

## 5-STEP METHODOLOGY FOR APPLICATION OF SCRIPTURE TO MORAL ISSUES

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### 1. *Selection and Precision of the Concrete Moral Case*

- a. Just as there is a need for the interpretation of *any* text (no text is self-interpreting), much the same can be said for the moral case, and the larger world in which it is located. There is no such thing as a self-evident or self-interpreting moral case.
- b. Thus, there will always be the need to a certain extent for casuistry (analysis and application of moral principles to a particular case).
- c. Notion of "reading the world" (in tandem with "reading the text") developed by Stephen Fowl and L. Gregory Jones

"We have argued that Scripture is best read in and through Christian communities. Such communities, however, find themselves within the political arrangements of wider societies. They need to understand these larger contexts and the ways in which they impinge on Christian communities if Christians' readings of Scripture are to enable them to live faithfully. Hence faithful interpretation requires not only 'readings of the texts' but also 'readings of the world'." Stephen E. Fowl, and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991): 44.

- d. Similar to reading the "signs of the times", e.g., as found in Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*.

### 2. *Selection of Scripture Text(s)*

- a. Logical caveat: no one can consider every possible Scriptural text for each and every ethical issue. However, we need to be aware of, and seek to mitigate the natural tendency to create a "canon-within-a-canon" to such an extent that a major part of the Bible, plus the historical experience of the whole Christian community (i.e., Tradition) are ignored or sidestepped as "irrelevant."
- b. Undoubtedly selection must be made, but it should be done in recognition of both the whole biblical canon and the Tradition of the Church.
- c. Here, again the notion of a "lectio continua" (continuous reading of the Bible) would be helpful, which acts as a corrective against tendency to create a canon-within-a-canon, plus helps us to here as many voices as possible from Scripture. Such a lectio continua also plugs into the ongoing liturgical life of the Church, and is precisely the moment in the Church's life where this "lectio continua" is practiced, and thus helps better integrate our moral theology into our liturgical life
- d. Recognition of different ways in which Scripture speaks to moral issues:
  - i. specific biblical texts on the specific issue
  - ii. specific biblical texts on related issues

- iii. general or overarching biblical themes, patterns, etc. which have broad ethical ramifications. E.g. sin, forgiveness, cross and resurrection.
  - e. Pay particular attention to those Scripture passages which have stood the test of time in selection for ethical use, e.g., Sermon on the Mount, key sections of Pauline theology, etc.
  - f. Make sure you have a complete "unit" and a passage of suitable length
    - i. Avoid taking the passage out of context
    - ii. No Proof-Texting!
- 3. ***Exegesis of the Text(s)***
  - a. be able and willing to do the research and reflection that this requires!
  - b. Logical corollary: not everyone will be able to master these scholarly requirements; therefore, need for both specialization and cooperation, and interdisciplinary study.
- 4. ***Interpretation of the Text(s)***
  - a. Principle of Hermeneutics: no text is "self-interpreting"
  - b. Aid here from work done in both hermeneutical theory in general, and more specifically in biblical hermeneutics (i.e., the method of the interpretation of the biblical texts to a contemporary context).
  - c. Insight from the practice of *lectio divina*, (spiritual reading) namely the two "moments" of interpretation, namely, first, the *meditatio* in which we meditate on the text, trying to "open" up the meaning of the text itself, and then second, the *contemplatio* in which we sit before the text and try to open ourselves to the voice of God who inspires the text and speaks through it to us.
  - d. The question/problem of interpretation will move us logically and inexorably to the next step: application of the text to the ethical problem.
- 5. ***Application of the Text to the Ethical Situation***
  - a. "No situation in which Christians (either now or in the past) find themselves is self-interpreting. The process of faithfully embodying an interpretation of Scripture presupposes that Christian communities have already analyzed and diagnosed the contexts in which they find themselves. Such analysis must be informed and directed by Scripture, but it is not simply an interpretation of Scripture." [Fowl & Jones, p. 45].
  - b. Involves the whole problematic of the use of models in Scripture, as well as the added problem/concern of Scripture itself as the "normative" source for Christian ethics.