

Does Christ's Law Apply to All?

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Abstract

Are the commands and exhortations of the Lord Jesus directed to his disciples only or are they directed to all mankind? The question arises from an examination of traditional Jewish teaching, around the time of Jesus's life in Palestine, that Jewish Law applies only to Jews. Seeing that there is no way of knowing what God requires of humans unless he reveals his requirements, and seeing that God's revealing of any requirements he has made has been carried out by Jesus the Christ and, further, that the best evidence for his teachings are the accounts of his teaching in the New Testament, this article examines it and concludes that his Law applies only to his disciples.

Keywords

Covenant, revelation, Jewish law, human reason, morals

Given that God has revealed how it is good for humans to behave and how they ought to behave, the question arises: Who is directed to behave? To whom is God's revealed teaching directed? Is it directed exclusively to disciples of his only Son, Jesus Christ? or is it directed to some other group? or to both disciples and also non-disciples? Indeed, is there any revealed moral teaching which is directed to all mankind, both disciples and non-disciples?

The question has arisen for me from reading *Proselytism and Jewish Law* by Michael J. Broyde.¹ Therein Broyde argues convincingly that "Jewish law is not a general ethical category governing the conduct of all. Its scope and application are limited to Jews, not merely jurisdictionally, but even theologically."² "On the one hand, Jewish tradition directs a categorical imperative that

¹ Michael J. Broyde, "Proselytism and Jewish Law: Inreach, Outreach, and the Jewish Tradition", in *Sharing the Book: Religious Perspectives on the Rights and Wrongs of Proselytism* edited by John Witte Jr. and Richard C. Martin (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), pp.45-60.

² Broyde, "Proselytism and Jewish Law", p.47.

Jews must observe Jewish law ... On the other hand, however, Jewish law obligates its adherents not to solicit converts and indeed affirmatively to reject converts as an initial matter, and denies any duty to observe Jewish law by Gentiles.”³

Here “Jewish law” is the equivalent of “what God revealed about how Jews ought to behave.” I shall not enter into argument regarding the cogency of arguments for Broyde’s assertion. I mention it because it suggests the hypothesis that God’s requirements, as revealed by the Lord Jesus and the apostles, are directed exclusively to disciples of Christ, having no application to non-Christians.

I shall argue that the New Testament evidence supports this hypothesis because Jesus did not teach morality but rather the way of a disciple.

Jesus and the New Testament Church did not teach *morals*. Morality, I hold, is a concept which includes such concepts as right and wrong, duties and rights. Such a concept is not employed by Jesus and his immediate disciples when teaching what God requires. They teach something different: that a disciple is one who has accepted the offer of a covenant with Jesus which requires the disciple to do the will of God, for doing which God has provided an enormous reward and an enormous punishment for failure to do it. As Bornkamm notes; “The ground of his command of love is simply because it is what God wills and what God does.”⁴

Why examine the New Testament? I take for granted that God has revealed many truths (true propositions), including those about human behavior. By “revealed” and “revelation” I do not mean what one might come to know about God without God’s employing speech which humans can comprehend. I do *not* use the terms in the sense in which Gerard J. Hughes uses them when he writes, “For the whole creation is a revelation of God, and any ethics which is based on reflection on the world is based on revelation in that sense,”⁵ because I hold there is scarcely anything we can know of God’s knowledge of how humans ought to behave from considering the whole creation. Rather, I use them in the sense employed by the First and Second Vatican Councils.

Vatican I taught that God, in addition to making it possible for humans to work out some truths about himself from considering some general features of the universe, has chosen “... to reveal himself and the eternal decrees of his will to the human race in another and supernatural way”, in support of which claim it quotes the classical New Testament text describing God’s revealing in the person

³ Broyde, “Proselytism and Jewish Law”, p. 45.

⁴ Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1966), p.114.

⁵ Gerard J. Hughes, “A Christian Basis for Ethics”, *Heythrop Journal* 13 (1) January 1972, p.28.

of Christ: "In times past, God speaking (*loquens*) in fragmentary and varied ways to our fathers through the prophets; in this, the final age, he has spoken (*locutus est*) to us through his Son" (Hebrews 1: 1–2) (DS 3004). Note the use of the Latin *loqui* = to speak.

The Second Vatican Council taught much the same: "By divine revelation God wished to manifest and communicate both Himself and also the eternal decrees of his will concerning the salvation of mankind" (*Dei Verbum* 6). By revelation God "addresses (*alloquitur*) men as friends." Jesus Christ "speaks [*loquitur*] the words of God" and "completes and perfects revelation and confirms it with divine guarantees" (*Dei Verbum* 4). He does this by his words and deeds. This way of making something known is personal: it is one person deliberately communicating with another by means of words. The paradigm case of this is Christ teaching, for thus God speaks. It is *this* which I mean by "revelation".⁶

Dei Verbum goes on to distinguish this way of God's making truths known from another way, "by the natural light of human reason", which is Hughes's notion of revelation. From which it is clear that Hughes (and those who share his view) and the Councils use "revelation" in different senses.

How does one have access to this revelation? Again I follow both Vatican II and also the vast majority of Christian teachers and theologians in assuming the truth of the proposition that what Christ revealed as God's spokesman was committed by the apostles and other men associated with them to writing, that is, the writings of the New Testament. Here is to be found "the apostolic preaching which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books" (*Dei Verbum* 8).

Within this body of teaching, the words of Jesus are paramount, in the sense that they convey teaching guaranteed by God to be true,⁷ with the consequence that propositions regarding right choices which contradict them are false.

Are such propositions included in revelation? Jesus certainly revealed "the eternal decrees of his will". Pope John Paul II has voiced the judgement of the vast majority of Christian theologians and exegetes in asserting: "Yet the Gospel and the Apostolic writings still set forth both general principles of Christian conduct and specific teachings and precepts".⁸ With regard to Christ's teachings on

⁶ The Council is employing St Thomas Aquinas's notion of revelation as *locutio Dei*. See Arturo Blanco, "La revelación como 'locutio Dei' en las obras de Santo Tomas de Aquino", *Scripta Theologica* 13 (1) 1981, pp.9-61.

⁷ "By faith, men and women give their *assent* to this divine testimony. This means they acknowledge fully and integrally the truth of what is revealed because it is God himself who is the guarantor of that truth." Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, art.13. Italics in the original.

⁸ Cf. *Veritatis Splendor*, articles 25, 26.

conduct, our source of knowledge of them is almost exclusively the four Gospels. They include and convey God's revelation. "The Synoptics really do not seem to consider the idea of revelation formally, and it is clear from the other NT writings as well as from the Synoptics themselves why they do not; Jesus is the self-manifestation of God".⁹ The same applies to the Gospel of John: "... no NT passage states this so simply and so sublimely as the Johannine title of word (John 1:1ff)."¹⁰ At once we are faced with the objection that exegetes have shown that it is very difficult to establish with assurance what Christ taught and the accounts in the Gospels record the beliefs of the earliest Christian communities rather than the teachings of Jesus. If this objection is accepted, then it follows that God in Christ tried to reveal a number of truths and failed, with the further consequence that virtually nothing regarding God's requirements has been revealed. On this view, the reported words of Christ in the Gospels cannot ground any teaching on human conduct as coming from God. Further, the words can only be used to illustrate or support or embellish a moral argument, functions which could equally well be exercised by, say, the Koran, the sayings of Marcus Aurelius, and the works of Karl Marx.

I take seriously the objections to establishing from the New Testament the content of God's revelation of moral truths. Seeing that I lack the space to answer the objections, I shall put them aside, and take my stand with the Christian tradition that confidently asserts that God has revealed in Christ truths governing right choices.¹¹ Moreover, my focus is on a different question: Assuming that Christ revealed truths governing conduct which constitute principles governing human choices, to whom were these principles directed?

The only way to answer the question is to examine both the four Gospels and also the writings of those who were Christ's contemporaries or who had contact with those contemporaries, as recorded in the other New Testament writings.

Before examining these texts, I should like to note that two broad categories of teachings directed to choices are to be found in the New Testament, as well as in the Apostolic Fathers:

⁹ John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Geoffrey Chapman: London/Dublin, 1972), p.737. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, St Thomas Aquinas writes in reference to the teaching of Jesus: "... this teaching surpasses all other teachings in [dignity], authority, usefulness; for it has been handed down to us immediately by the only Son of God who is First Wisdom." René Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1966), p.167. Latourelle has omitted the word in brackets.

¹⁰ McKenzie, *Dictionary*, p.738.

¹¹ Pope John Paul II criticises theologians who deny that "there exists, in Divine Revelation, a specific and determined moral content", *Veritatis Splendor*, art. 37.

Category A

Commands and invitations to have faith in Jesus. What is it to have this faith? It is to believe the claims of Jesus about himself, e.g., “He who sees me sees the Father”, “the Father and I are one”, “For the spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has christed me” (I am the Christ), “all authority is given to me in heaven and on earth.” The writer of the Fourth Gospel gave as his purpose in writing “. . . that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31). The other three Gospels are structured so as to argue for the same belief. The Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul largely consist of arguments intended to prove that Jesus is the Christ, with the aim of evoking belief in Jesus’s claims about himself. Moreover, they claim that this is what God in Jesus revealed. The same theme dominates most of the remaining New Testament writings.

God, then, has revealed that it is very, very, good to believe in Jesus, so that one ought to do so. That is the most pronounced action-guiding teaching in the New Testament, and, seeing that it is the teaching of Jesus, it is revelation from God. But who ought to believe in Jesus? To whom is this revelation addressed? Of course, to non-believers who are prospective believers. So the largest body of God’s revelation of right behaviour is addressed to prospective Christians.

Category B

But to whom is the rest of the directives of Jesus addressed? Is it addressed to non-believers, believers, or both? There is no escaping the intellectual duty of examining the evidence provided by the New Testament, so to it we must go.

THE GOSPELS

The Gospel of John

Nearly all admonitions, precepts, commendations of actions, and statements of right behaviour are addressed to non-believers to convince them that they ought to be believers. For example, “Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent’ ” (John 6:29).¹² The revelation in John belongs in great part to Category A.

¹² Cf. George R. Beazley-Murray: *Word Biblical Commentary*, Volume 36, John (Waco, TX: Waco Books, 1987), Introduction, pp.lxxxviii-lxxxix.

But it is also directed to believers, in that it spells out what a believer commits himself to believe about right behaviour which is behaviour pleasing to God.

“In the tradition of John ‘love one another’ (John 13:34) is called Jesus’ ‘new commandment’”, more important than any other. Apart from this commandment there are no other commandments in John, although he often speaks of “the commandments” in the plural.¹³ I would add, “If I, then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:13). But to whom are these teachings addressed? The text says they are “the disciples” of whom it names Simon Peter and Judas Iscariot, which favours the conclusion that the Twelve are the addressees. It seems more likely than not that John, the author, gave the whole Last Supper discourse as teaching directed to disciples of Jesus, both those contemporaneous with him and also contemporaries of John and any who might later come to faith in Jesus. However, the two injunctions are addressed to disciples, and no others, because the motive offered for complying with them could appeal only to believers in Jesus.

The Synoptic Gospels: the Gospel of Matthew

I shall begin with Matthew because this Gospel contains the largest body of teaching on conduct contained in the Gospels. I shall make reference to parallels in Luke and Mark in order to save repeating the same points.

I refer only to teachings other than those which which are the equivalent of “You ought to believe in me [Jesus].” As I have already said, “Believe in me” is directed to all.

In Matthew to whom are the action-guiding teachings of Jesus addressed?

If one considers the various sayings, precepts, and counsels of Jesus as recorded in this Gospel it is often difficult to decide who are the addressees in each case.

A large group of the precepts are of the form: If you wish to enter the Kingdom, then you must ϕ . (In John, instead of the Kingdom as the goal, it is eternal life.) This form of precept is addressed to believers. It is also addressed to prospective believers, for it sets down what God requires of a believer. We know it is addressed to these two groups because it could have appeal only to those who accepted the authority of Jesus and wanted participation in the Kingdom which he promised, or who were already attracted to doing so. This is confirmed by noting Luke 15: 25–26, “Now great

¹³ Josef Blank, “Unity and Plurality in New Testament Ethics”, *Concilium* 150 (1981), p.69.

multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother . . . he cannot be my disciple.' ” Here he addresses a multitude and tells them how they must behave if they become his disciples. Jesus mentions there are some who accept his authority, thus becoming disciples, but are unwilling to obey his commands. For example, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (7:21). One is a disciple by faith in Jesus as Lord, and a disciple must do the will of the Father.

The large body of instruction regarding behaviour which comprises the Sermon on the Mount is directed to “his disciples” ((5:1). At this stage in Matthew’s account only four have been mentioned. At the end of the Sermon, Matthew says, “And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching.” Most exegetes hold that the Sermon was not delivered on one occasion, but is a compilation of the teachings of Jesus delivered over a long period, so not much reliance can be placed on “disciples” and “crowds”. Seeing that the Sermon is a compilation of sayings of Jesus, whose original contexts are undiscoverable, each saying could possibly have a different audience.

But are there clues within the Sermon regarding the audience ? There are a few. Matthew 7:21 quoted above is one. Another occurs in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you . . . falsely on my account” (5:11). The “you” cannot refer to those who have never heard of Jesus and it cannot refer to those who have heard his claims and rejected them. It must refer to those who have heard the claims and accepted them - disciples.

More significant is the fact that Jesus teaches as if he had no need of authorisation from anyone - as if his authority had already been established in the minds of his hearers. This presumption could not have had any force, except with disciples or prospective disciples. I say “prospective disciples” because the whole Sermon can be read as an account of the way (*hodos*) of life which is required of a disciple, that is, of those who either had already accepted his authority or were being invited to do so.

“The Sermon is not saying: ‘This is how men in general should live if they really want to build the kingdom of God on earth.’ It is saying: ‘This is how you who are in the kingdom of God must live if your citizenship is to be a reality.’ ”¹⁴

One thing is certain: there never occurs in the Sermon the equivalent of, “Tell all mankind to obey these precepts and believe these

¹⁴ T. W. Manson, *Ethics and the Gospel* (London:SCM, 1960), p.51.

teachings whether they are my disciples or not.” That would be the form of the Sermon, were it addressed to mankind.¹⁵

Some doubt has been cast on this conclusion by appeal to Jesus's use of “no one” (*oudeis*), “whoever” (*hos an*). “everyone” (*pas ho*). “No one (*oudeis*) can serve two masters” (6:24) is an example. Referring to the use of these terms in other parts of Matthew, Chilton and McDonald write, “Clearly the ethic of the Kingdom cannot be equated simply with discipleship.”¹⁶ True, but it can be equated with the conditions for being a true disciple, that is, with what a prospective disciple needs to know if he is to conduct himself as a disciple.

Well known is the fact that there is a rough parallel to this Sermon in the collection of sayings of Jesus in Luke 6: 20–49, often called the Sermon on the Plain, so this is a useful point at which to consider it. “Luke now introduces into his Gospel a major sermon of Jesus, addressed specifically to the disciples (6:20-49).”¹⁷ But others, “the multitude” (6:17-19), are also present. Eduard Schweitzer¹⁸ thinks some sayings are directed to disciples, some to outsiders, and some to all who are willing to hear. This seems to me to have poor support from the text. More significant, this Sermon concludes with the equivalent of Matthew 7:21, “Why do you call me Lord and not do what I tell you?” (6:40). Clearly Luke has grouped the sayings together and thus reported them as an address to those who acknowledge Jesus as Lord, that is, to believers.

I return to the Gospel of Matthew. If one compiles a list of Jesus' teachings on behaviour therein, almost all are addressed to disciples. So I shall discuss the apparent exceptions.

I said, “teachings on behaviour”. These include imperatives. But only some imperatives are teachings on behaviour. “Rise, take up your bed and go home” ((9:6) is addressed to an individual paralytic. The instructions to the Twelve (10:1-39) seem to be directed to them only: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans” (10:5). But the instructions include, “Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues” (10:17). Seeing that this did not happen to this group, and Matthew knew that, the speech must be a composite of instructions delivered both at the time of the commissioning of the Twelve and also of

¹⁵ Raymond F. Collins, *Christian Morality: Biblical Foundations* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). p.25, maintains the contrary: “. . . this scribal teaching [Sermon on the Mount] is apparently addressed to the crowds”. But the crowds are prospective disciples.

¹⁶ Bruce Chilton & J. I. H. McDonald, *Jesus and the Ethics of the Kingdom* (London: SPCK, 1987), p.42.

¹⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*, The Anchor Bible Vol. 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), p.627.

¹⁸ *The Good News according to Luke* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1984), p.119.

teachings addressed to disciples at other times. Even so, the account ends with, "And when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples" (11:1), which shows how fragmentary Matthew's account is. However, it is worth noting that the discourse lacks instructions clearly directed to mankind in general.

Jesus performed an exorcism and was charged with exercising the power of Beelzebub. In his reply he said, "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men (*anthrôpois*), but the blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven" (12:31; cf. Mark 3:28-30, Luke 12:10). Which men? Christians? or all men? The answer, I hold, is all men, with the exception of disciples, because believers have no inclination to attribute Jesus's powers to Beelzebub. The warning to avoid blaspheming against the spirit constitutes a command. This then is a rare revelation from God regarding the behaviour of non-believers and is directed to them.

Continuing our search for teachings of Jesus on behaviour not addressed to believers, we note the logion regarding divorce (19:3-9, par Mk 10-12). That God through Jesus has revealed that he forbids divorce is one of the best attested teachings in the New Testament, occurring in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:32), and in Matthew 19:3-9, Mark 10:2-10, Luke 16:18, and Paul witnesses to his knowledge and acceptance of the teaching in I Cor. 7: 10-11.¹⁹ But to whom is it addressed? It is directed to disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 19:3-9 it is an answer to Pharisees and looks as if it is addressed to mankind. In that case it is a rare kind of teaching. One is forced to doubt this conclusion because it is also addressed to disciples for they, having heard his words, go on to question him about the meaning of his teaching.²⁰ One test of what he meant is by reference to what disciples, in the period just after Jesus, took to be the addressees of his teachings. In I Cor. 7:10-11 Paul is writing to believers and makes no suggestion that his teaching applies to just anyone.

Jesus answered a question put by a rich young man (19: 16-22), "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Is the reply a revelation from God? Seeing that it is an assertion of Jesus, it is revelation. To whom is it addressed? The rich young man, obviously. But there is more to the reply. Jesus has already taught that a disciple must be perfect (5:48), and now he tells the questioner the condition for being perfect: sell your possessions and follow me. So Jesus is teaching how a disciple ought to behave.

¹⁹ For a careful analysis of this teaching see Francis J. Moloney, "A New Testament Hermeneutic for Divorce and Remarriage in the Catholic Tradition", *Australasian Catholic Record* 92 (3) July 2015, pp.269-288.

²⁰ For one of numerous detailed analyses of teachings on divorce in the New Testament see Raymond F. Collins, *Divorce in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992).

Continuing our search of Matthew for deviations from the rule that all conduct-governing teachings of Jesus are addressed to disciples, we come to the lawyer's question: which is the greatest commandment? and the reply of Jesus (22:34-40). This is a question that can be of concern only to those interested in observing the requirements of Torah, so it cannot be addressed to mankind.

Matthew 25:31-46, sometimes called the parable of the Last Judgment, offers a strong *prima facie* challenge to my thesis. Before the Son of Man (later, the king) will be gathered "all the nations". Their members will be rewarded or punished according to whether they have performed works of mercy. There is no requirement that anyone should have had faith in Jesus or taken account of any revelation from God. Read *alone*, this pericope would destroy my thesis. Unfortunately it would also destroy much of God's revelation as conveyed by Jesus. For he taught that the one "who does the will of my Father" shall enter the kingdom of heaven (7:17), and doing that involves believing in Jesus (3:17. 17:1-8), becoming his disciple by believing in him (28:19) and accepting others of his requirements, such as leading a life in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount, and becoming like a little child (18:3). If the only condition for entering the kingdom were the performance of deeds of mercy, as the Last Judgement pericope seems to say, then Jesus's many other requirements would be superfluous and pointless. In contrast, if the whole of Jesus's requirements are considered, then it is clear that performance of one kind of action (being merciful) is not sufficient to make one a person fit to enter the Kingdom.

A final word on this pericope. Why should the Son of Man judge anyone by reference to how that one has treated the Son of Man? Why does it matter more than anything else that one treat the Son of Man (as Jesus called himself) in a certain way? This presupposes belief in Jesus as being "my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

It being impossible for me in this paper to trawl through every expression of a precept in Matthew, I would like to point out the importance of the ending of this Gospel. There Jesus commands the eleven disciples to (1) make disciples of all nations (peoples), (2) to baptise them, (3) and teach the baptised to observe all that he commanded the eleven. The commandments are directed to the baptised only.²¹

As for the other Synoptics the same pattern is to be found. Jesus reveals how disciples ought to behave. Because the logia and parables of Jesus are often difficult to interpret, I am willing to affirm that in some instances we do not know to whom his prescriptions are

²¹ A striking example of the same sequence lies in I John 4: 23: "And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us."

addressed, and, even, that a very few are addressed to all men. Jewish tradition, as evidenced by the Talmud, holds that the Noahide code, nearly 60 of the 613 commandments, binds Gentiles.²² Likewise a very few of the commands revealed by Jesus have application to all.

I consider now, the second part of Luke's account, the Acts of the Apostles. This work is relevant in that it can be expected to report the understanding of the early disciples of the scope of the addressees of Jesus's commands. In fact, very little on principles of conduct is to be found in Acts.

Much of the teaching in Acts is in the form of speeches. Those of Paul containing instruction on how it is right to behave are never addressed to Gentiles, but only to Christians and to Jews as prospective disciples, except for his speech on the Areopagus, wherein Paul makes no suggestion that he is conveying revelation except when he says God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). However, throughout Acts (and the New Testament generally) repenting on the part of non-disciples includes coming to belief in Jesus: "Repent and be baptised" (Acts 2:38).²³

Chapters 1–15 of Acts contains some prescriptions. Certain early disciples lived in community and held possessions in common. This suggests that these Christians understood Jesus's message to include recommendation of this way of life, but no authorisation of it is quoted and it plays no further part in Acts. In Chapter 10 Peter has a vision, i. e., a revelation that there are no unclean animals, so that God has revealed that some prohibitions of Torah are no longer in force.

Chapter 15 contains the well-known decision to exempt Gentiles from all but four prescriptions of Torah. Those deciding this claimed that they were guided by the Holy Spirit (15:28), so the decision can be counted as a revelation from God.

The Letters of Paul

In these, Christian believers are required to act in certain ways. Paul does not direct these to non-believers. "For what have I to do with judging outsiders" (I Cor. 5:12). Paul hardly ever claims to be passing on God's revelation regarding behaviour, and when he does he is addressing Christians.²⁴

²² Broyde, *Proselytism and Jewish Law*, p.46.

²³ "The demand for faith is very closely connected with the call to repentance." Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament* (London: Burns & Oates, 1975), p. 27.

²⁴ "If anyone thinks he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord." I Cor. 14:37. Cf. II Cor. 1:11, and a Pauline teaching in I Tim. 6:3.

All the other Letters of the New Testament are addressed to Christians, as is evidenced by the opening words of each and by the frequent use of the vocative of “brethren”, a common New Testament word for Christians.

Consequences

I now consider two consequences of adopting my argument that the principal sources of divine revelation ground the conclusion that revealed teachings regarding conduct are directed to Christian believers, with a very few exceptions. I shall return to the matter of exceptions shortly.

The ecclesiological consequence

Assuming (1) the truth of the belief common to Christians that Jesus commissioned the body of his disciples, the Church, to transmit the truths which he, as God’s Anointed One, revealed - a belief emphatically endorsed by the magisterium of the Catholic Church in Ecumenical Councils,²⁵ and (2) the truth of my thesis, it follows that the Church is divinely authorised to teach revealed truths governing conduct *to Christians only*.

The privilege consequence

A further consequence is that Christians are privileged, in that they have access to God’s knowledge of how they should act, knowledge that others do not share. In saying this I am echoing the teaching of Jesus (“many have wanted to hear what you hear”) and the conviction of the earliest Christians.

Non-consequences (non-sequiturs)

1. From acceptance of my thesis it does *not* follow that humans lack moral knowledge, if they have not come to faith, that is, accepted Jesus and his message. There are good grounds for moral beliefs which do not include revealed truths. There are true moral beliefs which have not been revealed; indeed, they comprise the majority of true moral beliefs. Just as in any other field of inquiry people come to true beliefs without attending to what God has revealed, so do they in matters of morals.

²⁵ Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, art. 7.

2. Nor does it follow from my thesis that the Church is barred from teaching non-revealed morals. The Church is morally entitled to advance, say, her social teachings, exemplified in some papal encyclicals and in Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*, just as any other body is so entitled to propagate its views. What the Church is not entitled to do is to tell non-Christians they are bound by her teachings on conduct, e. g., on divorce, on the ground that God has revealed that he requires all men to abide by the teachings. God has revealed them as applying to Christians only.

Just as the provisions of the Church's canon law concerning ecclesiastical law apply to Catholics only (canon 11), so the provisions of Christ's law apply to Christians only.

An objection: the logical status of revealed truths

It remains to consider an important objection. Surely when God reveals that it is good or obligatory to ϕ then to ϕ is good or obligatory for all - it is neither person nor kind- of-person relative.

Stoic, Jewish, and Christian thought are therefore substantially agreed in this: that there is a set of rules or precepts of conduct, constituting a divine law, which is binding on all rational creatures as such, and which in principle can be ascertained by human reason.²⁶

St Thomas Aquinas gave magisterial expression to this view,²⁷ so it is widely adopted by popes and other Catholic theologians, as also by Protestant and Anglican because John Calvin and Richard Hooker espoused it.

Of course, there are goods and obligations which arise from accepting membership of a group or from undertaking to lead a way of life. But on the view in question, there are also goods which ought to be pursued and obligations fulfilled which do not arise from anything more than one's being a human.

But we do not find this notion in the principal source of revelation, the New Testament. "[T]he ethic of Jesus, like the Jewish, is an ethic of obedience", writes Bultmann, citing Luke 17:7-10 and Matthew 20:1-15. Holden says, "Jesus' 'I say unto you' invites no discussion, uses no logically grounded persuasion. It simply commands obedience."²⁸ Commands whom? Those to whom it is addressed, namely, disciples of Jesus. Wolfgang Schrage has noted that "only members of the community were addressed; no general moral

²⁶ Alan Donagan, *The Theory of Morality* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago/London, 1977), p.6.

²⁷ *Summa Theologiae* I-II 90-104 and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III 111-130.

²⁸ J. L. Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.14.

principles were proclaimed. The real subject of New Testament ethics is neither society nor the individual, but the community.”²⁹

Referring to the teaching of Jesus, Spicq writes: “‘That which God wills’ (*thelema*) is not only the norm of good and evil, but the source of the interior obligation of the believer, which makes of this will the centre of his thought and of his actions.”³⁰

This means God has not revealed what is right and wrong for anyone to choose to do (with a few exceptions) but, rather, what choices make one fit to enter the Kingdom (the Synoptics) or to be granted eternal life (John). The choice to believe in Jesus is required of all, but the other requirements are directed to believers. “Come” (have faith in me), “follow me” (observe my commands) is addressed to all. Jesus’s other commands and exhortations are directed, with few exceptions, exclusively to his disciples. So one can describe these revealed teachings as law, the New Torah of the New Israel.

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²⁹ Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1990), p.5.

³⁰ “‘Ce que Dieu veut’ (*thelema*) n’est pas seulement la norme du bien et du mal, mais la source de l’obligation intérieure du croyant [footnote omitted], qui fait de ce vouloir le centre de ses pensées et de ses actions.” Ceslaus Spicq, *Théologie Morale du Nouveau Testament*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gabalda, 1965), p.751.