

- **The Use of Scripture in Ethics**
- ***La Recours à l'Écriture en Ethique***
- ***Der Gebrauch der Heiligen Schrift in der Ethik***

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SUMMARY

I. *Why* should we use Scriptures in ethics? In order to learn God's will, I defend my adherence to the Divine Command Theory (actually more a confession than a 'theory') against the following three objections:

1. The requirement to designate God's will as good leads to blind obedience.

2. The Divine Command Theory is self contradictory because the concept of good always logically precedes the concept of God.

3. Real morality presupposes autonomy, not heteronomy.

In reply to these objections:

1. It is blind obedience to do what Mr X wants just because Mr X wishes it. But the situation becomes different when Mr X is my father and totally different when he is my heavenly Father who saved my life through Jesus Christ. In this latter case it would be correct to say that an 'is' results in an 'ought'.

2. For many the knowledge of what is good often precedes *noetically* their knowledge of God, but *ontologically* 'God' still precedes 'good' as the creator of moral order. Notions of good and evil exist everywhere as a result of God's general revelation (Rom. 2:14f.). Although it is possible for people to consider God as irrelevant for morality ontologically, morality originates in God. Therefore it is maintainable that that which is good is so because God wills it.

3. A moral choice must indeed be a choice made wholeheartedly. The Bible makes it clear that we are full-fledged human beings who are taken seriously as covenant partners. Though we aren't autonomous, we are auto-mobile. True freedom listens to the law because it knows that the law is meant to preserve freedom. This relationship between 'good' as that which God wills and 'freedom' makes it possible to recognize many (although not all) moral actions as 'rational' actions. Titus 2:11–14 demonstrates that the Christian life-style didn't appear in the Hellenistic world *ex nihilo* by using three words also prevalent in pagan morality: moderation, uprightness, godliness. For the Christian, however, there is a guiding principle which organizes this otherwise non-distinctive behavior into a distinctive pattern. Furthermore, the new direction given to the Christian's life-style will lead to distinctive behavior as well, thus outwardly distinguishing him from

non-Christians. For the knowledge of God's will we are primarily dependent upon the Scriptures.

II. *How* should we use Scripture in ethics? The appeal to Scripture presents a number of difficulties:

1. Redemptive history: God's will in the past is not necessarily God's will for today (Old Testament ceremonies, sabbath, etc.).

2. Secular history: Variable elements in social structures (e.g. slavery, equal-pay, capital punishment) and revolutionary discoveries (e.g. nuclear weapons, *in vitro* fertilization) compel us to make new ethical decisions.

3. Personal history: God's will for one person is not necessarily his will for another.

Furthermore, we note that the apostles did more than just repeat 'it is written.' They argued from certain motifs, such as the imitation of Christ, and emphasized the Christian's maturity to discern between good and evil.

Yet, the difficulties involved with the appeal to Scripture in ethical matters shouldn't be exaggerated, for there are numerous situations where no such difficulty exists. With respect to the difficulties mentioned, however, I point out:

1. In reference to the Old Testament we must start with the fact that Jesus came (not to abolish but) to fulfil the law and the prophets. *πληρῶω* means that the law and the prophets, which were not full (complete), would be made full by Jesus. Jots and tittles, however, do pass away from the law when we make the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' impotent by being angry with our brother. Jots and tittles also pass away when we disregard the teaching of Christ and continue to justify divorce on the basis of Deuteronomy 24. We must avoid the Scylla of abolishing the law ('the Fourth Commandment is no longer in effect') and the Charybdis of legalism ('the Fourth Commandment must be upheld in precisely the same way as under Israel').

2. Saying that 'we live after Christ,' or 'we aren't ancient Israel' isn't enough. The world has developed in the 2,000 years that have gone by since Christ and it is quite impossible to return to a period where blood revenge, slavery, torture, etc. were commonplace. But how are we to know if such 'evident' developments are also 'good' developments?

Since good judgments and right actions *present* themselves as such to humanity, I detect in that *presenting* the work of God and his Spirit in his general revelation. Certainly, one can appeal wrongly to God's general revelation just as was done by the 'Deutsche Christen.' But the 'Deutsche Christen' appealed to God's general revelation while Hitler's activity in many areas conflicted sharply with the confession of Christ's rule, which can only be known from Holy Scripture. Though Scripture is not a universal guide (*dux*) in that it does not dictate all our decisions (Should we abolish slavery and colonialism? Should we choose democracy above aristocracy?), it is however, judge (*iudex*). God's guidance in history does not contradict his revelation in the Scriptures.

Thus, the Bible is not our only guide in ethics, we also have to use our intellect. Calvin distinguished between a *ratio ingenita* (which all people possess by nature), a *ratio vitiosa* (resulting from man's corruption), and a *tertia ratio* (which is led by the Word and Spirit).

Scriptures are also *iudex* with respect to new and revolutionary discoveries (e.g. *in vitro* fertilization, genetic manipulation) and warn us against irresponsible activity in these fields (e.g. where IVF involves the selection and destruction of embryos or the use of sperm and eggs from or for those outside the marriage covenant). But the Bible does more than just condemn as *iudex* certain wrong applications of modern developments. It also functions as a *signpost*, pointing out the direction we should take in questions such as: May man create new animal species or re-create humankind? Who is man? What is his purpose? Lines or themes through-

out Scripture help us in such questions more than specific texts.

3. In our personal lives we often have to make far-reaching decisions without the benefit of an explicit command from God (marriage, profession, etc.). Does the Holy Spirit come with another message *besides* that of Scripture for our ethical reflection? When a person calls others to submit to the will of the Holy Spirit, we may ask for the legitimization of that call (otherwise we would fall into mysticism). In this respect we say that the Holy Spirit works *per verbum* and not *extra et praeter verbum*. In all ethical reflection, an appeal to the Holy Spirit must be verifiable according to the *analogia fidei* (Rom. 12:3, 1 Cor. 14:29). The Bible continues to function as *iudex*, even where it is not a guide.

But in the concrete decisions we have to make without the benefit of an explicit directive from the Bible we say that the Holy Spirit works *cum verbo*. It is possible to say that we, being led by the Holy Spirit, act in the spirit of the Holy Scriptures. Thereby we follow biblical signposts, such as the imitation of Christ. To a large degree, the Scriptures receive in this way the character of *example*, model, or type.

Conclusion: We are able to appeal to the Holy Scriptures for the knowledge of God's will for our time. This appeal can take different forms. The Bible acts as a *guide*, straightforwardly commanding and prohibiting; as *judge*, not dictating every action, though judging them on the basis of their fruit; as a *signpost*, telling us who we are, and how to follow Christ; as a giver of *examples*, not to copy, but to follow.

RÉSUMÉ

I. *Pourquoi nous servir de l'Écriture en éthique?* Afin d'apprendre la volonté de Dieu. Je défends ma position en faveur de la théorie du commandement divin (en réalité plus une confession qu'une 'théorie') contre les trois objections suivantes:

(1) Désigner la volonté de Dieu comme le bien conduit à une obéissance aveugle;

(2) La théorie du commandement divin se contredit elle-même, parce que le concept du bien précède toujours logiquement le concept de Dieu;

(3) Le véritable sens moral présuppose l'autonomie et non l'hétéronomie.

En réponse à ces objections:

(1) L'obéissance aveugle consiste à faire ce que demande M. X uniquement parce que M. X le souhaite. Mais la situation change si M. X est mon père, et elle change totalement s'il est mon

père céleste qui m'a sauvé la vie par Jésus-Christ. Dans ce dernier cas, il est correct de dire que ce qui 'est' mène à ce qui 'doit être'.

(2) Pour beaucoup, la connaissance du bien précède *noétiquement* la connaissance de Dieu, mais *ontologiquement* 'Dieu' précède pourtant, en tant que créateur de l'ordre moral, le 'bien'. Les notions de bien et de mal existent partout, fruits de la révélation générale de Dieu (Rm 2.14s). Bien que certains puissent considérer qu'ontologiquement Dieu n'a rien à voir avec le sens moral, le sens moral a son origine en Dieu. Donc on peut toujours soutenir que le bien est bien parce que Dieu le veut.

(3) Un choix moral doit procéder d'un cœur sincère. La Bible nous fait apparaître clairement comme des êtres humains adultes, que Dieu prend au sérieux comme ses partenaires dans l'alliance. Bien que nous ne soyons pas autonomes, nous sommes auto-mobiles. La véritable

liberté est attentive à la loi, car elle sait que la loi a pour fin la sauvegarde de la liberté. Cette relation entre le 'bien' comme ce que Dieu veut et la 'liberté' permet de reconnaître en beaucoup d'actions morales (non pas en toutes, cependant) des actions 'rationnelles'. Tite 2.11-14 démontre que le style de vie chrétien n'a pas surgi dans le monde hellénistique *ex nihilo* en employant trois mots fort en honneur dans la morale païenne: la tempérance, la justice, la piété. Pour le chrétien, cependant, il y a un principe directeur qui donne un visage unique à une conduite qui ne se distinguerait pas, autrement, des normes communes. Bien plus, la nouvelle direction imprimée au style de vie du chrétien aboutit à une conduite différente, qui le distingue alors extérieurement des non-chrétiens. Pour la connaissance de la volonté de Dieu, nous sommes essentiellement dépendants des Écritures.

II. *Comment* nous servir de l'Écriture en éthique? Le recours à l'Écriture présente un certain nombre de difficultés:

(1) L'histoire du salut: la volonté de Dieu dans le passé n'est pas nécessairement la volonté de Dieu pour aujourd'hui (les cérémonies de l'Ancien Testament, le sabbat, etc.);

(2) L'histoire séculière: éléments variables dans les structures sociales (par exemple, l'esclavage, l'égalité des salaires, la peine capitale) et découvertes révolutionnaires (par exemple, les armes nucléaires, la fécondation *in vitro*) nous obligent à prendre de nouvelles décisions morales;

(3) L'histoire personnelle: la volonté de Dieu pour une personne n'est pas nécessairement sa volonté pour une autre.

Remarquons, en outre, que les apôtres ne se sont pas contentés de répéter 'Il est écrit'. Ils ont tiré argument de certains thèmes, tel celui de l'imitation du Christ, et ils ont mis l'accent sur la maturité du chrétien s'exerçant dans le discernement du bien et du mal.

Pourtant, les difficultés attachées au recours à l'Écriture en éthique ne doivent pas être exagérées; dans de nombreux cas, la difficulté n'existe pas. En ce qui concerne les difficultés mentionnées, je remarque:

(1) Pour l'Ancien Testament, nous devons partir du fait que Jésus est venu (non pour abolir mais) pour accomplir la loi et les prophètes. *Plêroô* veut dire que la loi et les prophètes qui n'étaient pas accomplis (pleins) sont 'remplis' par Jésus. Des iotas et traits de lettres disparaissent, cependant, de la loi si nous rendons vain le commandement 'Tu ne tueras point' lorsque nous sommes en colère contre notre frère. Iotas et traits de lettres

disparaissent aussi si nous ne tenons pas compte l'enseignement du Christ et continuons à justifier le divorce sur la base de Deutéronome 24. Nous devons éviter le Scylla de l'abolition de la loi ('le quatrième commandement n'est plus en vigueur') et le Charybde du légalisme ('le quatrième commandement doit être observé de la même manière qu'en Israël').

(2) Dire que 'nous vivons après le Christ', ou 'ne sommes pas l'ancien Israël', n'est pas suffisant. Le monde a évolué pendant les deux mille ans qui se sont écoulés depuis Jésus-Christ et il est impossible de retourner à une époque où la vengeance du sang, l'esclavage, et la torture, étaient choses courantes. Mais comment pouvons nous savoir si de tels développements 'évidents' sont également de 'bons' développements? Puisque de bons jugements et des actions justes se *présentent* eux-mêmes comme tels à l'humanité, je discerne dans leur *présence* ou présentation l'oeuvre de Dieu et de son Esprit dans sa révélation générale. Il est certain qu'on peut invoquer à tort le révélation générale de Dieu, comme l'ont fait les 'Deutsche Christen'. Mais les 'Deutsche Christen' invoquaient la révélation générale de Dieu alors que l'action de Hitler dans de nombreux domaines était en contradiction totale avec la confession de règne du Christ, qui ne peut être connu que par l'Écriture Sainte. Bien que l'Écriture ne soit pas un guide (*dux*) universel, en ce sens qu'elle ne dicte pas toutes nos décisions (Devrions nous abolir l'esclavage et le colonialisme? Préférer la démocratie à l'aristocratie?), elle est néanmoins un juge (*iudex*). La direction de Dieu dans l'histoire ne contredit pas sa révélation dans les Écritures.

Ainsi la Bible n'est pas notre seul guide en éthique; nous devons aussi faire appel à notre intelligence. Calvin distinguait entre la *ratio ingenerita* (que chacun possède par nature), la *ratio vitiosa* (résultant de la corruption de l'homme), et une *tertia ratio* (que est conduite par le Parole et l'Esprit).

Les Écritures sont également *iudex* quant aux innovations révolutionnaires (la fécondation *in vitro*, les manipulations génétiques...), et nous mettent en garde contre une activité irresponsable dans ces domaines (par exemple, là où la fécondation *in vitro* implique la sélection et la destruction d'embryons, ou l'emploi de sperme et d'ovules provenant de personnes non-liées par le mariage, ou destinés à de telles personnes). Mais la Bible fait plus que condamner en tant que *iudex* certaines applications perverses des développements modernes. Elle fonctionne également comme un *poteau indicateur* signalant la direction à prendre devant des

questions telles que: Peut-on créer de nouvelles espèces animales ou re-crée le genre humain? Qu'est-ce que l'homme? Quel sens a son existence? De grandes lignes ou des thèmes à travers l'Écriture nous aident ici davantage que des textes spécifiques.

(3) Dans notre vie personnelle, nous avons souvent à prendre des décisions d'une grande portée sans l'aide d'un commandement explicite de Dieu (mariage, profession, etc.). Le Saint-Esprit apporte-t-il à notre réflexion éthique un autre message, *en plus* de celui de l'Écriture? Quand une personne en appelle d'autres à se soumettre au Saint-Esprit, nous pouvons demander ce qui légitime cet appel (sans quoi nous tomberions dans le mysticisme). A cet égard, nous disons que le Saint-Esprit oeuvre *per verbum* et non *extra et praeter verbum*. Dans toute réflexion éthique, il faut toujours vérifier si l'attribution au Saint-Esprit s'accorde avec l'*analogia fidei* (Rm 12.3; 1 Co 14.29). La Bible continue à fonctionner comme *iudex* là même où elle n'est pas un guide.

Mais dans les décisions concrètes que nous devons prendre sans le bénéfice d'une directive explicite de la Bible, nous disons que le Saint-Esprit oeuvre *cum verbo*. Il est possible de dire que, poussés par le Saint-Esprit, nous agissons dans l'esprit des Saintes Écritures. De cette façon, nous suivons les indicateurs bibliques comme l'imitation du Christ. Dans une large mesure, l'Écriture revêt ainsi le caractère d'*exemple*, de modèle ou de type.

Conclusion: Nous sommes à même de faire appel à l'Écriture Sainte pour connaître la volonté de Dieu aujourd'hui. Ce recours peut prendre différentes formes. La Bible opère comme *guide*, prescrivant et interdisant de façon directe; comme *juge*, ne dictant pas toutes les actions, mais les jugeant d'après leurs fruits; comme *poteau indicateur*, nous apprenant qui nous sommes et comment suivre Jésus-Christ; comme pourvoyeur d'*exemples*, non pas à copier, mais à suivre.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

I. Warum sollen wir in der Ethik von der Schrift überhaupt Gebrauch machen? Um den Willen Gottes zu erkennen. Ich verteidige hier meine Position, nämlich die Bejahung der Theorie des göttlichen Gebotes' (eigentlich eher ein Bekenntnis als eine Theorie) gegen die folgenden drei Einwände:

1. Die Forderung, Gottes Willen als gut zu bezeichnen, führe zu blindem Gehorsam.

2. Die Theorie des göttlichen Gebotes sei in sich widersprüchlich, da der Vorstellung vom Guten die Vorstellung von Gott logischerweise immer vorausgehe.

3. Echte Ethik setze Autonomie, nicht Heteronomie voraus.

Die Antwort auf diese Einwände:

1. Es ist wohl blinder Gehorsam, das zu tun, was Herr X fordert, nur weil Herr X es so wünscht. Aber die Situation wird eine andere, wenn Herr X mein Vater ist und wiederum eine andere, wenn er mein himmlischer Vater ist, der mich durch Jesus Christus errettet hat.

2. Für viele geht die Erkenntnis des Guten die Erkenntnis Gottes aus noetischer Sicht voraus, aber aus ontologischer Sicht geht Gott als Schöpfer der Moralordnung immer noch dem Guten voraus. Vorstellungen von 'gut und böse' gibt es aufgrund der allgemeinen Offenbarung Gottes (Röm.2,14ff) überall. Obwohl es aus ontologischer Sicht möglich ist, Gott hinsichtlich der Moralität für irrelevant zu halten, hat die Moralität jedoch ihren Ursprung in Gott. Deshalb kann man

zurecht behaupten, daß das Gute deshalb gut sei, weil Gott es so will.

3. Eine moralische Entscheidung muß eine Entscheidung sein, die von ganzem Herzen kommt. Die Bibel macht deutlich, daß wir mündige Menschen sind, die als Bündnispartner ernstgenommen werden. Obwohl nicht autonom, sind wir doch auto-mobil. Echte Freiheit hört auf das Gesetz, weil sie weiß, daß das Gesetz die Freiheit erhalten soll. Diese Beziehung zwischen dem 'Guten' als Gottes Willen und der 'Freiheit' ermöglicht es, viele (allerdings nicht alle) moralische Handlungen als 'rationale' Handlungen anzuerkennen. Der Gebrauch von drei, auch in der heidnischen Moralität geläufigen Begriffen in Titus 2,11-14 — züchtig, gerecht und gottselig — beweist, daß der christliche Lebenswandel in der hellenistischen Welt nicht aus dem Nichts entstanden ist. Für den Christen gibt es jedoch eine Richtschnur, die dieses ansonsten nicht unterschiedene Verhalten nach einem erkennbaren Muster ordnet. Weiterhin führt diese neue Richtung, die der christliche Lebenswandel bekommt, auch zu einem bestimmten Verhalten, das ihn daher vom Nichtchristen auch äußerlich unterscheidet. Um den Willen Gottes zu erkennen, sind wir vor allem auf die Schrift angewiesen.

II. Wie sollen wir die Schrift in der Ethik gebrauchen? Die Berufung auf die Schrift stellt uns vor verschiedene Schwierigkeiten:

1. bezüglich der Heilsgeschichte: Der Wille Gottes in der Vergangenheit ist nicht notwendig

der Wille Gottes für heute (alttestamentliche Riten, der Sabbat, etc.).

2. bezüglich der Weltgeschichte: Veränderte Sozialstrukturen (z.B. Sklaverei, gleiche Bezahlung für gleiche Arbeit, Todesstrafe) und revolutionäre Entdeckungen (z.B. Atomwaffen, künstliche Befruchtung) zwingen uns zu neuen ethischen Entscheidungen.

3. bezüglich der persönlichen Geschichte: Der Wille Gottes für den Einen ist nicht notwendig sein Wille für den anderen.

Weiterhin stellen wir fest, daß die Apostel mehr taten, als nur zu wiederholen 'es steht geschrieben'. Sie argumentierten von bestimmten Leitmotiven her, z.B. der Nachfolge Christi, und betonten die Fähigkeit des mündigen Christen, zwischen Gut und Böse zu unterscheiden.

Die mit dem Verweis auf die Schrift verbundenen Schwierigkeiten in ethischen Fragen sollten jedoch nicht überbetont werden, denn viele Situationen sind unproblematisch. Aber in Bezug auf die schon genannten Schwierigkeiten mache ich folgende Feststellungen:

1. In Bezug auf das AT müssen wir von der Tatsache ausgehen, daß Jesus nicht gekommen ist, um das Gesetz und die Propheten aufzulösen, sondern um sie zu erfüllen. *πληρωω* bedeutet, daß das Gesetz und die Propheten, die unvollendet waren, ihre Vollendung in Jesus finden würden. Wenn wir das Gebot 'Du sollst nicht töten' dadurch entmachten, daß wir uns über unseren Bruder ärgern, vergeht selbst der kleinste Buchstabe und das letzte Tüpfelchen vom Gesetz. Buchstabe und Tüpfelchen vergehen ebenso, wenn wir die Weisungen Jesu mißachten und die Ehescheidung weiterhin auf der Grundlage von 5.Mose 24 rechtfertigen. Wir müssen sowohl die Scylla der Aufhebung des Gesetzes (das 4.Gebot gilt nicht mehr) als auch die Charybdis der Gesetzlichkeit (das 4.Gebot muß heute genauso gelten wie damals in Israel) umschiffen.

2. Es genügt nicht zu behaupten: 'wir leben in der Zeit nach Christus', oder: 'wir sind nicht das alte Israel'. Die Welt hat sich in den letzten 2000 Jahren seit Christus weiterentwickelt, und die Rückkehr in eine Zeit der Blutrache, der Sklaverei und der Folter u.s.w. ist völlig ausgeschlossen. Aber woher wissen wir, ob solche offensichtlichen Entwicklungen auch gute Entwicklungen sind? Weil gute Entscheidungen und richtige Handlungen sich der Menschheit auch als solche erweisen, sehe ich darin das Wirken Gottes und seines Geistes in der allgemeinen Offenbarung. Natürlich kann man sich auch fälschlicherweise auf die allgemeine göttliche Offenbarung berufen, wie es z.B. die 'Deutschen Christen' taten. Die 'Deutschen Christen' beriefen sich jedoch auf die allgemeine Offenbarung Gottes,

obwohl viele Handlungen Hitlers im scharfen Widerspruch zum Bekenntnis zur Herrschaft Christi standen, die man nur aus der Heiligen Schrift erkennen kann. Obwohl die Schrift keine universelle Führung (*dux*) anbietet, da sie nicht alle unseren Entscheidungen diktiert (z.B. sollten wir die Sklaverei und den Kolonialismus abschaffen? Sollten wir der Demokratie gegenüber der Aristokratie den Vorzug geben?), so ist sie doch unser Richter (*iudex*). Die Führungen Gottes in der Geschichte widersprechen nicht seiner Offenbarung in der Schrift.

Infolgedessen ist die Bibel nicht unsere einzige Orientierung in der Ethik, sondern wir müssen auch von unserem Verstand Gebrauch machen. Calvin unterschied zwischen der *ratio ingenita* (die allen Menschen angeboren ist), einer *ratio vitiosa* (das Ergebnis der menschlichen Verdorbenheit) und einer *tertia ratio* (bestimmt durch das Wort und den Geist).

Die Schrift ist auch *iudex* hinsichtlich neuer und revolutionärer Entwicklungen (z.B. künstlicher Befruchtung, Gentechnik) und warnt vor unverantwortlichem Handeln in diesen Bereichen (z.B. wo die künstliche Befruchtung mit dem Selektieren und Zerstören von Embryonen verbunden ist; oder wenn Samen und Eier von Spendern stammen oder in Menschen eingepflanzt werden, die außerhalb des Ehebundes stehen). Aber die Bibel verurteilt nicht nur als *iudex* bestimmte falsche Anwendungen moderner Entwicklungen. Sie hat auch die Funktion eines Wegweisers, sie zeigt die Richtung an, die wir bei folgenden Fragen einschlagen sollen: Darf der Mensch neue Tiergattungen erschaffen oder die Menschheit neu schaffen? Wer ist der Mensch? Wozu lebt er eigentlich? Allgemeine Richtungen und Tendenzen in der ganzen Schrift sind bei solchen Fragestellungen hilfreicher als einzelne Bibelstellen.

3. Im persönlichen Bereich müssen wir oft ohne ein ausdrückliches Gebot Gottes (Ehe, Beruf, usw.) weitreichende Entscheidungen treffen. Gibt uns der Heilige Geist für unsere ethischen Überlegungen eine zusätzliche Botschaft neben der Schrift? Wenn jemand andere dazu auffordert, sich dem Willen des Heiligen Geistes zu beugen, dürfen wir eine Begründung dieser Aufforderung verlangen (sonst würden wir in Mystizismus verfallen). Hinsichtlich dieser Frage betonen wir, daß der Heilige Geist *per verbum* und nicht *extra et praeter verbum* handelt. In allen ethischen Überlegungen muß die Berufung auf den Heiligen Geist nach der *analogia fidei* (Röm.12,3; 1.Kor.14,29) überprüfbar sein. Die Bibel übt auch dann die Funktion als *iudex* aus, wenn sie keine Führung anbietet.

Aber in den konkreten Entscheidungen, die wir

ohne die Hilfe eines ausdrücklichen Befehls der Bibel treffen müssen, sagen wir, daß der Heilige Geist *cum verbo* wirke. Es ist erlaubt zu behaupten, daß wir — geführt vom Heiligen Geist — im Geiste der Heiligen Schrift handeln. Dabei folgen wir biblischen Wegweisern, wie z.B. der Nachfolge Christi. Zu einem großen Teil bekommt die Schrift dadurch die Funktion eines Vorbildes, Modells oder Typus'.

Schlußfolgerung: Wir dürfen uns in der Frage nach Gottes Willen für unsere Zeit auf die Schrift

berufen. Diese Berufung kann verschiedene Formen annehmen. Die Bibel gibt Führung, indem sie schlicht Gebote und Verbote ausspricht; sie ist Richter, nicht indem sie jede Handlung vorschreibt, sondern diese Handlungen aufgrund ihrer Früchte beurteilt; sie ist Wegweiser, indem sie uns zeigt, wer wir sind, und wie wir Christus nachfolgen können; sie gibt uns Beispiele, nicht um sie nachzuahmen, sondern um nachzufolgen.

WHY AND HOW SHOULD WE USE SCRIPTURE IN ETHICS?

Defining the Problem

By 'ethics' I mean man's reflection on responsible behaviour towards God and his neighbour in terms of good and bad.¹ But the question arises as to what makes something 'good' or 'bad.' What criterion are we to use?

I maintain that our criterion is the will of God. In the philosophy of ethics, this position is known as the Divine Command Theory. An act is right because and only because it is commanded by God. Something is 'good' because God so wills it. When this is true, we are dependent on God's revelation, particularly the Scriptures, for our knowledge of good and bad.

But is the Divine Command Theory coherent? Anyone slightly acquainted with the discussion revolving around this theory will be aware that the so-called Eutyphro-dilemma is constantly brought to the fore: Is something good because God commands it or does he command it because it is good?² The possible choices here have very different consequences. If God commands something only because it is good, then it is implied that what is good is good independently, whether God commands it or not. And if good exists independently, apart from God's will, then why couldn't it be known independently, apart from God's revelation? The appeal to Scripture, in that case, would not be of determinative importance for ethics. We would be able to determine good and bad by deliberating among ourselves, without the criterion of God's will, the Scriptures.

The first problem that I would like to discuss is my choice for the Divine Command Theory in order to answer the question of why we should use Scripture in ethics. For it is on the basis of this choice that I conclude that the appeal to Scripture is essential for Christian ethics.

But that raises a second problem: If God's will is the criterion for determining good and bad, and this will is revealed to us in the Scriptures, then in what way or how am I to appeal to the Scriptures in my ethical reflections? Not all that was once God's will is still God's will. Consequently I need to distinguish in the Bible between what yet and what no longer pertains to God's will. This will engage us in the second question: How should we use Scripture in ethics?

I. WHY SHOULD WE USE SCRIPTURE IN ETHICS?

Criticisms of the Divine Command Theory

First, my choice for the Divine Command Theory. Several serious objections to this theory have been raised. I mention the following points:

1. The requirement to designate what God wills as good leads to *blind obedience*. Good and bad become arbitrary labels dependent simply upon a command or prohibition of God. This is no longer morality, at most it is prudence. It may be prudent at times to obey another's will in order to avoid catastrophic consequences. We can pay money, for example, to kidnappers and thieves in order to save a family member that is being held hostage. In the same way

a believer also can obey God's will, not because he sees that what God wills is good, but because he wants to escape hell and damnation. Such obedience to God's will is arbitrary because it is blind obedience. God says that something is good, and the believer follows without any interest as to why it is good.

2. The Divine Command Theory is *self contradictory*. The concept of good, it is said, always logically precedes the concept of God. Otherwise we would never be able to call God good. Whoever says someone or something is good already has a concept of good, for it is on the basis of that concept that he makes such a judgment. Biblical examples are sometimes used to demonstrate this. When God in Exodus 34:6 reveals that he as Yahweh is faithful and keeps his promises, then this revelation presupposes that those who listen to God know what faithfulness is. Contact with God, then, already presupposes a moral cadre. You have a moral position even before you begin with theology. The Divine Command Theory digs its own grave.³

3. The *starting point* of the Divine Command Theory is inappropriate. This has already come to light in the first objection: Nothing can ever be called moral if I do not sincerely subscribe to it myself. Real morality presupposes that I, and not another, even if it be God, must determine what I ought to do; for the issue at stake is the purity of my moral motivation.⁴ Not obedience to anything outside oneself *i.e.* heteronomy, but *autonomy* is the key word for ethics. When we are convinced that a certain action X is immoral, then *God* cannot will it. In other words the assertion that God does in fact will action X can add nothing essential to the moral action. God may, however, be seen as the keeper, guardian, and maintainer of morality.⁵

My Reply

The objections to the Divine Command theory are actually less impressive than they appear. My opposition to the objections is as follows:

1. It is indeed blind obedience when we do what Mr X wants just because Mr X wishes it. But it is a different situation when Mr X is my father whom I love. Suppose that he

were to ask me to do something which I may not do, my refusal of his request would be more difficult than had he been a total stranger to me. Outside the institution of the family, the fact that this is the man who begat me would not have the moral significance that it has within the family. Because of this one can say: 'Remember, he is your father.' That means you ought to give special consideration to your father, since to understand what is meant by calling someone your father, is to understand that one has certain obligations towards him.⁶ *In general* it is correct to say that an 'is' does not result in an 'ought.' But the statement 'He is my father' does result in duties, more than the statement 'He is Mr X, totally unknown to me.' If this already applies to: 'he is my father,' how much more shouldn't it apply to: 'He is my Heavenly Father, who saved my life through Jesus Christ'? Doesn't this 'is' result in an 'ought'?⁷ How would obedience be blind obedience in that case? Good and bad are not arbitrary labels when they are bound to the will of this God.

2. It is true that moral concepts always precede the judgments we make, where we say, for example, that X is good, trustworthy, *etc.* But must we conclude therefore that the concept of good logically precedes the concept of God? Indeed, for many the knowledge of what is good often precedes *noetically* their knowledge of God, but *ontologically* 'God' can still precede 'good.' We believe that God who is creator of all things, also determined what is good and what is bad. He is the creator of a moral order. That which is good has no intrinsic worth apart from God.

Because of this it is evident that what is good is good because God has so willed it. Good is not something higher than God. According to Plato, in his dialogue *Eutypbro*, God is only the demiurge, while the highest idea is that of good. But in the Christian morality. He is also its source.

That people who do not know God have knowledge of good and evil is manifest in the Bible. The Christian house rules (Eph. 6:1ff.; Col. 3:18ff.; *etc.*) and the résumé of Christian virtues (*e.g.* Gal. 5:22; Col. 3:12) contain elements also found in pagan morality. Christian behavior was not so alien to the heathen of Paul's day that they could have

no appreciation for it. On the contrary, Christian behaviour could impress them because they knew what 'good,' 'virtue,' 'decorous,' *etc.* meant. Paul says governments are called to punish evil and to praise good (Rom. 13:3). These (pagan) governments were (and are) evidently able to distinguish between good and bad.

But that does not prove that knowledge of good and bad is independent of God. It is true, non-Christians possess this knowledge of good and bad without knowledge of God from the Scriptures. But though this is true noetically, ontologically the situation is different. Their knowledge is not independent of God. Notions of good and bad exist everywhere as a result of God's general revelation. Romans 2:14f. presupposes that it is God who writes the 'work of the law' in the hearts of non-Christians. Noetically, this knowledge can be experienced as independent of God. For people it is possible that God is irrelevant for morality. But ontologically, morality originates in God, so that it is entirely maintainable that that which is good is so because God wills it.

3. Obedience to God certainly does not correspond to autonomy in the strict sense of the word. We are not a law (*νομος*) to ourselves (*αὐτος*). Autonomy and theonomy are mutually exclusive. If, however, one wishes to express with the term autonomy that something is only wholly moral for me when I myself am in complete accord with it – that applies also for Christian morals. A moral choice must indeed be a choice made whole-heartedly. I must be able to call that choice *my* choice. Paul names both of these aspects in one breath: We must as slaves of Christ do the will of God from the heart (Eph. 6:6). In Christian ethics this 'doing from the heart' is taken most seriously since constant reflection is necessary in order to understand the will of God. We don't have all the answers ready. We must *prove* what the will of the Lord is (Eph. 5:10), and *try* to understand that will (Eph. 5:17). We must learn to discern what is best (Phil. 1:10). Prayer is necessary in order to be filled with the proper knowledge of God's will (Col. 1:9). Such texts make it clear that we are treated as full-fledged human beings who, having been placed in a covenant position

with God, are taken seriously as covenant partners. Alas, Christians are often divided as to what God's will precisely is; but no division is necessary when it comes to the fact that it is the *honour* of the Christian to *learn* to understand the will of God. Much less has been regulated for him than for Israel in the Old Covenant. The law had *been* a schoolmaster to lead to Christ; we have come of age (Gal. 3:24ff). In this maturity, the Christian is led by the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:11, John 14:26, 2 Cor. 13:13, 1 Thess. 4:8, 5:19ff).

This also has consequences for our ethical reflection. We are not autonomous, but we are auto-mobile, in the sense that we bring ourselves into motion,⁸ and make ourselves think in order to discover the will of God. A Christian believes that alliance with God's will in fact guarantees his freedom. True freedom listens to the law. The preamble to the Decalogue makes this perfectly clear. It is in light of the preamble that the commandments receive their special character. They follow liberation from Egyptian slavery, and they are indispensable for *preserving* the freedom of the liberated.

There is, therefore, a relationship between 'good,' as that which God wills, and our freedom. This relationship makes it possible to recognize many moral actions as 'rational' actions for myself, and to defend them as such before others. Yet that is not always possible, and precisely there it becomes clear how important it is to hold fast the conviction that something is good because God wills it. It can be hard for a Christian to see the reasonableness of limiting sexual intercourse to marriage (Gen. 2:24, 1 Cor. 7:9). He may find it difficult to see the rationale of prohibiting homosexual intercourse among homosexually orientated people on the basis of, for example, Romans 1:26.⁹ The leadership role of the husband in relation to his wife can appear unreasonable to him, even though Paul has based this in creation (1 Tim. 2:11ff). Whoever has difficulty with these biblical statements and commandments, can nevertheless continue to believe in the goodness of these statements and commandments, because that is what God wills. What I am not able to justify for myself and others as good, I accept as good with confidence. A

thing is good because God wills it. I know him as the God and Father of Jesus Christ, and that's why I don't need to doubt that what he says and commands is good, even though I may not always be able to fathom the rationality thereof.

A Distinctive Christian Morality

We can openly recognize that Christians and non-Christians have, to a certain degree, a common knowledge of good and bad. Abimelech of Gerar is able to call himself the king of a righteous people (Gen. 20:4). The apostle Paul can confidently entrust his case to the judge Felix (Acts 24:10). On his way to Rome, he was treated courteously by the administrator Julius (Acts 27:3), while Publius, the chief official of the island of Malta, demonstrated that he knew what hospitality was by his treatment of Paul and the others with him (Acts 28:7). They were all pagans, but that doesn't mean that their uprightness and sincere assistance can only be qualified negatively. What we call the Christian life-style didn't appear in the Hellenistic world as a *creatio ex nihilo*.

Yet, no matter how frankly we admit this, and no matter how important this is for the possibility and necessity of cooperation between Christians and non-Christians – this recognition may not close our eyes to another reality, namely, that the character of obedience to God's will is such as to also *divide* across the whole board into Christian and non-Christian action. Even if we suppose for a moment that a Christian and a non-Christian were to exhibit the same external behavior, that of the Christian would still present a different picture. Let me illustrate this by the workings of a *magnet*. To our eyes, individual iron filings look alike and have nothing distinctive in themselves (our behavior), but notice how the magnet organizes them into a distinct pattern (the picture). The framework within which the Christian carries out his actions is totally different. Titus 2:11–14 illustrates this beautifully with three words utilized also by pagan morality: moderation, uprightness, godliness. This was the noble pagan morality in a nutshell. But for the Christian, there is also a magnet which arranges these otherwise

similar iron filings into a distinctive pattern. Paul asks for a moderate, upright, and godly life on the basis of the appearance of God's grace which brings salvation to all men, and because we await the appearance of Christ himself. The Christian life is rooted between remembrance of this past event and this expectation for the future.

We can live according to the will of God or according to the will of pagans (1 Pet. 4:2f); we can follow the lusts of the world or do the will of God (1 John 2:16f). Whoever makes the Christian choice knows that that which is good is good because God wills it. We must not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind, that we may prove what God's will is – that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:2). In the philosophy of ethics it may still look as if the knowledge of good and evil is universal, so that by mutual deliberation it would be possible to arrive at a proper course of action. But in Christian ethics we are dependent upon the will of God for the knowledge of what is *genuinely* good.

We are able to speak of a *Christian life-style*. The new direction given to the Christian's life-style does in fact lead to external actions which distinguish him from a non-Christian. Consider, for example, his expression of gratitude to God in reading the Scriptures, in song and prayer, and in Sunday observance. A Christian will not use the name of God vainly, but reverently. He will honor the bounds given him in the Scriptures concerning marriage and sexuality. He or she will not terminate an undesired pregnancy by an abortion. Love for God and love for his fellow man will set him apart from others. This is what Paul means when he says that a Christian is 'totally different' because he has come to know Christ. A Christian must not lie, lose control in anger, steal, or bring down others; he must have nothing to do with sexual immorality, coarse language, or drunkenness (Eph. 4:25–5:21). Christian morals do exist next to non-Christian morals. I am convinced that this is just as true today as it was in the days of the early Christian church.

Conclusions

1. The Divine Command Theory (actually more of a confession of faith than a 'theory') can be maintained, since it does not require blind obedience, is not self contradictory, and because God allows us, (though not as autonomous, but just the same) as free, full-fledged humans, to make moral choices.

2. Our life is defined by the doing of God's will, which has made known to us what good is. Therein we follow the footsteps of Christ, whose food was to do the will of him who had sent him (John 4:34; cf. Matt. 26:42, Luke 22:42, Heb. 10:7ff.). Whoever does the will of the Father will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 7:21; cf. 50, Mark 3:35). The knowledge of the will of God changes people, internally as well as externally. We are able to speak of Christian morals in distinction to non-Christian morals.

3. We are dependent upon the knowledge of God's will for the knowledge of what is good. And for the knowledge of God's will we are dependent first of all upon the knowledge of the Scriptures.

II. HOW SHOULD WE USE SCRIPTURE IN ETHICS?

Difficulties with the Appeal to Scripture

So then, we are dependent on the Scriptures for the knowledge of good and bad. But *how* are we supposed to use the Scriptures? That is not always an easy matter, especially in view of the following difficulties:

1. God's will in the past is not necessarily his will for today. The Old Testament is full of regulations concerning the temple service with its sacrifices which we no longer practice. We believe that these sacrifices were fulfilled by Christ's shed blood. No Christian has any problem saying that all kinds of *ceremonial* rituals have been fulfilled in Christ and therefore no longer need to be practiced. In such a way we recognize the progression that exists in the History of Salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*). Yet difficulties arise here: Not only the blood sacrifices, but also the celebration of the Sabbath is reckoned as ceremonial. But does the fulfilling of the Sabbath in Christ mean that the Fourth

Commandment is no longer in effect? Or may we say that the Sunday has taken the place of the Sabbath?

2. God's will regarding established structures, such as authority, respect for life, marriage, economic and legal systems, has variable elements as well as constant elements. Men and women, parents and children, governments and citizens, relate to each other very differently from the way they did in biblical times. Slavery, circumscribed but not condemned in the Bible, is today considered as evil. Fathers gave their daughters in marriage (1 Cor. 7:36ff.). The Israelite was required to tithe. Equal pay for the same work was not always regarded as necessary (Matt. 20:12ff.). The death penalty was required for more than 15 offences in the Mosaic law code, while many Christians object to capital punishment even for murder (Gen. 9:4). Even good kings, like David, had no qualms about torture (2 Sam. 12:31), while we consider such to be in conflict with human rights. *Etc., etc.*

In addition to these historical developments, revolutionary discoveries are being made which place us before new ethical decisions. Let me name, for example, the transition from conventional forces to nuclear forces, space travel, *in vitro* fertilization and DNA research. How is the Bible a lamp for our feet in these areas?

The advance of Salvation History within Scripture is not in discussion here as in our first point, but the advance of our own secular history. But what must we still accept as normative (according to Scripture) and what can we regard as variable, without being in conflict with Scripture?

3. What God's will is for one person, is not necessarily God's will for another. That was already so in biblical times. Paul wishes that everyone could be like him (celibate); but, he concedes, each person has his own special gift, whether it be for this or that (1 Cor. 7:7). One may be called to be a slave, but one may also take advantage of the possibilities there are for becoming free (1 Cor. 7:21). In our pluralistic and strongly individualistic societies, the differences, as for example in choice of profession, will be more marked than in Paul's day. Marriage, profession and other personal decisions have

such far-reaching effects on our lives, that we are unable to regard them as *adiaphora*. But a direct appeal to the Bible for such matters concerning our *personal history* is impossible. How are we to discover the will of God for such personal decisions, and how does the appeal to Scripture function thereby? God's will for an individual is coupled to the situation of others. If eating food offered to idols causes problems in the congregation, then one has to take that into account. This aspect is of such immense importance in the New Testament that we can legitimately speak of a *koinonia*-ethic. The church is the communion of the saints, and must form one body. The gifts which we have received must be used in love (1 Cor. 13) and for the edification of the congregation (1 Cor. 14:12).

When we look at these three points together, we find that there is always an historical factor which will often make the discovery of God's will for our present-day action more complex.

More than an Appeal to Texts

Before I discuss these three points further, I would like to direct our attention to another matter first. Undoubtedly, the apostles also had to deal with the aforesaid historical factor. What was God's will for the new situation in which Gentiles were being admitted to the congregation of Christ (Acts 10, 15)? How were they to assess circumcision and other Jewish practices (Acts 16:3 and Gal. 2, Col. 2:16ff)? What was to be done regarding government (Rom. 13:1ff) and such matters as marriage, divorce, slavery, and the eating of food offered to pagan gods (1 Cor. 7)?

We observe that regularly they appealed to the Scriptures for their answers. They defend the toppling of the wall between Gentiles and Jews by an appeal to the Scriptures (Rom. 4, 9–11, Gal. 3), and not as a departure from the 'holy law' and 'the holy, just and good commandment' (Rom. 7:12). That is in perfect harmony with what Jesus had said: I have not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfil them (Matt. 5:17ff). The apostles appeal to the Scriptures not only for dogmatic teaching, but also for ethical instruction. A few examples of this

are: Whoever takes revenge forgets that it is written: Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord (Rom. 12:19). A gross sin must be put out of the congregation of Corinth on the grounds of several arguments, the last of which is taken from the Old Testament: Expel the wicked man from among you (1 Cor. 5:13). Exhortations to liberality are also grounded in an 'as it is written' (2 Cor. 8:15, 9:9). Not only Jesus, but also the apostles appeal to the Decalogue (Rom. 13:9, Eph. 6:2f, Jas. 2:11; cf. 1 Tim. 1:9f). This makes it clear that it is necessary and possible to appeal to concrete texts in Scripture for the knowledge of God's will.

Still, it strikes us that the apostles did more than just repeat 'as it is written.' In many cases they do not even appeal to the Decalogue, where perhaps we would have done so. They either give an altogether different reason for obeying God's will; or they give another reason in addition to an appeal to the Decalogue. An appeal to the Fifth Commandment in Ephesians 6:2f. wasn't enough for Paul, in fact, he doesn't even begin with it. He starts with (Eph. 6:1): Children obey your parents *in the Lord* (Jesus). The *motive* here is the imitation of Christ, just as it is an argument in many other situations. The Christian must walk differently from the pagan, because he has come to know Christ (Eph. 4:20). He must be ready to forgive, as God, in Christ, forgave him (4:32). He must find out what pleases the Lord (5:10). Husband and wife must be an image of the relationship between Christ and the church (5:22ff.). Christians must flee fornication, because their bodies are members of Christ (1 Cor. 6:13ff.); *etc.*

Therefore, in addition to the explicit 'as it is written,' we must recognize what it means to imitate Christ. The connection with Christ is so decisive, that adequate arguments can be derived from it alone in order to point out what is good and evil in the behaviour of Christians. That proves the legitimacy of the question: 'What would Jesus do in this situation?'

The appeal to the imitation of Christ makes it clear that we, in concurrence with the apostles, must appeal to more than just texts. This fits in well with what I said earlier about our maturity, our having come

of age. Israel had been taken by the hand throughout the guardianship of the old dispensation, but the New Testament church has grown up. Her honour is her maturity (Gal. 4:1ff). Through experience and exercise our senses are being sharpened in order to discern between good and evil (Heb. 5:12ff.). This maturity is a fruit of the Holy Spirit's work. Wasn't it he who, according to the promise of Christ, would lead us into all truth (John 16:13)? He wasn't just given to the apostles, but to the other members of Christ's congregation as well (1 Thess. 4:8). Even when we take the unique position of the (inspired) apostles into account, we can still compare ourselves to them in our search for the way through all types of ethical questions. Through prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance, we will be able to discern what is best. We don't (always) *possess* this proper discernment; we must ask and wait for it. We have to do that together. Reflection on our behaviour is reflection within the one congregation of Christ.

Not Annulment, but Fulfilment

At this point I wish to return to our discussion of the three points mentioned above. It is true the question concerning what still and what no longer applies in Scripture as the will of God gives rise to immediate problems. But I would like to point out, however, that there are numerous situations where we *don't* have this difficulty. We are able to condemn murder, adultery, theft, and dishonesty as sins against God by a simple appeal to Bible texts. No matter how much sympathy we have for a woman with an undesired pregnancy, and no matter how much *pastoral* toil it may cost in dissuading one from having an abortion, *ethically* it may not become a problem to reject abortion as conflicting with God's will. No matter how difficult it may be for us not to live in anger against our brother (Matt. 5:22), to be friendly to our adversaries (5:25), not to look at any woman lustfully (5:28), to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44ff.) – again we must say that the difficulty doesn't lie in the (lack of) clarity of God's (Christ's) will, but in ourselves. A simpler appeal to the Decalogue, a quotation from the wisdom of Proverbs, or a

word of Christ from the Sermon on the Mount can suffice. Whoever exaggerates the difficulties, makes it impossible to believe in the words of Psalm 119:105: Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

I am not saying that there aren't any problems when we use the Bible for consulting the will of God, and thereby have to deal with the progression of Salvation history. Christians differ when they reflect on such important matters as the Fourth Commandment (Sabbath or Sunday), as well as when they think about less important matters such as eating blood sausage (Does Acts 15 still apply with regard to abstinence from blood?).

Can we overcome these difficulties? In my opinion we must start with the fact that Jesus came (not to abolish, but) to *fulfil* the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17ff.). That word means more than just 'to confirm,' in the sense that just as God's law was for Israel, so it remains for us.¹⁰ For πληροω means that the law and prophets, which *aren't* full (complete), will be *made* full by Jesus. Jesus brings the completing, finishing revelation. To put it concretely, he adds the New Testament to the Old. Correspondingly, he adds the Sermon on the Mount to the Decalogue. That not a single jot or tittle will pass from the law, means that the law in its most profound sense was taken seriously by Christ. Jesus did not bring the law to its annulment, but to its consummation. The rest of the Sermon on the Mount confirms this. It is not enough just to abstain from murder and adultery. For many jots and tittles pass away from the law when we make the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' impotent by being angry with our brother, and by making him out to be an imbecile or a fool. We also let many jots and tittles pass away from the law, when, after the teaching of Christ, we continue to justify divorce on the basis of Deuteronomy 24.¹¹ In the same way, the law in its profoundness was not kept by those who, on the basis of Judaism, continued to believe that animal blood was still necessary for the forgiveness of sins even after the shedding of Christ's own blood.

The same thing can be said of those who, *per se*, continue to celebrate the Sabbath on

Saturday when Christ arose on the first day of the week. Here too, we must take both aspects of Christ's word in Matthew 5:17ff. seriously. He did not come to annul the Fourth Commandment; but he did come to fulfil it. The question as to what is ceremonial and what is moral in the Fourth Commandment has stimulated much discussion among Christians, and will probably never be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. Christ's word, however, enables us to avoid the Scylla of abolishing the law ('the Fourth Commandment is no longer in effect') and the Charybdis of legalism ('the Fourth Commandment must be upheld in precisely the same way as under Israel').

The whole Old Testament – law, prophets, and the writings – continues to be of significance for our ethical reflection, but then as *Old Testament* which must be read in the light of Christ's fulfilment. If we don't do that, and only hang on to the letter of the law, we use the Bible in a biblicist manner. *Biblicism* uses texts atomistically, pulling them out of their context. Little attention is paid to the time and circumstances of a text which give it its particular colour; instead, an 'equals' sign is placed simplistically between the past and the present. This method of exemplarily interpreting Scripture doesn't do justice to the historical character of God's salvation as revealed in Scripture. Not every thing characterizing life in one phase of Salvation History has been carried over into the following phase.

Dux and Iudex

We can say justly that through Christ's fulfilment of the law, Israel's independent existence as a holy nation came to an end, and that this must have consequences for what we call the mosaic *civil* laws.¹² And Calvin can say justly that all nations are free to make laws which they consider profitable, so long as they concord with love. We may give precedence to laws other than those of Moses, says Calvin, because they may fit a nation's time and situation better. By doing so, Calvin wittily remarks, we don't abolish the Jewish laws, because they were never given to us in the first place!¹³

The Old Testament itself already makes

this clear. Yahweh gave his law to Israel and not to other nations (Ps. 147:19). He placed the Israelites under other laws from the non-Israelites who live in Israel. Foreigners and children of non-Israelite residents could be held as slaves and remain someone's permanent possession, which was impossible in regard to Israelite slaves (Lev. 25:39ff.; 47ff.). Interest could not be collected from poor fellow citizens, but it could be collected from foreigners (Deut. 23:19f.). The Israelites were not allowed to eat anything which died of itself, but others living in their towns could and it could also be sold to foreigners (Deut. 14:21).

When the time came for pulling down the separation between Israel and the nations, Christ commissioned his apostles to teach the nations to observe all that *he* had commanded. He joins the nations to God's law as he has fulfilled it. Therefore the laws of Christian nations will (or at least ought to) be different from the 'civil' laws once given to Israel. Not only the progression of Salvation History, but also that of 'secular' history has to be taken into consideration. It's not enough to say: 'We live after Christ,' and: 'We aren't ancient Israel.' Whoever takes, for example, the development and refinement seriously, cannot therefore wish to return to the civil legislation of Israel. If he does, then he wishes not only to go back to a time before Christ, he forgets that a history of 2,000 years has gone by since Christ; a history that has also taught us a few ethical lessons. We have learned to distinguish between manslaughter and various degrees of murder; our understanding of psychological and social factors has led criminal law to take account of mitigating circumstances and the degree of mental accountability, more so than in past. This is another reason why it is no longer possible to return to the biblical period with its blood revenge, where all unnatural deaths were avenged. We condemn slavery and torture, but they were considered quite normal in biblical times. Democracy certainly isn't ideal, but it certainly is better than aristocracy, oligarchy or monarchy (at least in its original meaning where only one man or woman rules).

Such developments towards better forms of government, better administration of justice *etc.* are not in themselves expansions of Scripture, but they are expansions of history, which, sooner or later, brings poignant contrasts to consciousness with an irresistible power, and requires, with or without violence, remedy. This has happened with reference to religious persecution, slavery, child labour, colonialism, and unequal pay for equal work. It is not of great importance who or what contributed to the correction of these injustices. All kinds of Christian and non-Christian influences have played a role in this process of consciousness-raising.

But how am I to know if such 'evident' developments are also *good* developments, which we can, or even must approve? I don't mean by 'evident' something autonomous, or inherent in the process of human development. My point is that good judgments and right actions present themselves as such to humanity. And in that *presenting* I detect the work of *God* and his *Spirit*. We know *God* from the Scriptures, but we also know him as he reveals himself in the creation and history of the world. In many cases, it is not enough to know the Bible in order to form an ethical judgement. We must also know history, in order to spot *God's* general revelation.

I realize that what I have said can be dangerously misused. Didn't the 'Deutsche Christen' say that *God's* will was to be seen in Hitler's arrival as leader? Wasn't that for them a clear 'presentation' of *God's* revelation? My reply is that they appealed to *God's* general revelation, while Hitler's activity in many areas conflicted sharply with the confession of Christ's rule, which can only be known from Holy Scripture. Scripture reserves its *critical* function, even though it isn't a guide which tells us that slavery and colonialism should be abolished, that democracy is better than aristocracy, or that the death penalty should be meted out less than during the mosaic legislation. The Bible is not a guide (*dux*) in everything, but it is, however, Judge (*iudex*).

God's guidance in history does not contradict his revelation in the Scriptures. Thus, the bare fact that something 'presents' itself as good to many people is not decisive.

Many, even among Christian theologians, consider, for example, that homosexual relations can no longer be condemned, because it presents itself as an evident expression of one's psychological constitution, of which the biblical writers could not yet have known. The latter, of course, may be true, but it is also true that the Bible condemns homosexual relations. And that is why it is impossible to approve such sexual relations.

From the above it is clear that we need to use our intellect, as well as the Bible, in order to determine what we ought or ought not to do. The Bible is not our only guide in ethics. I would like to make a distinction here which Calvin also makes. He speaks of a *ratio ingenua* (which all people possess by nature), a *ratio vitiosa* (a result of man's corruption), and a *tertia ratio* (which is led by the Word and Spirit). Reason is not an enemy of faith, writes Calvin, and must not be equated with *phreneticus mens*.¹⁴ Applying this distinction in our context we say that the *ratio ingenua* can lead men to good judgments and right actions in all kinds of affairs. Attention has always been given, even in Reformed Theology, to human reason by which a person can discover what is right and wrong without it being explicitly revealed to him in Scripture. But Calvin and others have always bound this possibility to the *providentia Dei* and the gifts of his Spirit to man.¹⁵ Therefore, we have no objection to the idea that 'common sense' is of great importance for all kinds of ethical judgments. But at the same time a Christian, with his *tertia ratio*, will let the Scriptures function in their critical capacity. When ideas 'present' themselves which are in conflict with the Bible, or if these ideas have consequences which are in conflict with love towards *God* and man, they cannot prevail before the forum of the Holy Scriptures.¹⁶

The Scriptures: a Signpost

We can relate the developments in secular history discussed above to the solid and lasting structures of which the Scriptures teach. We should critically test the changes taking place in the relationships between parents and children, husbands and wives, governments and citizens, employers and

employees, with reference to what the Scriptures teach about these relationships. The Scriptures are not a guide for democratic reform; but Romans 13, for example, does require respect for governments, because they have received their authority from God. If democracy degenerates into disrespect for authority, then Romans 13 is here *iudex*: such a development cannot be in accordance with God's will.

But how do we discover the will of God concerning new and revolutionary discoveries? I mentioned earlier, by way of example, *in vitro* fertilization and DNA research. Here again it is clear that the Bible is not a guide, for such scientific developments lie totally outside its horizons.

But on the other hand, the Bible remains *iudex* here also, and warns us against irresponsible activity in these fields. In my opinion the answers can sometimes be quite straightforward. Take the problem of *in vitro* fertilization. Since human life begins with conception, we have to reject *in vitro* fertilization where it is accompanied by selection and destruction of embryos. That is in conflict with the commandment: Thou shalt not kill. And because the creation of new life is bound by God to marriage, we have to reject *in vitro* fertilization where it is something other than an aid to married couples, who by use of their own sperm and egg cells wish to circumvent their infertility. Whoever observes these two restrictions while making use of *in vitro* fertilization cannot, in my opinion, be condemned on scriptural grounds.

But the Bible does more than just condemn as *iudex* certain wrong applications of modern developments. It functions also as a *signpost*. *In vitro* fertilization, and to a greater degree, DNA research, raise the question as to how far we may go in applying our scientific discoveries. DNA research enables us to produce better medicines, and to discover sicknesses at a very early stage. It may even be possible to correct certain genetic abnormalities in a patient. But . . . may man set himself up as the creator of new animal species or as the re-creator of mankind? Scripture gives here a clear answer. The Bible isn't, of course, a guide giving explicit rules for (carrying out) DNA

research. But it does say in which direction we should work. It tells us that man is a creature and not Creator. He is as creature a steward, who must judiciously govern the creation committed to his care.

Since it is difficult to determine where human stewardship crosses the line and becomes hubris, acting as God, we must continually ask ourselves if it is according to the will of God, who made us stewards rather than creators, that we should move further in a particular direction with our research and its application.

Scripture also functions as a signpost for all the other types of ethical issues mentioned earlier, because questions such as 'Who is man?' and 'What is his purpose?' are always pertinent. Not so much certain texts, but general themes come into consideration here – many themes that can point us in the right direction. Besides creation, which we have already mentioned, there are the themes of atonement, redemption, imitation of Christ, etc.¹⁷

Scripture and its Examples

Finally, I direct our attention to our personal lives, where we often have to make far-reaching decisions without the benefit of an explicit command from God. This has been called the *Differentiaethik*, the individualization of God's will.¹⁸ Which profession should I choose? Should I marry, and if so whom? How must I behave within the congregation of Christ? What is my task in this world? I have already pointed out that making one's own decisions belongs to the maturity and ripeness of the Christian, in which he is led by the Holy Spirit. But does the Holy Spirit come with another message besides that of Scripture for our ethical reflection? We cannot answer this question with a simple yes or no. Whoever answers with an unqualified yes, can succumb to mysticism. If that person calls others to submit to the will of the Holy Spirit, then we may ask for the legitimization of that call. And where else do we find this legitimization than in the Word of God, given to us all in the Holy Scriptures? To this degree we must say that the Holy Spirit works *per verbum* and not *extra et praeter verbum*. In all ethical

reflection, an appeal to the Holy Spirit must be verifiable according to the *analogia fidei* (Rom. 12:3, 1 Cor. 14:29). The Bible continues to function as *iudex*, even where it is not a guide.

But on the other hand, neither can we answer with an unqualified no when asked if the Holy Spirit comes with another message. Isn't the issue at hand about concrete decisions we have to make without the benefit of explicit directives from the Bible? To that degree we must say that the Holy Spirit works *cum verbo*.¹⁹

It is possible to say that we, being led by the Holy Spirit, act in the spirit of the Holy Scriptures. Thereby we follow biblical signposts, such as the imitation of Christ. We have already seen the significance of such a signpost in the New Testament, alongside the explicit appeals to 'as it is written.' The stress, here, is not on incidental deeds, but on the all-inclusive manner of our lifestyle.

Inevitably, and to a large degree, the Scriptures receive in this way the character of *example*, model, or type.²⁰ The saintly and not so saintly figures of the Old and New Testaments are given to us as examples (Luke 4:25ff., 10:13ff., 38ff., 1 Cor 10:1ff., Heb. 11:12ff.). We don't simplistically place an 'equals' sign between an example and our situation. Imitating doesn't mean duplicating. To imitate Christ doesn't mean that we copy his actions in not marrying, having no home, and carrying the sins of others, etc. But it means that we learn from others and especially from him what it means to deny ourselves, to be servants of God and our fellow man, and to display true love.

It is undeniably clear from the New Testament that our personal decisions are often connected to those of other followers of Christ. The Bible gives us many examples of this too. Ethics, as *koinonia* ethics, requires that we reflect together on understanding God's will.

Conclusion

We can appeal to the Holy Scriptures for the knowledge of God's will in our time. This appeal can take different forms. We use the Bible as a *guide*, with straightforward commands and prohibitions for our behaviour.

We use the Bible as a *judge*, which doesn't dictate all types of actions, but does judge them on the basis of their fruit. We use the Bible as a *signpost*, which tells us who we are, and how we are to follow Christ. We use the Bible with its *examples*, which we can't copy, but which we must follow.

- 1 See my *Christian Morals and Ethics* (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1981), p.7f. Not all responsible actions are to be considered under the aspects of good and bad. We can judge actions, for example, as either correct or incorrect (as in mathematics and technology); useful or harmful (as in business); beautiful or ugly (as in art); legal or illegal (as in jurisprudence).
- 2 See, e.g. W.K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), pp.28ff.
- 3 See among others for this argument H.M. Kuitert, 'Secularisatie en moraal,' in *Secularisatie in theologisch perspectief*, ed. G. Dekker and K.U. Gäbler (Kampen: Kok, n.d. (1989)), pp.138ff; P. Pronk, *Tegennatuurlijk?* (Amsterdam: V.U. uitgeverij, 1989), pp.189ff.
- 4 See B. Williams, 'God, Morality and Prudence,' in *Divine Commands and Morality*, ed. P. Helm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 136. He points correctly to Kant for the modern form of the discussion. 'Even if God did exist, that would not, to a clear-headed and moral thinker, make any difference to the situation of morality.'
- 5 Kuitert, 'De wil van God doen,' in *Ad Interim*, (a collection of essays presented to R. Schippers) (Kampen: Kok, 1975), pp.187, 191.
- 6 D.Z. Phillips, 'God and ought,' in *Divine Commands and Morality*, ed. P. Helm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.177.
- 7 Kuitert also uses an example: 'From the fact that I advocate the rejection of military service, it does not follow that rejection of military service is (morally) good.' 'De wil van God doen,' p.184. Indeed, but 'I' am just 'me'; 'I' am not God.
- 8 Not that we would be able to learn God's will without the power of God's Spirit. We have to pray for guidance in learning how to discern what is best.
- 9 Actually I make a distinction between 'homophilia' as a condition and 'homosexuality' as the sexual practice of that condition.
- 10 This is how the school of Rousas John Rushdoony interprets Matthew 5:17ff. See especially G. Bahnsen, *Theonomy* (Nutley: Craig Press, 1977), pp.39ff. The conclusion is drawn, for example, that the Mosaic criminal law, with its many death penalties, should still be upheld by our present-day governments, pp.435ff.
- 11 This last example is a good illustration of my difference with Bahnsen *et al.* According to Bahnsen, divorce is still legitimate on the basis of Deuteronomy 24. Hence the ground for divorce is not only adultery, but immorality in a broader sense (in accordance with the expression 'some indecency' used in Deuteronomy 24:1). The word *πληρωμα* used by Jesus in Matthew 5:32 and 29:9, then, is interpreted in the broad sense of Deuteronomy 24, p.97ff. This gives the appearance that Bahnsen *et al.* do not let any jots or tittles fall from the law. In reality, however, he refuses to drop an old provision of the law, and thus shuts his eyes to the

depth of the 'fulfilment' of God's law concerning marriage by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus goes beyond the measure taken in Deuteronomy 24 on account of the 'hardness of hearts' to God's law in Genesis 2, as Matthew 29:8 shows.

12. Many distinguish ceremonial, civil, and moral elements in the Mosaic legislation, in my opinion correctly, so long as we see in these distinctions nothing more than an aid for *ourselves*, and not distinctions which functioned in Israel. In fact, they could not have functioned in Israel: Yahweh was both King and God of Israel, so that the civil laws applied as religious laws.
- 13 Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, 20, 15f.
- 14 Calvin, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Baum, Cunitz and Reuss (Brunswick-Berlin, 1863 (and following years)), IX, 474.
- 15 Especially Calvin underlined the gifts of the Spirit given to people in general and to magistrates in particular. See W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), pp.95-125.
- 16 When in this critical way, we give a positive place both to 'evident' developments in history and to common sense within our ethical reflection, we use the term general revelation responsibly. No one can deny that light shines *extra muros ecclesiae*. Not even Karl Barth, as evidenced by later developments within his *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), pp.96f., 110ff. He correctly

states that this does not lead to a 'natural theology,' p.117. But he is incorrect in thinking that we may not use the word 'revelation' here, since then it would apply only to the good, but limited gift of common sense: 'In the converse which is of the world with itself, it is not a covenant of God with man ... , but only a kind of divinely ordained concordat between the world and itself,' p.143. What reason is there to be so afraid of considering God's gifts in the course of his providence as an indication of his revelation?

- 17 Texts and themes do not contradict each other. Use of isolated texts leads to biblicism (see above); use of themes independently of texts leads to speculation. Examples: the theme of creation with the creation ordinances as absolutes; the theme of atonement in Christ with attention exclusively on personal conversion; the theme of redemption *à la* liberation theology.
- 18 See e.g. K. Bockmühl, *Gesetz und Geist* (Giessen/Babel: Brunnen Verlag, 1987), I, pp.32ff.
- 19 Bockmühl, pp.432ff., where he chooses *cum verbo*, but then as *conjunctio*, 'Konsonanz' of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scripture.
- 20 See e.g. J. Blank, *Concilium*, 3 (1967), pp.11ff. I disagree with Blank's limitation of the New Testament ethos to 'ethical model' *alone*, leaving no room for *commandment* in Scripture as norm for us.