

Money, Power, Relationship
Is Christian Morality Unique? Part One

Comparison with Other World Religions

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Slide set 10 of 10

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Isbn 978-0-9805603-8-1

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In previous workshops we looked at the essential needs for the individuals of a society. They need to be protected from violence.

They need a social support group. They need material goods such as food and shelter.

We considered how the Commandments of "Thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal" protected such rights.

We considered how from their earliest days, the followers of Jesus sought to turn these Commandments into positives.

How universal are these three morality issues?

Influenced by the idealism of Greek philosophy they sought to empower others through defense, health and education. They sought to reinforce social grouping. They sought to improve both the production of goods and housing and the distribution of these.

In doing this, over the centuries, they helped to advance societies where the dynamism of Christianity flourished

Even so, we need to consider whether these values have also existed in other types of societies.

Are these values found in other World Religions as well?



How universal are these three morality issues?

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There are parallels here with other life species as well.

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Three key things essential for life

There is the need for **life itself** and safety.

There is the need for a reproductive **social support** group.

There is the need for **material supports** such as food, clothing, housing etc.

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Three social Commandments of Judaism
protected basic rights

5. **“Thou shalt not kill”**
Life itself

6. **“Thou shalt not commit adultery”**
Social Support

7. **“Thou shalt not steal”**
Material Support



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In early Christian teaching onwards, There has been a process of **“raising the bar”** of the Commandments

5.	“Thou shalt not kill”	Avoid cruelty and help people’s self-determination
6.	“Thou shalt not commit adultery”	Control sexuality and support basic social group
7.	“Thou shalt not steal”	Provide material supports



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In reflecting on this on-going process of development, one wonders whether or not other world religions have “homed in” on the same three basic survival needs.

Have they “raised the bar” of these precepts as well?



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Consider **Judaism**, the basis of both Christianity and Islam



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Judaism

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Using the traditional Catholic sequence of Commandments we have already looked at the numbers. 5,6 and 7 Commandments about killing, adultery and stealing.

However if we look at the three commandments that follow these three there is arguably a "raising of the bar" here.



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Commandment Number Eight

8.

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour"

(cf. killing off the reputation and self-determination of another)

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Is this "raising the bar" of Commandment

5. *"Thou shalt not kill"*



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Commandment Number Nine

9.

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife"

(cf. failure to control one's attitude to sex)

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Is this a "raising of the bar" of

6. *"Thou shalt not commit adultery"*



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Commandment Number Ten

10.

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods"

(Failure to control one's avarice)

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Is this a "raising of the bar" of

7. *"Thou shalt not steal"*



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- ▶ We can see from commandments 8. 9. 10 that the **attitudes** of people are also being taken into account with the Commandments.
- ▶ In this sense there is a “raising of the bar” towards respect for “the other”.



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This focus on “attitude” is reflected in the prayers of Judaism as well cf.

“He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly

Who despises the gain of oppressions

Who shakes his hand lest they hold a bribe **Stealing** cf. **money**

Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed **Killing** cf. **power**

And shuts his eyes from looking upon evil” **Adultery** cf. **sex**

Isaiah 33:15

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Islam is heavily based upon Judaism

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Consider another world religion such as
Islam.



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It has a strict belief in the
Otherness
of the One God

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Islam is based on Judaism and it holds the
Commandments in special regard.

In its own laws set out in the *Koran*, Islam

- **has concern for the welfare of the poor**
- has a strong opposition to adultery
- has emphasis on the protective stability of family

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Consider **Hinduism** and its Scriptures.



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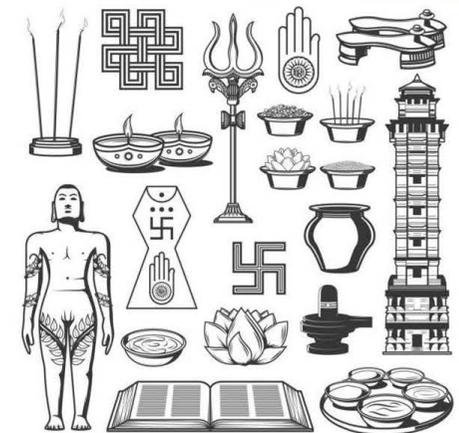
What about Hinduism?

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In the *Gita* there is a strong emphasis on **duty**.

This involves respect for the lives and welfare of others especially **family members**

(cf. "Thou shalt not commit adultery")



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In the Hindu *Upanisads* there is the sense of an **all-encompassing Spirit** beyond this world
This reminds people that **material wealth is secondary**
(cf. "Thou shalt not steal")



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Hindus have a strong belief in **Dharma**, i.e.
"a cosmic law underlying right behaviour and social order."
This reminds people there is ultimate accountability for one's **treatment of others**
(cf. "Thou shalt not kill")



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Consider Taoism, a philosophic religion based in China

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Consider Chinese **Taoism** and its philosophy



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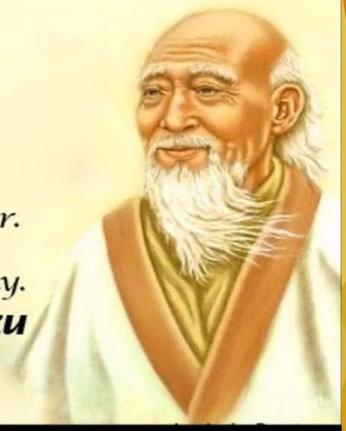
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*Watch your thoughts;
They become words.
Watch your words;
They become actions.
Watch your actions;
They become habits.
Watch your habits;
They become character.
Watch your character;
It becomes your destiny.*
Lao Tzu



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In **Taoism** the Sage says
“I have three things that I cherish. These are:

Compassion	Respect for relationships cf. <i>“Thou shalt not commit adultery”</i>
Frugality	cf. <i>“Thou shalt not steal”</i>
Not daring to take a lead in the empire.” <i>Tao Te Ching Bk 2 LXVII</i>	control of one’s wish for power cf. <i>“Thou shalt not kill”</i>

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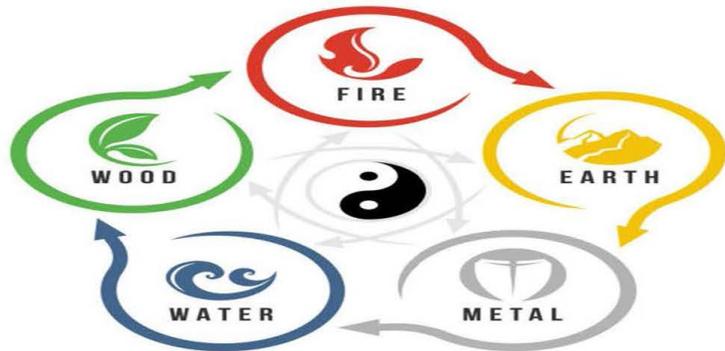
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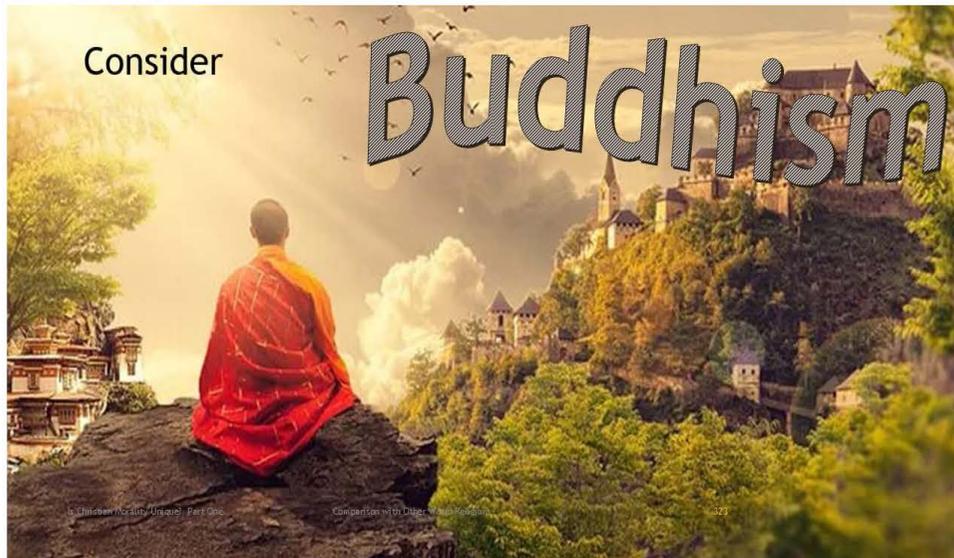
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The Buddha founded an offshoot of Hinduism

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Buddhist nuns and monks take **public vows** of

Poverty	<i>As opposed to</i>	Over-focus on material wealth
Chastity	<i>As opposed to</i>	Lack of sexual control
Obedience to leaders	<i>As opposed to</i>	Violence towards others

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Because of the allegiance Buddhists have to the lifestyle of their monks and nuns, they in turn try to avoid

- over-indulgence in material wealth,
- lack of control with regard to sexuality and
- cruelty towards others.



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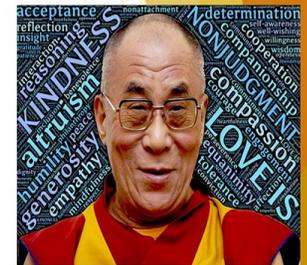
Buddhist Vows	Encourage <i>Opposition to</i>	They endorse the Commandments
Poverty	Over-indulgence in material goods	<i>“Thou shalt not steal”</i>
Chastity	Lack of sexual control	<i>“Thou shalt not commit adultery”</i>
Obedience to leadership	Violence towards others	<i>“Thou shalt not kill”</i>

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This approach is echoed in their teaching
For example

In a talk given at the Buddhist monastery in Footscray Melbourne, the Dalai Lama of Tibet opened with the sentence



“Have compassion for all sentient beings!”

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Do these public vows
have any leverage over
the

**value system of
society in general??**

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- ▶ If we look at the imagery used by sociologist Talcott Parsons, we remember his comparison between the key values of a society and the tiller of a ship -
- ▶ The ship's tiller (cf. key values) determines the direction of the whole.



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Strongly upheld core values can determine the direction of the whole

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There can be a similarity here with the people who take on an extreme application of :

Poverty cf. *“Thou shalt not steal”*

Chastity cf. *“Thou shalt not commit adultery”*

Obedience cf. *“Thou shalt not kill”*

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Over the centuries Christian Religious Orders have attempted to “raise the bar” of the Commandments . They have set up and run according to their charism:-

schools (cf. education)

Hospitals (cf. health) and

Orphanages etc. (cf. social services) etc.

As one African woman put it

*“I’m not going to criticize the Church.
It is the only organization that helps us”*

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These days in developed countries the above “needs” in society are largely met by government funding and other dedicated people.

But Catholic Religious continue to look for a “cutting edge” in service where they can “raise the bar” of Commandment Observance

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Do Religious Orders hold special significance in today's world?

Strongly upheld core values can determine the direction of the whole



Are there other key differences between a general effort to control and direct money, power and sex and the efforts made by Religious?

Religious join a lifelong, focused "social organism" within the "social organism" of the Church.

Together they try to promote the Authorized, Living Word of Jesus Christ within and amongst themselves, in the Church and in the world.

Despite their diminishing numbers, they continue on, this basic, Christian dynamic

..... Is Christian Morality Unique? Part Or

Part Two of Is Christian Morality Unique? explores how the structures of the gospels have set up the Dialectic Tension that gives momentum to this dynamic

Some Questions Relating to Part 1 of *Is Christian Morality Unique?*

01 To what extent do you think the vast array of do's and don'ts relating to social interaction can be summed up in the the three Commandments of "Thou shalt not Kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal"?

02 In the first century CE, the Jerusalem Temple was one of the wonders of the known world. The family of Jesus visited Jerusalem and its Temple every year. The Temple's builder, King Herod, had a keen interest in Greek philosophy and culture. On the one hand Saul (later called Paul) studied in Jerusalem under the Jewish scholar Gamaliel. But as well as this Paul knew enough about the philosophy of the Greek Stoics to challenge this philosophy in his first letter to the Corinthians. Given such a background, do you think it likely that the Temple's library held some Greek texts as well as the Hebrew ones and Jesus had access to these?

03 As most people in first century Palestine were illiterate, do you think that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was probably illiterate as well? Or, could she have been taught literacy and weaving etc. by people such as Anna who lived at the Temple for decades?

Remember that many scribes were based there, providing a background of reading and writing. Also, recall that the garment that Jesus wore at the crucifixion was seamless from top to bottom. Indeed the weaving of this garment was so "special" the soldiers did not want to tear it. Does this suggest there was a "higher" level of education amongst the members of Jesus' household?

04 At the first Church Council in the late 40's CE, it was decided that the Gentile followers of Jesus would not need to undergo circumcision and observe the many rules and rites of Judaism. Rather they would need to avoid "blood, fornication and strangling". The Gentiles were relieved about this. But would these rules be enough on which to base the whole morality of their lives? Or, would it make more sense that these rules inferred that to:

"avoid blood" also meant to avoid the blood sports and cruelty of the Roman Empire.

"Avoid fornication" also included avoiding Temple prostitution and unmarried sex.

"Avoid strangling" also included avoiding unjust business practices, especially those that oppressed the poor ??

Some Questions Relating to Part 1 of *Is Christian Morality Unique?*

continued

05 How does our own culture measure up to these standards?

06 As the message of Jesus spread across the Roman Empire people said "See how these Christians love one another". Do you think they said this because the help that Christians were giving to others extended beyond their own family and ethnic group?

07 Why do you think so many of the advances in the modern world have come from "the West" and its Christian heritage?

08 Do you think there is an inner dynamic within Christianity "pushing" people towards improvement?

09 Does it make sense to you that the basic morality rules in the world's major religions are similar?

10 What are some of the obstacles this type of "worldwide morality" is likely to face into the future? What would be some ways in which people can anticipate such obstacles and deal with them?

11 Why do you think the new Pope adopted the name of Leo XIV?

going back to the question ----considered in Part 2 of *Is Christian Morality Unique?*

What indeed is the nature of the Christian Dynamic?

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