**Morality - Biblical Stories**

**Teacher Background**

The Christian message is underpinned with a cluster of beliefs and stories drawn from Scripture and tradition. For all Christians, the Bible is the primary source of their morality. While Catholic moral theology sources its basic moral teaching from the Bible, it adds two other distinctive emphases, namely, tradition drawn from hierarchical Church teaching and human reason. The latter two constitute a distinctive Catholic emphasis in Christian moral theology.

There are different ways in which the Bible can be regarded as authoritative in revealing moral positions. First, there are revealed moral precepts that remain permanently valid in their precise biblical form. Second, there are values, dispositions, intentions and attitudes which the Bible declares to be appropriate to Christians and which they should foster. Third, there is a permanently valid core to biblical morality although the precise literal interpretation is not permanently valid. When one appeals to the Bible as an authoritative source, it is important to know exactly what claim is being made for it. It is also important to have a considered view on the manner or process of revelation and on how the community in the text came to possess a revealed morality. The Bible reveals the inspired wisdom of the people of the time. One needs to acknowledge the cultural limitations on the horizons and philosophies of biblical writers. Discriminating between biblical texts for their moral messages is essential - e.g. contemporary society has jettisoned concepts of slavery and the subordinate position of women which are both prevalent in the Bible.

**Helpful background for the moral messages in Luke 25:30-37: The Good Samaritan.**

The story takes place on the road between the city of Jerusalem, in the mountains and the city of Jericho, about 20 miles away in the Jordan River valley. The terrain between the cities is rough, desolate and in the time of Jesus, had few inhabitants and was frequented by robbers. The robbers at times used tricks like having one of their number appear injured by the side of the road. When someone stopped to help, the others would attack him. Different types of people are mentioned in the story. The person who is robbed would be understood by most to be a Jew. The priest and the Levite are Jewish religious leaders who have a good knowledge of God's laws. The final person in the story is a Samaritan, a person from the province of Samaria. The Jews considered Samaritans as social outcasts, untouchables, racially inferior, practising a false religion. They avoided any association with Samaritans, travelling long distances out of their way to avoid passing through a Samaritan area. Any close physical contact, drinking water from a common bucket, or eating a meal with a Samaritan, would make a Jew ritually unclean, that is, unable to participate in temple worship for a period of time.

The Samaritans responded quite naturally with strong dislike or hatred for Jews. Understanding this cultural prejudice makes the end of Jesus’ story all the more surprising to us.

**Creation Stories**

It is accepted that the Genesis narratives are not literal reportage. Genesis bears many of the features of the genre of myth. Even though these narratives are not to be taken literally, it is important to remember that they are situated deeply within an historical Hebrew faith. The Genesis account is different from other cosmologies of other peoples in that God is unambiguously monotheistic. God is transcendent and pre-existent. God is creator. Divine beings in other accounts of creation are treated as creatures of Yahweh in Genesis. The God of Genesis is the God of all. In summary Genesis seems to say:
1. The whole world owes its being to the sovereign action of God.
2. Creation is basically good.
3. Evil is portrayed as a single moral fault, namely, the flawed human response to temptation. We are therefore challenged to think of evil beyond this idea, because in life, there is a fractiousness of nature that can ruin innocent lives—e.g. the suffering and death of a little child.
4. The world exists for men and women. Men and women are made in the image of God and are to increase and care for the earth. Humankind is suffused of the breath of God, and thus given unique spirit with a mission of stewardship for the earth.

The first explicit reference to “creation out of nothing” is in the second book of Maccabees.

**Biblical Texts**

**Teacher Background**

Moral values and moral directions or pathways are understood, reflected on and acted upon within personal, historical, cultural and religious contexts. Numerous Biblical texts encapsulate moral understandings and attitudes, moral reflection and moral action across a range of contexts. The perennial moral wisdom of Biblical texts reflected upon, prayed over and internalised, provides a foundation and motivation for moral life and moral action in contemporary contexts.

Some Biblical texts are in narrative form. Moral attitudes, dilemmas and actions are reflected in the situation as well as in the characters and their interactions in Biblical narratives. For example, in the narrative about the adulterous woman (Jn.8: 1-11), the compassionate and forgiving attitude of Jesus is strongly contrasted with the legalistic, punitive and self-righteous attitudes of the woman's accusers.

Other Biblical texts focus on the development of values, attitudes, virtues and moral orientations that necessarily underpin a moral life faithful to the covenant with God and lived in accordance with the example of Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Some texts challenge us to justice, to consciousness of the poor and needy, to advocacy and practical action on behalf of the oppressed. Other texts list attitudes and dispositions that animate the moral life. Among such attitudes and dispositions are patience, compassion, goodness, faithfulness, peacefulness, self-control and the like. Other texts counsel us against negative attitudes, values and orientations that lead to sinful attitudes and actions. Among such negatives are jealousy, pride, vanity, hardness of heart, hatred, indifference and so on.

Biblical texts provide guidance in the development of moral values and pathways. As such reflection upon and interaction with such texts is an important part of the moral growth of Christians. Christians need to reflect upon and pray about such texts in relation to the moral contexts of their own lives acting with discernment and seeking sound guidance where needed.