costly Grace | Where a Christian has to be willing to suffer like Christ |
| Cheap Grace | Christians who are passive and wait for God to work in their lives or in the world |
| Sacrifice | To give up something for the sake of others of the greater good |
| Suffering | The state of undergoing pain, distress or hardship |
| Solidarity | A sense of loyalty to others |

The teaching and example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German, protestant Christian who became particularly famous, not only due to his writings, but also because he was executed by the German authorities just before the end of the Second World War. He is seen as a martyr of the Christian Church.

Bonhoeffer decided to become a pastor in the Lutheran Church and began to train in 1923. He turned out to be an excellent pastor and an especially good theologian writing some excellent books on Christian discipleship. He travelled all over the world and even for a short time was a pastor in London.



As he grew older the political situation in Germany changed. Hitler's party, the National Socialists, began to gain more and more power. Bonhoeffer wrote condemnations of the Nazi party and eventually during the war he was arrested. In prison, he managed to get a series of letters smuggled out of the prison, which have become famous as an account of someone's struggles with imprisonment and their faith.

Bonhoeffer thought that he would eventually be released since the initial charges against him were fairly mild. However, there was an attempted assassination of Hitler (the film *Valkyrie* with Tom Cruise tells the story), and Bonhoeffer was associated with some of the people who were involved. Just three weeks before Germany surrendered Bonhoeffer was hanged by the Gestapo on the 9th of April, 1945 along with six other members of the resistance.

Task: Produce a 5-7 point overview of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Bonhoeffer's teaching on the relationship between Church and State

Due to the rise of the Nazi party, his imprisonment and eventual execution, Bonhoeffer's writings on the relationship between Church and state have been studied very closely. To begin with Bonhoeffer views were very similar to others in the Lutheran Church. Basically the understanding was that you had a duty to the state or government (to obey its laws, for example), and you had to obey the laws of God, but usually the two areas of life – Church and state – *were considered as separate parts of life*. Your duty to God and Church involved only your home life or private life. Your duty to the state, on the other hand, was your public duty.

This understanding was based upon a passage from St Paul in his letter to the Romans:

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. (Romans 13: 1-2)

Lutherans kept their public and private life separate keeping their public life under the authority of the state. This meant that Christians in Germany generally did not attend public protests because they thought that this amounted to trying to build God's kingdom by earthly efforts, and also it was resisting the state. They believed that they could rely on God in the long run to sort things out. In the short term they thought a Christian's duty in their public life was to follow the laws and commandments of their superiors.

This understanding (which Bonhoeffer eventually rejected) is summarised in the following table:

| Private life of a Christian | Public Life of a Christian |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Be a good father, mother, sister, brother...etc. ➤ Go to Church. ➤ Read the Bible ➤ Obey the Ten Commandments ➤ Rely on God to change the world | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Be a good public servant, a good citizen ➤ Be obedient to the state and its orders ➤ Do what you are told to do because God has put the ruling authorities in place ➤ Be a good soldier, teacher, lawyer by following whoever is in charge ➤ Wait for God to change the world |

This, to a certain extent, explains why so many German Christian soldiers obeyed their officers even when told to do something absolutely immoral like execute a whole village or be a guard at a concentration camp. Many must have thought that what they did was immoral, but had been conditioned to be reluctant to speak out. God, they thought, would change the world eventually. For the time being, as long as you were obedient at home to God's law in your private life, your duty as a German citizen was to follow orders that were given by the authorities. Many German soldiers when put on trial after the war thought that it was a valid excuse to say that they were only following orders.

Task:

Outline the views of the Lutheran Church regarding Church and State. Explain how the passage from St Paul influenced the Lutheran Church. Use examples in your answer.

Bonhoeffer's Change of Heart on the Relation between Church and State

Bonhoeffer's attitude towards the authority of the state became much more defiant when Hitler came to power, and began to abolish all the democratic structures of the state whilst, at the same time, his persecution of the Jews began. Hitler, also, demanded that all the churches show complete obedience to his authority as *Führer*. In 1933 Bonhoeffer published a paper for the churches called '**The Church and the Jewish Question**'. In it he suggested three courses of possible action:

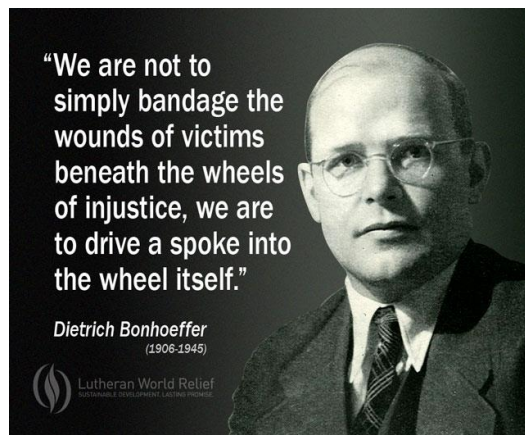
- 1) **The Church provides care for victims of injustice including Jews.**
- 2) **Protest and question the state rather than being silent.**
- 3) **Actively seeking to disrupt the state when it was doing immoral things. In his own words, the Christian must be prepared to 'drive a spoke' into the wheels of state**

In doing this, he was advocating active, political resistance, which, as we have seen, went against the grain of most German Christian's understanding of the relationship between Church and state. It was, they thought, God's role to resist the state, not the Churches.

Bonhoeffer continued to advocate resistance to the state. In 1934 many representatives of the German Churches met in an area called Barmen and together wrote a paper which Bonhoeffer heartily agreed with.

In it they made clear their views on Hitler's attempt to become the head of all the churches in Germany and so bring all of them under direct state control. For example, one of the popular slogans which was encouraged by the Nazi government at the time was:

"The State of Adolf Hitler appeals to the Church, and the Church has to hear his call."



The protest paper which became known as the *Declaration of the Free Synod of Barmen* first of all made the point that only Jesus Christ could be the Head of the Church, not a party leader:

“Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.”

The declaration rejected other views of the relationship between the church and state:

“We reject the false doctrine, as though the church, over and beyond its special commission, should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself becoming an organ of the State.”

Bonhoeffer agreed with this understanding. The Church, he argued, must be separate from the state, not just a tool (organ) of state. Its job is to be under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and, if need be, protest at injustice and immorality.

Tragically many Christians in the Lutheran Church decided to not oppose Hitler. Some even supported him since they thought that he was God’s instrument to unify Germany and persecute the Jews who were thought of as being guilty of killing Christ. Bonhoeffer together with Christians who opposed Hitler, formed the Confessing Church.

The Justification of Civil Disobedience

As we have seen, Bonhoeffer was not a natural radical. He had thought (as most Germans had) that the state was divinely given and that its laws were God’s laws. The Christian life was confined to the home and its immediate surroundings. But with the rise of Hitler and his murderous policies this was found to be entirely inadequate. As the state became more and more powerful and demanded absolute obedience, Bonhoeffer became an active member of the German resistance movement, which was working to eventually overthrow Hitler and the National Socialists. This meant a change in how Bonhoeffer could behave. He was now a member of a secret organisation working to overthrow the state. He now had to lie, deceive, engage in a conspiracy and work towards what might be a violent end for Hitler. He had to engage in activities which he had formerly thought of as immoral.

Bonhoeffer rejected the idea that there were two separate areas of life – the private life and the public one. *There is for the Christian only one realm* and that realm must be entirely governed by obedience to Christ. A Christian cannot leave his Christian principles at home.

He writes,

There are not two realities but only one “and that is God’s reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world”

This means Christians must involve themselves in the public arena, but continue to be Christians and apply Christian principles. They cannot just say that they are obeying orders if those orders are immoral. The ‘reality of the world’ means that the Christian must be prepared to take on some guilt as well. Bonhoeffer was not comfortable with being in the resistance, but he felt it was the responsible action. He said that sometimes the Christian must be prepared to do ‘immoral’ things for the sake of others:

“Because of Jesus Christ, the essence of responsible action intrinsically involves the sinless, those who act out of selfless love, becoming guilty.”

Being in a conspiracy against the leader of the country would be seen by most Germans to be wrong, but the Christian must be prepared to incur this kind of guilt if he or she is to act responsibly, and out of a love which is prepared to take on the guilt of others.

Task: Create a manifesto that outlines Bonhoeffer’s justification for civil disobedience.

Success Criteria:

- Refer to the need for the German resistance movement
- How could he justify lying and engaging in conspiracy?
- Refer to the two quotes from Bonhoeffer – what do they show about civil disobedience?

Duty to God and State in a Nutshell

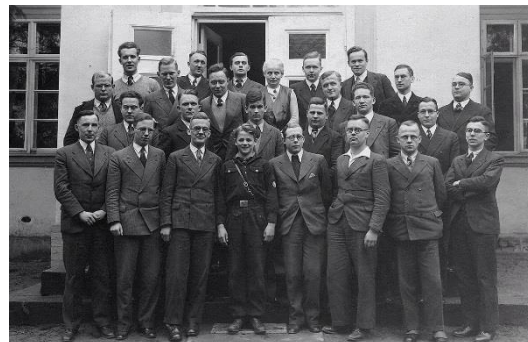
- Many German Christians separated their lives into private and public. Only in the private life was the Church significant. Outside you must submit to the state which is God's representative.
- Many believed that it was God's role to change the world, not the Christian.
- Bonhoeffer rejected both these beliefs. The Christian life must be a seamless whole with no moral distinction being made between the public and the private realms. He believed in 'one realm'.
- Sometimes responsible action might well be considered immoral. The Christian must be prepared to take on guilt for the sake of others.

Bonhoeffer's role in the Confessing Church and his own religious community at Finkenwalde

One of Bonhoeffer's earliest books was called *The Community of Saints* – in other words, the Church. Bonhoeffer saw the Church, not only as a haven or place of rest, *but as a place of spiritual exercise*. It is a community of people who *work* at being Christians, rather than just allowing God to hide them. Church is not a place of rest; it is a place of training. He passionately believed in active discipleship.

This commitment to the Church being a place of discipline, exercise as well as fellowship is richly illustrated by Bonhoeffer's time in Finkenwalde (which is now in the North West corner of Poland). The Nazis had demanded that all seminaries (places where pastors get trained) would only be allowed to stay open if they endorsed Hitler. Bonhoeffer, in defiance of this, opened an illegal seminary in Finkenwalde, which would, of course, not endorse Hitler but instead faithfully teach the Gospel and train its members.

As head of the seminary, Bonhoeffer was free to apply his own beliefs as to how Christian communities should live and learn together. Bonhoeffer believed in strict discipline in the seminary. There were regular and extensive Bible readings, times of meditation. The day started and ended with worship.



Cheap and Costly Grace: Sacrifice and Suffering

This disciplined, rather strict environment, reflected Bonhoeffer's views. Again many Christians were rather passive in their faith thinking that they could allow God to do the work. They believed that God's grace meant that God's Holy Spirit worked in you to perfect you. You could sit back and wait for the transformation to begin! In other words, because your salvation is a gift, you could not work for it. This led to many Christians allowing things and events to happen rather than being active.

Bonhoeffer thought that this was an inadequate view of grace. He agreed that grace was freely given. Our salvation is God's gift to give and we cannot earn it, but surely true Christian discipleship means that we must obey Christ. Discipleship demands obedience, not just allowing God to work in you. He thought that Christians who thought that they could be passive and wait for God to work were working with what he called '**cheap grace**'. He emphasised parts of the Bible where the Christian has to suffer with Christ. Such Christians still believe in God's gift of salvation, but they obey Christ and suffer with him. Such Christians are committed to true grace which is a **costly grace**.

Such a view of grace demands sacrifice and suffering. We have already seen this in Bonhoeffer's views about responsibility. Sometimes the Christian must be prepared to sacrifice his or her own innocence and take on guilt for the sake of others. Bonhoeffer was certainly prepared to do this in his highly risky role as a member of the resistance.

Task: Create a table and identify the difference between cheap grace and costly grace:

| Cheap Grace | Costly Grace |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Give examples – look at page | Examples from the Bible |

Solidarity

Bonhoeffer based much of his revised thinking about the relationship between the Christian and the state upon his understanding of Jesus, the incarnate one. He asked the question, 'What had happened to all of mankind when God became man?'

In Christianity, Jesus is believed to be 'fully God and fully man'. Bonhoeffer agreed with this, and thought that implied that mankind itself – all people – were made one in Christ. God had, in the incarnation, blessed and lifted and unified all of us in one body of people. 'Solidarity' means you have a sense of intense loyalty to others, and that you identify with each other. Just as God had identified with mankind in Christ we ought to identify with each other. God in Christ has brought the whole of mankind together. Bonhoeffer says in his book 'The Cost of Discipleship':

In Christ's incarnation all of humanity regains the dignity of bearing the image of God. Whoever from now on attacks the least of the people attacks Christ...Since we know ourselves to be accepted and borne within the humanity of Jesus, our new humanity now also consists in bearing the troubles and sins of all other.

Task - Answer the following questions:

1. **Bonhoeffer believed in 'active discipleship' – what does this mean?**
2. **What was Finkenwalde? Why was this created?**
3. **What issue did Bonhoeffer have the strict belief that salvation was 'God's gift'?**
4. **Outline the difference between 'cheap' and 'costly' grace**
5. **What did 'solidarity' mean to Bonhoeffer?**
6. **What does Bonhoeffer mean by the phrase: "our new humanity now also consists in bearing the troubles and sins of all other"?**

Church, Community, Spiritual discipline and the Cost of Discipleship in a Nutshell

- The Church should not be a place where Christians go to hide from the world. In it they must be trained to be Disciples of Christ.
- The Church is a community which works together, prays together, worships together.
- Grace should not be viewed as cheap as if we are called to do nothing. Discipleship costs since we must be obedient to Christ's commands. True grace is costly grace, not cheap grace. It involves sacrifice and suffering.
- Solidarity has been shown to us and given to us by Christ. He has bound all of mankind together, and taken on the guilt of everyone. Just like Him we must be prepared to shoulder each other's sins and become guilty for the sake of others.

A02 Issues Arising: Should a Christian practise civil disobedience?

| Yes | No |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Bonhoeffer certainly thought that the Christian is justified in defying the state, and so participating in civil disobedience. Initially, however, he was attracted, like most Germans, to the view that in your private life you have a duty to God, but in the public life you must obey the authorities. With the rise of Hitler, Bonhoeffer thought that this understanding was totally inadequate.</p> | <p>The Gospel of Luke implies that the worldly authority are to be respected since Jesus said: "Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." The Romans were an occupying power yet Jesus is still telling the Jewish people to give taxes that ultimately support Rome. This account supports the view that it is not your responsibility to defy the state, instead our giving to God should be a personal affair.</p> |
| <p>Bonhoeffer practised civil disobedience and possibly was part of the attempt to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer wrote that the 'worldly order is subject to the commandment of God.' In other words, the Christian has a higher duty than the state – he or she must ensure that God's will is being followed. Example of the Finkenwalde seminary – setting up of the Confessing Church.</p> | <p>In St Paul's letter to the Romans he commands the Christian community to follow the state: "All of you must obey the government rulers. Everyone who rules was given the power to rule by God." At the time of St Paul's writing the ruling authority was Nero, one of the worst tyrants of all time – a man who enjoyed burning Christians alive in his night time garden parties! If Paul could command Christians to obey Nero, then, why not Hitler? Many German Christians must have thought that in the long run, God would sort it all out – their duty, in the interim, was to obey the state.</p> |
| <p>If a state imposes a law which is unjust and does not promote the common good, then, the Christian no longer is required to obey it. For example, in Britain at various times in history the Catholic Mass was banned and there were severe penalties for priests who celebrated Mass. Here the law was clearly unjust. Here Catholics disobeyed the state, and secretly priests defied the state. In many large houses in England there are 'priest holes' – secret rooms for priests to hide in if the authorities raided the house.</p> | <p>The Christian Church has agreed with St Paul on the necessity of obeying authority. The <i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> says: "Human society can be neither well-ordered nor prosperous unless it has some people invested with legitimate authority to preserve its institutions". In simpler terms, society needs leaders to establish law and order.</p> |
| <p>The <i>Catechism</i> makes it clear that the state's authority should only be recognised if it is seeking the common good and does nothing immoral in the pursuit of the common good. "Authority is exercised legitimately only when it seeks the common good...If rulers were to enact unjust laws or take measures contrary to the moral order, such arrangements would not be binding in conscience."</p> | <p>St Thomas Aquinas argues that one of the Primary Precepts of Natural Law is to live in an orderly society. For this to happen we have to establish secondary precepts that demand civil obedience not civil disobedience. We have a rule of law and an elected hierarchy of power so that society can function properly. If Christians practice civil disobedience then they are actively working against the natural law.</p> |
| <p>The Gospel of Mark indicates that Jesus seemed to advocate civil disobedience whilst in the Temple in Jerusalem. "And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."</p> | <p>Many Christians would argue that practising civil disobedience leads to a slippery slope. In other words, peaceful civil disobedience often leads to violent rebellion. It is a nice idea to think that we can challenge authority in a peaceful and productive way. However, the reality is that society runs far more smoothly when everyone is pulling in the same direction. By allowing civil disobedience or we then allowing anarchy?</p> |

A02 Issues Arising – Should Christians be obedient to God’s will? / Is it possible to know God’s will?

| Yes | No |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>For Bonhoeffer, each individual has to try to work out what God’s will is in the circumstances they find themselves in. Bonhoeffer writes: “The nature of God’s will can only be made clear in the moment of action” This means that we must confront every significant decision on a case by case basis, and that no general rules of the Church can replace the individual’s responsibility to try to work out what God’s will is for his or her life.</p> | <p>Bonhoeffer writes: “The nature of God’s will can only be made clear in the moment of action”. However, this approach has been criticised based on the fact that it is a slippery slope to justifying all sorts of actions and claim that it is the will of God. Many religious extremists could interpret this as justification for acts of violence and terror.</p> |
| <p>Bonhoeffer would argue that Jesus provides a model of following God’s will, exemplified by his willing sacrifice and death for a greater cause. Furthermore, we come to know God’s will through Jesus’ actions with poor, oppressed and marginalised. We should be obedient to God’s will and try and emulate this in our lives.</p> | <p>Bonhoeffer’s ‘knowing in the moment of action’ could simply be the voice of the conscience. Sigmund Freud argues that conscience is not the voice or will of God. Freud would argue that this voice is based on our upbringing and guilt and it cannot be interpreted as the will of God.</p> |
| <p>Bonhoeffer would also argue that Jesus’ disciples are excellent models of what following God’s will involves. They showed obedience to god’s will and his commands, including a willingness to give up everything for God. The Gospels all highlight the disciple’s willingness to leave their jobs, homes and families to follow Jesus. Their actions highlight that Christians should be obedient to God’s will and commitment is shown through their moral actions.</p> | <p>Bonhoeffer was criticised for his own actions. He changed direction in his life from being a parish priest, then a theologian, then a member of the Confessing Church and then a member of the resistance. If it was possible for him to know God’s will, why did he keep changing direction?</p> |
| <p>Bonhoeffer shows that obedience to God’s will was far more important than obedience to the state. Bonhoeffer rejected the idea that there were two separate areas of life – the private life and the public one. There is for the Christian only one realm and that realm must be entirely governed by obedience to Christ. A Christian cannot leave his Christian principles at home. He writes, “There are not two realities but only one “and that is God’s reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world” This means Christians must involve themselves in the public arena, but continue to be Christians and apply Christian principles.</p> | <p>There is debate within Christianity regarding Bonhoeffer’s view of what God’s will was. This in itself suggest that it is not always possible to know God’s will. Bonhoeffer practised civil disobedience and possibly was part of the attempt to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer wrote that the ‘worldly order is subject to the commandment of God.’ However, this approach seems inconsistent with the person of Jesus and his actions as a pacifist.</p> |
| <p>The Filkenwalde community was a clear example that Bonhoeffer expected obedience to God. Bonhoeffer believed in strict discipline in the community. There were regular and extensive Bible readings, times of meditation. The day started and ended with worship which allowed people to know God’s will.</p> | <p>St Augustine argued that the ‘Fall’ corrupted man’s reason. Humans are essentially fallen creatures who are controlled by lust. Due to this Augustine argues that knowledge of God’s will is impossible. Karl Barth would agree and argue that in order to know God’s will we need the Bible, Church and our reason. Without these sources of guidance our corrupt nature would mean we are unable to know God’s will fully.</p> |

A02 Issues Arising: Does Bonhoeffer's ethics put too much emphasis on suffering?

| Yes | No |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Bonhoeffer distinguishes between cheap and costly grace. Bonhoeffer insists that if grace is to mean anything it has to be costly grace. Bonhoeffer emphasises those parts of the Bible where it says the Christian must take up his or her cross and follow Christ. Grace must be met with obedience and this obedience involves suffering.</p> | <p>To be fair to Bonhoeffer, he was involved in one of the greatest tragedies of Europe – he was born under the terrible tyranny of the Nazis, and was in prison for his final years. Furthermore, Bonhoeffer did not deliberately seek martyrdom – he did not expect to be executed. He thought that his imprisonment would end in freedom. If he had survived the war then surely his theology would have reflected the joy of Christian discipleship as well as its costs.</p> |
| <p>This emphasis on suffering being a part of grace can be criticised. There seems to be little room for joy, light heartedness and humour in Christian discipleship. There might seem to be a lot of cost and not enough grace. Many have named Bonhoeffer's type of Christianity 'crisis theology'.</p> | <p>In the New Testament St Paul asks the Christian community to: "Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." Paul is emphasising the importance of suffering within Christianity. This is in line with Jesus who taught his disciples that "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me." Jesus was clear that to be a Christian meant that suffering was a necessary part of being a disciple. It seems clear that Bonhoeffer does not put too much emphasis on suffering. Instead, his teaching is consistent with that of Jesus.</p> |
| <p>Those who have an empirical view of poverty (that poverty is a way of life) would argue that Bonhoeffer's ethics place too much emphasis on something that cannot be removed from society. Cardinal Ratzinger would argue Christianity is focused on the view that Salvation came through the death and resurrection of Jesus. There is too much focus on materialism and not enough focus on the message of Jesus. Ratzinger argued that spirituality is more important than relieving the suffering of people in this world.</p> | <p>The Catholic Church has always placed an emphasis upon the value of suffering. Suffering goes alongside solidarity which is an intense sense of loyalty to others. Solidarity means that suffering is likely to occur in your life. Furthermore, in Christianity, Jesus is believed to be 'fully God and fully man'. Bonhoeffer agreed with this and argued that God himself suffered so we too must be prepared to suffer. The Catholic Church believes that one of its main principles is to be a servant Church just as Jesus was a 'suffering servant' himself.</p> |
| <p>Many Biblical scholars would cite reversal theology as a reason to argue that Bonhoeffer's ethics are too focused on suffering. Jesus' parables, such as the Rich Man and Lazarus demonstrate that those who are last in this world will be first in the next. The afterlife is where God makes the suffering of individuals worthwhile.</p> | <p>For liberation theologians, right action (orthopraxy) is a priority over right beliefs (orthodoxy). This can also be seen in the New Testament where James says 'If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?' Suffering is a way for beliefs to be put into practise.</p> |
| | <p>Leonardo Boff argues that Christianity does not teach that we meekly accept suffering and wait for heaven, but that we try to confront the political authorities and try to change society so it becomes more fair and just. Boff says, A Christology [understanding of Christ] that proclaims Jesus Christ as the Liberator (Jesus Christ Liberator 1972). Boff is arguing that Jesus prioritised the poor and we should follow that example.</p> |

A02 Issues Arising: Does Bonhoeffer's theology have relevance today?

| Yes | No |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The willingness of many German Christians to allow the Nazis to do their terrible work shows us that there is a danger in separating our lives into a Christian part and public part. A Christian must have a <i>whole, integrated</i> life that is informed by the values of Christianity, and not be prepared to ignore the example of Jesus just because the authorities say that you should. The Christian should not be just passive and complacently just allow God to do His work; the Christian must get involved and be a proper disciple, and this, as Bonhoeffer recognises, can involve suffering. Sometimes grace is costly.</p> | <p>Bonhoeffer's ideas were influenced by the historical context in which he lived. This context was Nazi Germany, war, conflict and anti-Semitism. Many would argue that his ideas are no longer relevant today in a modern, secular and liberal democracy. We are no longer a world at war so his ideas of costly grace are no longer necessary.</p> |
| <p>Christians must sometimes be involved in civil disobedience, or at least allow this possibility. The state should normally be obeyed. It is there to uphold the common good, and civil disobedience is only justified if the state goes against God's laws. If more Christians had actively involved themselves in civil disobedience in Nazi Germany perhaps the Nazis would not have the freedom to do what they did.</p> | <p>Bonhoeffer's focus on civil disobedience and costly grace neglects other important Christian teachings. For instance, Joseph Fletcher argues that Jesus' main emphasis of morality was based on 'agape' or unconditional love. This idea does not seem to feature in Bonhoeffer. Furthermore, his</p> |
| <p>If a state imposes a law which is unjust and does not promote the common good, then, the Christian no longer is required to obey it. For example, in Britain at various times in history the Catholic Mass was banned and there were severe penalties for priests who celebrated Mass. Here the law was clearly unjust. Here Catholics disobeyed the state, and secretly priests defied the state. In many large houses in England there are 'priest holes' – secret rooms for priests to hide in if the authorities raided the house.</p> | <p>Bonhoeffer's emphasis on suffering can be off-putting. There seems to be little room for joy, light heartedness and humour in Christian discipleship. There might seem to be a lot of cost and not enough grace. Many have named Bonhoeffer's type of Christianity 'crisis theology'.</p> |
| <p>The <i>Catechism</i> makes it clear that the state's authority should only be recognised if it is seeking the common good and does nothing immoral in the pursuit of the common good. "Authority is exercised legitimately only when it seeks the common good...If rulers were to enact unjust laws or take measures contrary to the moral order, such arrangements would not be binding in conscience."</p> | <p>Pope Francis' document entitled 'The Joy of the Gospel' is in complete contrast to the community Bonhoeffer established at Finkenwalde. Francis insists that the message of Jesus is a message of joy that should be shared with the world. Therefore, Bonhoeffer's theology is not relevant with the Catholic Church today.</p> |
| <p>Stanley Hauerwas believes that Bonhoeffer's concern for truth in politics is a much needed challenge to Western democracy today. In a world dominated by fake news and propaganda we must always be aware of the potential rise of extremist political views such as the Nazis rearing their ugly heads once again.</p> | |

Assessment: 'Bonhoeffer has no relevance for today.' Discuss. (40 marks)

Success Criteria

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German, protestant Christian who became particularly famous, not only due to his writings, but also because he was executed by the German authorities just before the end of the Second World War. He is seen as a martyr of the Christian Church.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer's views were very similar to others in the Lutheran Church in Germany. Basically the understanding was that you had a duty to the state/government (to obey its laws, for example), and you had to obey the laws of God, but usually the two areas of life – Church and state – were considered as separate parts of life.
- Your duty to God and Church involved only your home life or private life. Your duty to the state, on the other hand, was your public duty.
- Bonhoeffer's attitude towards the authority of the state became much more defiant when Hitler came to power.
- The actions of Bonhoeffer have led many Christians to argue that they should not always be obedient to God's will but instead practice civil disobedience.

Arguments suggesting Bonhoeffer has no relevance today:

- Bonhoeffer's ideas were influenced by the historical context in which he lived.
- Bonhoeffer's focus on civil disobedience and costly grace neglects other important Christian teachings.
- Bonhoeffer's emphasis on suffering can be off-putting.
- Pope Francis' document entitled 'The Joy of the Gospel' is in complete contrast to the community Bonhoeffer established at Finkenwalde.

Arguments suggesting Bonhoeffer does have relevance today:

- The willingness of many German Christians to allow the Nazis to do their terrible work shows us that there is a danger in separating our lives into a Christian part and public part.
- Christians must sometimes be involved in civil disobedience, or at least allow this possibility.
- If a state imposes a law which is unjust and does not promote the common good, then, the Christian no longer is required to obey it.
- The *Catechism* makes it clear that the state's authority should only be recognised if it is seeking the common good and does nothing immoral in the pursuit of the common good.
- Stanley Hauerwas believes that Bonhoeffer's concern for truth in politics is a much needed challenge to Western democracy today.

Use the table and discussion points on the previous pages to help you construct this essay

Extended Reading – Complete a close reading of the following Dialogue Articles:

How to do a close reading:

Read with a pencil or highlighter in hand, and annotate the text. "Annotating" means underlining or highlighting key words and phrases—anything that strikes you as surprising or significant, or that raises questions—as well as making notes in the margins.

Jesus and Civil Disobedience by John Dear

John Dear lists ten major episodes as actions of nonviolent disobedience by Jesus:

1. Jesus' first action was a public exorcism of a man with an unclean spirit in the Capernaum synagogue (Mark 1:23-26). He disrupts the cultic atmosphere. He exorcized the culture's possession of people. The man was amazingly cleansed from the unclean spirit of imperial violence which had been internalized.
2. The healing of the leper (Mark 1:40-42) was civilly disobedient because it went beyond the designated boundaries of society. Lepers were "outsiders." By touching him, Jesus became a marginalized outsider too. He broke social and religious laws of behavior. (Gandhi also associated with India's "untouchable" cast.)
3. A third set of illegal actions includes Jesus' mingling with the outsiders: sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, the sick, the dying, the hungry, widows, women, fishermen, and children. He declared (Mark 3:34) his total union with the poor and oppressed. By eating with the marginalized (Mark 2:15) Jesus publicly embraced all who were excluded by societal laws.
4. Working and healing on the Sabbath constitute a fourth series of civil resistance actions: (Mark 2:23) plucking grain by the disciples (their first public action was illegal!) Mark 3:1-6 healing of the withered hand; Luke 13:10-17, healing of the woman, Luke 14:1-6 healing of man. For Jesus, mercy and human needs preceded regulation and rule.
5. This addresses the economy of militarism, the business of war which allowed the imperialistic forces of Rome ("legion") to control people (Matt. 8:28-34). The man possessed by the unclean spirit represents the poor who were under the oppressive and violent Roman military occupation. Jesus also called for the economic conversion from profits and oppression to justice and disarmament. Then, as now, Jesus' message was scandalous and radical.
6. Jesus challenged the religious leaders by breaking the legalized religious dietary codes used to manipulate and oppress (Mark 7:1-23). Not washing hands before eating could result in condemnation and ostracization. Essentially, Jesus called for a return to the basics of justice and mercy (Luke 11:37-43). He used very strong language ("Woe to you!")
7. Jesus was constantly fraternizing with the enemy: loving one's enemy was dangerous, subversive activity and yet it is the hallmark of Jesus's teaching and life. In his time the enemies were Samaritans, Gerasenes, and Greeks. (John 4:4-43 – the Samaritan woman; Mark 4:35-41– enemy territory). When crucified by enemies, he prayed, "Forgive them!"
8. The street theater of the donkey ride into Jerusalem is considered a satire on the military parades of the empire (Luke 19:29-40). He is demonstrating how a real liberator acts: in humility, nonviolence, and simplicity. The procession is public and political, like Gandhi's salt march to the sea or King's march from Selma to Montgomery.
9. The climax is Jesus' nonviolent direct action at the temple, the public center of the Jewish-Roman system, which kept the people subdued and oppressed. By wrecking the tables, Jesus symbolically throws over the imperial and religious domination (Mark 11: 15-18). He quotes Isaiah and Jeremiah who regularly condemned the Temple-state system and called for justice and peace.

