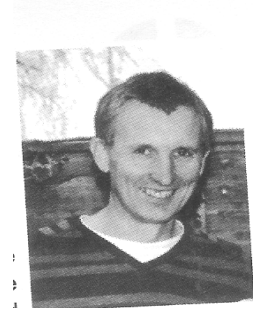


Christianity and morality

I've been thinking a lot recently about the place of the Church in our society particularly with regard to morality. Does Church contribute in any way to the promotion of a just and fair society? Many see the aim of Church as simply to help people to be good honest citizens and on this reasoning, generally conclude that they have no need for Church because they live decent, law abiding lives without it.



And that by and large is true of most. People can have a very limited knowledge of both the Bible and the life of Jesus yet be good, honest and law-abiding. So is there any more to morality than that and if so how do we gain access to it? It has to be said that within each of us there seems to be an inherent sense of right and wrong and our conscience tells us when we contravene it. Whether that sense is instinctive or learned is unclear but nevertheless it is there. Increasingly though it seems that individual opinions on morality vary considerably and as a society we no longer hold firmly to the concept of objective moral truth (an external moral code of practice that is part of the make up of the world and not the creation of human beings).

Christian thinking on the other hand does support the concept of objective morality instituted by God. How we gain that morality though is often misunderstood. Many seem to promote the notion that the essence of Christianity is simply to learn the moral code as Jesus taught it and aim to live by it. Church is simply the place and occasion where moral truth is taught as rules to follow and in fact going to Church and the way things are done there are part and parcel of these rules.

Jesus' teaching though, does not seem to me to be about obeying God's rules but more about obeying God. On his terms there is more to morality than a set of general principles. It's personal and specific; about each of us living as God would have us live. Jesus told one rich man to sell his possessions. He told twelve, and later seventy disciples to go out to preach, heal and drive out demons. Jesus asked some people to leave home to go with him, yet a man who had been delivered from demonic possession was told instead to stay in his village and tell people what God had done for him. Others who were healed were told to keep quiet about it. Living as a follower of Jesus was not just about obeying a moral code of practice but taking specific decisions on the basis of his prompting. It still is. So we read the Bible not just to learn the rules as you might do in a Maths or science book but to get to know God. Church is not so much a place and event where a moral code is taught and learnt but a community that is inspired by the real presence of God the Holy Spirit to live out the specific calling of Jesus as well as God's moral truth.

So where is moral truth located? If atheists are right then it emerges from the realm of human reason and pragmatism and we as a society can exist well enough without God, providing we put that code into practice. If however moral truth is held by God then it makes sense that we have to refer to Him in order to live it. General moral principles can be found in the Bible and in other Holy books as well, but to follow Jesus fully we must rely on our relationship with God and the wisdom and empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Steve