

# Is Christian Morality Unique?

## Part 2

Michelle Nailon CSB

01 of 12 slide sets

**The following sets of pictures cover a wide range of topics so  
an introductory outline would be helpful.**

The first set of slides provide an outline of Part 1 of *Is Christian Morality Unique?*. It shows how there are three basic social commandments of  
- "Thou shalt not kill,  
commit adultery or  
steal".

It considers how the the society of C1st Palestine was based upon Judaism yet it was also challenged by the Greek philosophy (cf. Hellenism) of the Roman Empire.

The slides then show how, from the earliest days, the followers of Jesus reduced the myriad rules of Judaism and at the same time, incorporated the idealism of Hellenism into observance of the Commandments.

This approach was developed in the three synoptic gospels of Mark (cf. poverty), Matthew (cf. relationship) and Luke (cf. power) and was even reflected in the accounts given of the crucifixion.

The slides argue that the approach of Christianity in "raising the bar" of the Commandments has continued on into the development of the industrialised world.

It is pointed out that while the three key social values are found in the other major world religions such as Buddhism, the tension between the two contrasting world views of Judaism and Hellenism is more obvious within Christianity.

## Questions, questions,...

Questions are then asked.

Is such a tension found within the cosmos itself, namely the tension between time and place?

Does Jewish society rely especially on the sense of time while

Hellenism relies especially on the sense of place?

Did the gospel writers show their awareness of such a time/place tension between Judaism and Hellenism within the basic structure of Christianity?

Can a semiotic, sociological analysis of the gospels reveal their awareness of this tension (cf. [www.realitysearch.com.au](http://www.realitysearch.com.au))?

The slides go on to show how a semiotic, sociological analysis of the Acts of the Apostles and the gospel of John, reveal a sense of the "Living Authority" (cf. time) and the "Living Word" (cf. place) that is embedded in the texts.

The slides then diverge into an exploration of how ancient societies have attempted to "align" time and place in order to reach beyond the time/place "bubble" of the cosmos, towards the "Ground of Being" that exists beyond it.

Such an "alignment" has parallels with the structure of the Eucharist.

Here, participants are challenged to endorse the presence of the "living Word" (cf. Liturgy of the Word) and the "Living Authority" (cf. offering the fruits of one's daily labour).

This leads into a re-enactment of the Last Supper.

Here, the "Authorised, Living Word" becomes present in the midst of the congregation and through the Communion service, enters into their daily lives.

In the words of John's gospel "the Word becomes flesh"

No. 1

# Is Christian Morality Unique? Part 2

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Set 01 of 12 slide sets.

No. 2

01	Is Christian Morality Unique - A re-cap of Part 1	
02	Time, Place and Cosmic Tension	
03	Judaism and Reliance on the Sense of Time	
04	Hellenism (cf. Greek Philosophy) and Place	
05	Mark 's Concentric Circles around Place	
06	Matthew, Structured around Time Statements	
07	The Gospel of Luke	Project Employment Inc. Melbourne 2024 All Rights Reserved
08	Luke's Acts of the Apostles	
09	Introduction to the Gospel of John	<a href="http://www.valuesclarification.org/ischristianmoralityunique.htm">www.valuesclarification.org /ischristianmoralityunique.htm</a>
10	John and the Authorized, Living Word	
11	Historical Efforts to Align Time and Place	Isbn 978-0-9805603-8-1
12	Structure of the Eucharist	

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# Is Christian Morality Unique? Part 2

*Let's begin with a Recap of Part 1*

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- ▶ From ancient times societies have attempted to work out an operating code of conduct
- ▶ For instance in 1700 BC there was the Law Code of Hammurabi in Babylon
- ▶ This had a stress on the rights to **life**, **a family** and **property**



Law Code of Hammurabi

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- ▶ Around C12th BCE Moses presented the Jewish forbears with the Commandments.
- ▶ There were parallels here with Hammurabi as the Commandments stress:

the right to life

*Thou shalt not kill,*

family

*Thou shalt not commit adultery*

property *Thou shalt not steal.*



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- ▶ An early Church Council (around 49CE) required Gentile converts to “avoid blood, fornication and strangling” rather than the many rules of Jewish law.

- ▶ But this was “raising the bar” of the Commandments.



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- ▶ The life and teaching of Jesus shows a combination of the Commandments of Judaism with the idealism of Greek philosophy (cf. the Roman Empire)



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“Avoid blood” implied cruelty as such cf. *“thou shalt not kill”*



“Avoid fornication” implied uncommitted sex cf. *“thou shalt not commit adultery”*



“Avoid strangling” implied unjust business practices cf. *“thou shalt not steal”*

What do you think?

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▶ This “raising of the bar” continued on as shown in the gospels.

▶ In **Mark’s** gospel (70CE) Ch 10

▶ Jesus throws out the challenge

▶ *“Go sell what you have and give to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven and come follow me”*



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No. 10

▶ This implies a **raising of the bar**.

▶ Instead of **stealing**, give property away.

▶ Instead of setting up your **own family/** household rely on your relationship with God.

▶ Instead of your own **self-determination** commit yourself to the following of Jesus and helping others

▶ i.e. move beyond the Commandments



No. 12



▶ The Gospel of **Matthew**

stressed the need to follow the Spirit of the Law

If you are fined for a tunic give your coat as well

**(Thou shalt not steal)**

Avoid even looking at a woman lustfully

**(Thou shalt not commit adultery)**

Avoid calling another a fool

**(Thou shalt not kill)**

(cf. Ch. 5)

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▶ In the gospel of **Luke**, the bar of these three commandments is raised as well: Consider:

▶ When someone asked to follow Jesus he warned them of extreme **poverty** (“nowhere to lay his head”) (cf. “**Thou shalt not steal**”)



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▶ When Jesus invited someone to join him the person asked to “bury his father first”, i.e. wait until he died. Jesus said *Your duty is to spread the Kingdom of God* i.e. help others in self-determination (cf. “**Thou shalt not kill**”)



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▶ In Luke Ch 9 someone promised to follow Jesus after saying goodbye to his family.  
▶ Jesus replied *Once the hand is laid on the plough no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.*  
(i.e. the task of proclaiming the kingdom takes precedence over setting up a family cf. “**thou shalt not commit adultery**”)

**When Paul was accused of being a ring leader of what his opponents called the "Nazarene Sect." Paul answered that rather, he was a follower of "the Way" (Acts ch. 24).**

**Paul had difficulty explaining what "the Way" entailed. In Acts 19:9 some people publicly maligned it.**

**Do you think a constant "raising of the bar" of the three key social commandments would have parallels with what Paul understood as "the way" of practising the Commandments?**

**And, in such case do you think the followers of Jesus would try to extend a living out of "the Way" into all aspects of their daily life and work?**

# Has an idealistic approach towards the Commandments stimulated the development of industry in the Western World? In such case arguably..... -

## Industry

An idealistic approach towards the Commandments stimulated the development of industry in the Western World

- - helping others towards self-determination, social security, material well-being etc.

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### ▶ Industry

- ▶ over the centuries as Christian societies developed, there has been an on-going tension between the moral edicts inherited from Judaism and the idealism of Greek philosophy.  
For example:

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- ▶ The “bar has been raised” in terms of universal education and health care  
(cf. “**thou shalt not kill**”)
- ▶ There have been improvements in **family support** (at least financially).
- ▶ There has been increased productivity and increased distribution of goods  
(cf. “**thou shalt not steal**”)

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- ▶ The values emphasis of :  
“thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal”  
exists in other world religions as well.

- ▶ e.g. the more detailed rules of **Judaism**,
- ▶ the edicts of the **Koran**,
- ▶ the *Tai Te Chien* of **Taoism**, and
- ▶ the self-giving of the *Bhagavad Gita* of **Hinduism**

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Also  
there are strong parallels between the vows of **poverty**, **chastity** and **obedience** in Buddhist communities and the Religious Orders of Christian (esp. Catholic) churches



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- ▶ the vows are a “raising of the bar” of
- ▶ thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal.

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- ▶ Christianity is based upon the two world views of Judaism and Hellenism.
- ▶ The question is asked “What is the nature of this tension between Judaism and Hellenism?”



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On the other hand even while these values exist in other world religions, a Christian society is set up in order to embed the dialectical tension between its moral values and idealism.

Part 2 of *Is Christian Morality Unique?* looks at how this tension was incorporated into the gospels of Christianity.

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Is it connected to the cosmic tension between time and place?



[www.valuesclarification.org/ischristianmoralityunique.htm](http://www.valuesclarification.org/ischristianmoralityunique.htm)