Caring/Careless Behaviours

Teacher Background

Societies encourage their members to live moral lives, for without an understanding of right and wrong, the good, the acceptable and the virtuous in societies cannot survive. The religions of the world have also encouraged their followers to live morally for similar reasons. Christianity teaches that human beings are made in God’s image and that it is God’s intent that believers strive to live the moral life for their spiritual and eternal well being. For centuries, Christians have endeavoured to define and determine the Christian moral life by distinguishing right from wrong.

The Church’s desire to encapsulate the essence of the moral life through its teachings and dogma have both helped and, in some social and historical contexts, hindered Christians. Due to the complex nature of morality and the dilemmas it confronts in a changing world, morality defies simplistic definition, codes and dogmas about what is right and wrong. This does not mean that behavioural codes, Church teaching and dogma on morality are irrelevant and unhelpful. Quite the contrary, it is essential that the Church continues to discern, critique and communicate, through a variety of forms, its moral stance on contemporary issues in a particular time and context. The challenge for the Church and individuals endeavouring to live the moral life in these times, is to engage fully in the processes of moral discernment - that is, continuing to engage in a dialogue between today’s understandings and those of our ancestors in faith.

Christian morality and moral theology have always relied heavily on Scripture, the tradition of the Church, and the historical, social and cultural contexts in which Christians live and act. For example, a set of moral codes established in one generation does not necessarily meet the needs and reality of another generation. The Bible has provided the main source and foundation for Christians’ moral understanding of right and wrong. Moral teachings within the Decalogue and the Beatitudes continue to provide inspiration and guidance to Christians. The Bible demonstrates to believers the importance of living and upholding the values of love, charity, kindness, peace, reconciliation, care, respect and dignity, to name but a few. The New Testament in particular provides moral inspiration and guidance to believers today, if they interpret its moral teaching with discernment, critique and dialogue with the wisdom of today and that of our ancestors in faith. However, when the Bible is used uncritically and sometimes literally, its interpretations can be skewed for particular purposes and intentions. There have been countless incidences in history where a variety of political, social and religious groups have used the Scriptures for the purpose of determining what is morally right and wrong for the people of that time and context. Therefore, it is essential that moral educators and teachers of religion teach the process of moral discernment carefully to students.