

LESSON 10

COUNSELLING ON ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS ISSUES

Introduction

Aims

1. To point out the ethical dilemmas which have resulted from developments in the medical field.
2. To help the minister to be able to counsel those who face such issues as abortion, giving consent based upon adequate medical information, and euthanasia.
3. To show how the minister can respond to those who pass through periods of doubt.
4. To help pastors to respond to those who have doubts related to the origin of religion, conflicts between science and religion, and the Bible as a source of final authority for the Christian faith.

Living in the last part of the twentieth century has thrust us into a complex situation and has forced us to make decisions which man has not previously had to make. Man has the potential of doing a great deal more in terms of deciding whether or not to let life be born, when to continue life, and when to terminate it.

Perhaps an even greater issue than that of determining the beginning and ending of life is the quality of life that people live. The Christian faith proceeds on the basis that there are eternal and spiritual values which help to give meaning to life. Following these values leads to a higher plane of living.

Ethical Issues

Factors which have created ethical dilemmas

Changes in technology. – In recent years we have seen developments in technology which have made possible procedures in medicine that previously were not thought possible. Most hospitals now have an intensive care section which makes it possible to maintain people alive, who in previous years, would have died quickly. The prolongation of life in some of these cases is a mixed blessing. As a chaplain I had occasion to visit among patients and family members who felt themselves to be the victims of these advancements. In some cases the patients had illnesses which gave very little hope of recovery. Some of them were old and preferred to be left alone in order to die peacefully instead of prolonging their suffering and the anguish of family members, not to mention the mounting medical expenses that resulted from each day's hospitalization in the intensive care unit. The use of heroic measures now makes it possible to deprive the patient of the fulfilment of his wish to have a death of his own. The use of sophisticated technological equipment, such as the breathing machine,

How have technological advances created an ethical dilemma?

(Compare your answer with the text.)

places the decision as to the prolongation of life in the hands of the doctor and the nurses. Doubtless there is a great deal of good that comes from these machines. The question is to know when they should be used and when the machine should be turned off in order to let the patient quietly slip away into eternity.

Scientific advances. – Medical science has advanced considerably in recent years, which adds a tremendous moral responsibility upon those in the medical professions. For instance, there is a test called amniocentesis involving taking a sampling of the amniotic fluid around the fetus. This fluid is examined and it is possible to detect seventy per cent of the genetic disorders in the unborn infant. This knowledge is used as a basis for recommending that the mother have an abortion if the fetus shows signs of being defective. If the pastor has within his church membership a couple that comes to ask his counsel because they are considering the recommendation of their obstetrician to have an abortion based on the findings of this test, what is to be the counsel of the pastor? If the couple has already given birth to one child that is defective, they may not want to take the chance of having another. They will want to know whether or not it is morally wrong to have an abortion.

Cultural changes. – In addition to the technological and scientific developments which make possible and sometimes necessary decisions that formerly we did not have to consider, we recognize that within recent years there have been many changes in the attitudes of people towards many different issues. The Roman Catholic Church has followed the principle of casuistry for centuries, and now Evangelicals are faced with the same principle within the framework of relativity in ethical issues. Decisions that formerly were simple are now seen as complex in which we must admit that circumstances make a difference. Joseph Fletcher and others have propounded the new morality based upon determining what is love in each specific situation.¹

While working in a hospital I ministered to a couple who struggled with the question of what to do with their infant that had been born with Down's syndrome (mongolism). A few years ago they would probably not have considered giving the child to the state, but this was their final decision after considering their circumstances. Some time later I talked with another man from another state who shared with me the joy that he and his wife had experienced through the years as they lovingly took care of their mongoloid daughter, now an adult. He said that their world had been blessed immeasurably by the presence of that daughter in their home. Her capacity to give and receive love unconditionally had revolutionized their own attitudes and actions. Who can say that the former couple made the wrong decision and the latter couple acted in a Christian manner? Other issues related to abortion, euthanasia, and organ transplants tend to force us to recognize that extenuating circumstances do make a difference as to the moral implications of a decision.

Give an example of how scientific advances have helped to create ethical dilemmas.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Give an example of how cultural changes have helped to create ethical dilemmas.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Philosophical alternatives that compete

Hedonism. – As we face up to contemporary ethical issues, we are confronted with a number of different philosophical positions that compete with the Christian ideals. Hedonism in its modern forms of expression seems to be the basic philosophy which influences the decision making process of many people. If personal, physical pleasure is uppermost as our aim in life, then we will probably choose the pathways which involve the least amount of pain and personal responsibility in order to be more free to enjoy ourselves. Frankly, I visited among some family members who seemed to reflect this basic viewpoint as they wondered why the doctor did not turn off the life-sustaining machines that kept their mother or father alive and thereby postponed their receiving their share of the family inheritance. In one case the doctor bluntly told a middle-aged woman that she should not be in such a hurry to get rid of her mother. The sensate culture of which Sorokin spoke several years ago seems to have blossomed forth in its fullness as we observe the varieties of sensual pleasures that are available through the Playboy clubs, crude pornographic movies and reading material, and other orgies. Modern hedonism is having its heyday.

Utilitarianism. – The effort to decide what gives the greatest amount of good to the greatest number of people creates ethical anxiety through some of the perplexing decisions which some people are forced to make. One family struggled with their feelings of confusion, grief, and anger after the doctor came to tell them that their son had been involved in an automobile accident. He had no chances of survival, and the doctor wanted permission to take their son's kidneys and eyes for other patients who needed them. It was almost too much to ask them to be altruistic and utilitarian and think of the blessings that can come to others who have a chance to live normal lives by using their son's organs.

A few years ago a committee in a metropolitan city received a lot of publicity as they tried to screen the different candidates for the dialysis machines because they had more who needed them than the number of machines available.² They formulated the following criteria to help them to decide who should be saved by the dialysis: (1) What are the relative ages and health of the people who need dialysis? (2) What are the relative contributions that each of these people can contribute to society? (3) What financial obligations will come to the family and how will the cost of the treatment leave them? (4) What are the potential contributions that the person can make towards bettering mankind's conditions? They struggled with the advantages and disadvantages of letting a genius who is doing research on cancer cures be given preference over the senile man who is a semi-invalid and has no living relatives. They also debated about the young person over against the older person who had already reared his family and was now retired. A lot of people objected to the use of all these criteria for deciding who should be given the opportunity to

Define Hedonism. Give an example of Hedonism.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Give an example of Utilitarianism.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

live through the dialysis machines. Who can place a value upon anyone's life? And yet these are very real decisions which people have to make.

Absolutism. – Another philosophical basis which offers an option in making ethical decisions is absolutism. This position would maintain that there is a right and wrong regarding every issue. The Pharisees in the day of Jesus seemed to see issues in this respect without regard for the effects upon people. They preferred for people to continue to be lame or blind rather than be healed on the Sabbath and thereby break a ceremonial law. They preferred that people endure hunger rather than eat without fulfilling the ritualistic requirements of washing their hands and the outside of the vessels prior to eating. Immanuel Kant had his categorical imperatives which made it possible to establish the rightness or wrongness of any issue. Some today feel more comfortable when they can appeal to a rule and thereby simply declare an issue as being right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, good or bad.

One medical doctor says that he deals with abortion in this way. He decided that he would not do abortions. When his patients request one, he explains his position and recommends them to a colleague who does them. His colleagues decide to do abortions based upon the circumstances without regard for the moral issue.

Implications for pastors

As related to the ethical roots of our faith. – As we minister to people who are faced with, and sometimes the victims of, these radical changes in our world, we are thrust back upon our Judaeo-Christian foundations to give us the principles that we need to help form the basis for the decisions that we help others to make. One of the basic teachings that forms the foundation for all else is that man is created in the image of God. This means that human life is sacred and that it is a gift from God. As such, no one has a right to take that gift from anyone else. All that is done to preserve and to enrich life can be blessed by the pastor. Other actions should be questioned. We ask what will be the consequences of their choice. This will usually help them to clarify their thinking on the issues. We can explain to them God's expectations on issues that are clear. This is what people usually expect when they come to consult the man of God.

As related to our fellowman. – One of the basic teachings of the Christian faith involves the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. This implies that God has endowed all human life with significance, and no one has a right to put more value upon one person than another. The geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky has said: "If we enable the weak and the deformed to live and propagate their kind, we face the prospect of a genetic twilight for the entire human race. But if we let them die or suffer when we can save them, we face the certainty of moral twilight."³ We need to remember that there is validity in the principles of sanctity of life, justice for all mankind, and compassion

The philosophy that states that there is a right and wrong about every issue is called _____

(absolutism)

Draw lines to match the following:

Absolutism	The pathway of personal, physical pleasure
Hedonism	A right and wrong regarding every issue
Utilitarianism	
Dialysis	The effort to decide what gives the greatest amount of good to the greatest number of people

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Name three philosophies that compete with Christianity in making ethical decisions.

(Hedonism, Utilitarianism, Absolutism)

All that is done to _____ and to _____ life can be blessed by the _____

(preserve, enrich, pastor)

towards others as a bulwark against cruelty and tyranny.

This principle implies that there is no place for superiority of one race or nationality over another. It also implies that we are all responsible to have love for one another and an interest in the welfare of one another. The medical profession struggles with the use of the technology that is now at their disposal. Previously the physician proceeded upon a basis of hunches that came by probing with his hands in order to diagnose. Now he has at his disposal mechanisms which eliminate his need to touch so much, and probably still give a more accurate diagnosis of the illness and needs of the patient. Also, to whom is the doctor responsible? Is he responsible to the patient, the company that contracts him, or the government? These issues help us to see that frequently the physician walks a rather lonely road as he struggles to make the right decision. He has more power now to extend life, at least for a period of time, than previously. Is he God? We must increase our ethical understanding of all the factors and be supportive of the doctors who struggle with the issues of life and death.

Specific areas of application

The issue of abortion. – In recent years the government officials in various countries have tended to legalize abortion, stating that the adult woman has a right to determine what happens to her body. Previously abortion was illegal in most countries and permitted in some only when two medical opinions stated that the life of the mother was at stake if the pregnancy continued until the normal time for the birth of the baby. For some time there has been a lot of controversy over “therapeutic abortions,” because people cannot agree upon the place to draw the line in determining what is therapeutic or not.

The main argument for the legalization of abortions was the fact that so many illegal abortions were practised each year with tragic consequences. They were usually done under clandestine conditions, which increased greatly the possibility of infection. Many women die of tetanus as a result of the infection caused by abortions. There was always the danger of leaving something inside the uterus, which also can have grave consequences. There was also the danger of perforation of the uterus. These problems led many countries to move in the direction of legalizing abortion if practised during the first three months of pregnancy.

Arguments against the practice of therapeutic abortions are numerous. First, it should be recognized that the fetus is a human being from the time of conception. Every person has a right to live. Second, to practise abortion in those cases where the baby might be deformed implies that some human being or agency has the right to determine who should live. Third, many believe that it is just one step from abortion to euthanasia, in which man sets himself up as judge over when the life of another man is to be terminated. Fourth, to practise abortion as a means of convenience because a family did not want another child or

We are all responsible to have _____ for one another and an interest in the _____ of one another.

(love, welfare)

Is the following statement true or false?

Abortion is a serious issue upon which the pastor may be called to help make an ethical decision.

(true)

to protect the reputation of an unmarried young lady is to give assent to egoism in its most extreme expression.

Specific conditions vary in each country and the laws will probably be different. But we can lay down some basic principles which will guide the pastor. First, human life is created in the image of God, and therefore is sacred. No one has a right to take life which belongs to God (Gen. 9:6). Second, one must depend upon the best professional advice when faced with a situation which involves a threat to the life of the mother. Also, we must depend upon the doctors and their professional competence when they recommend that a pregnancy be terminated because of complications in the fetus. I believe that the pastor should give support to the family to follow the advice of a reputable and competent physician. Third, people who are unmarried can look at other solutions to the problem rather than abortion. The adoption of the baby or keeping it to be reared by the mother are viable options which offer fewer negative consequences.

Informed consent. – Does the patient have the right to know about his condition? Is the doctor obligated to tell the patient and/or his family all the truth with relationship to his illness? The issue of informed consent enters into the picture here also. Before a patient is asked to give his permission for any type of procedure, does he have a right to know about the possible consequences, both positive and negative, of such procedure?

These are some of the questions that have arisen in recent years and which perplex patients and doctors. Sometimes doctors feel that they have become the scapegoats and that people are unjust in their haste to bring malpractice lawsuits against them. The minister will be consulted by doctors and patients who are his church members as they struggle with the questions that tribulate them. Patients will want to know whether or not to submit to surgery that might endanger their lives or leave them as invalids. The pastor will seek to instill confidence in the physician on the part of the patient. The patient will be encouraged to trust the surgeon and the Lord as he seeks better health.

Euthanasia. – The word “euthanasia” comes from the Greek and means “good death, happy death, easy death.” Edgar Jackson defines euthanasia as a medical judgement sustained by legal consent “to the end of relieving the suffering of the incurably ill by hastening death.”¹⁴ There is a growing interest in this issue. Some people are talking of terminating their lives at will. How does this type death differ from suicide? Does it differ? Frequently the pastor will visit among patients who are incurably ill and notice the heroic measures that are used to keep them alive. Many of them long for the release that comes with death. He will wonder about the efforts, expense, and additional suffering to the patient and family members which result from this process. From time to time someone will say: “Wouldn’t it be better just to let the patient die?” While we might agree with this statement, there is a great difference between this and “helping the patient to die.”

List principles that can guide the pastor in helping make decisions regarding abortion.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Circle the correct answer.

Informed consent refers to a patient and/or his family being fully informed about his illness. true false

(true)

The relief of the suffering of the incurably ill by hastening death is known as _____.

(euthanasia)

Physicians take the Hippocratic Oath, which says: "I will follow that method of treatment which, according to my ability and judgement, I consider best for the benefit of my patients and abstain from whatever is deleterious and wrong. I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody, if asked for, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect." While adhering to the letter of this oath, most physicians are forced to make decisions regarding the extension of life by choosing not to continue with a drug or medication that can prolong suffering even though there is no hope for recovery. Most people are against the idea of submitting to the request of the patient to be given something which will end their suffering by terminating life. Certainly we oppose other people's making the decision as to when life is to be terminated. Some divide euthanasia into active and passive, insisting that active euthanasia is wrong but passive euthanasia is Christian in that it permits the person to die with dignity.

Reasons for resisting euthanasia involve the principle of the sanctity of life, the dignity of the personhood, the Sixth Commandment of the Decalogue: "Thou shalt not kill," the difficulty of determining the processes of "life" and "death," the principles of Christian compassion and mercy, and the matter of individual rights and personal freedom. It is possible in some countries to make a "living will" in which the person dictates that no heroic measures are to be utilized in an effort to keep him or her alive.

For several days I visited and talked with the husband of a new mother who was in intensive care following a cardiac arrest just a few days after giving birth to her baby. She was unconscious and had been on the breathing machine for several days with no signs of improvement. The doctors had hinted to the husband, according to his understanding of what they said, that they may as well turn off the machine. He talked with me about this dilemma. He said that once his wife had told him that she never wanted to be kept alive as an invalid dependent upon others. Would he be doing wrong in giving his consent to let them turn off the machine? I responded to him that I felt that the Lord understood the situation and the struggle that he was having. He should not feel guilty if he followed the recommendations of the doctors. Just as they were ready to turn off the machine there was a sudden improvement in his wife's condition. Within a week she was out of intensive care, though semi-conscious. After a time she was transferred to a nursing home near their farm for further recuperation. I had no further contact with them, but I am sure that the husband feels good about his wife's recuperation; although at the critical moment he was ready to give her up. The doctors feared that she would never be normal again, because too much time had elapsed between her cardiac arrest and when they got her heart to beating again.

Thus the pastor is called upon to walk with people down the sorrow-filled pathway. He will almost feel the ill reaching out to the beyond where they will be free from suffering. He will say goodbye to them and stand with family members who watch them slip away. It is a special

List reasons for resisting euthanasia given by the author.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

privilege to be able to minister at this time. While we seek not to hasten the moment for anyone, neither should we hold on to those who are nearing death out of our own selfish desires. We leave the mystery of life and death in the hands of the Creator.

The pastor will minister to many who face medical problems which involve ethical issues. Bioethics is a relatively new field, and the doctors need our support as they struggle with issues which have moral implications. Will we offer them and their patients bread or a stone?

Counselling Those with Religious Doubts

What causes religious doubts?

The pastor will have occasion to minister to people who have doubts about religious matters. Usually the confirmed atheist in the community will not seek pastoral assistance, but young people who are being confronted with atheistic theories and materialistic philosophies will frequently turn to the pastor for counsel. Others who are skeptics or who have never embraced the Christian faith may occasionally have reason to seek out a pastor to confide in him about some other issue as well as their doubts. As young people seek a personal, authentic faith apart from that which has been imposed upon them by their parents and other authority figures, they naturally came up against the question of the why of certain beliefs. Also, as they come into contact with other significant people from outside the Christian faith whom they respect and whom they recognize to be persons of intelligence, they naturally ask how these others get along without any faith. Another group that will seek help from the pastor are those committed Christians, who, because of some special circumstance in their lives, are now passing through a time of doubt because the Christian faith hasn't worked for them to produce the special need which they felt they had. For instance, there are people who feel that God no longer responds to their prayers. Others seem to have lost their faith because of some tragedy that came in spite of their faithfulness to God. All these illustrations and special circumstances indicate that there are numerous opportunities for the pastor to help people who have religious doubts.

Unconscious factors. – It is well to consider the unconscious factors that contribute to the doubts that people have. For instance, people will come to talk about their doubts and later discover that their basic problem is not one of doubts in a religious area, but repressed grief which they have not been able to resolve because of some significant loss in the past. Another case is that of the young person who feels that God has abandoned him because he no longer feels His presence as he did when he was a child. The pastor helps the person to discover that the basic problem is the death of the father of the young person a few months previously. Others may feel that God is angry with them, or that they feel condemned. Upon conversing for a time with the pastor they discover that the basic problem is

The pastor will have occasion to minister to people who have _____ about _____ matters.

(doubts, religious)

Is the following statement true or false?

The unconscious has no bearing upon one's doubts about religion. _____

(false)

some sin which they committed, and now their guilt causes them to feel this way about God. All these illustrations point up the unconscious factors that may be involved in the phenomenon of religious doubt.

Allport gives a convincing presentation of the fact that doubts which people have, have their origin in one's relationship with his parents.⁵ Freud insisted that religious faith is an extension of one's attitude towards his physical father.⁶ This would mean that hostility towards one's father might result in a rejection of religion. Freud insisted that belief in God is a projection of dependence and love associated with the earthly father. He saw religion as an illusion that would become outmoded as man developed into a more mature person. Allport concludes that both belief and doubt may reflect unconsciously one's attitudes towards one's parent.

Doubts which carry one towards atheism may be an evidence of an intense interest in religious matters. So we must recognize that "reaction formation" may be taking place in the person who comes to the pastor with deep doubts. His deep interest in God and religious matters may be manifesting itself in violent protests. The pastor who deals gingerly with young people with doubts may be helping them to move towards a more mature faith. Tennyson is often quoted: "There lives more faith in honest doubt, Believe me, than in half your creeds."⁷

So the minister will be open-minded and sympathetic with the young people who express their doubts. He must recognize that usually the person is giving a message which may be interpreted as a cry for help in settling some intellectual and emotional issues which are the heart of his faith.

Issues which contribute to doubt. – Walter Houston Clark mentions some general factors which work as operating principles that cause doubt to be a common experience among youth.⁸ First, he mentions the natural logical development of the mind. With this development comes the capacity to question ideas which have previously been presented as truths and which the child has accepted. Later, he uses the capacities which he has developed and naturally begins to try to figure out whether or not these ideas are logically sound. He may have the inquiring mind of a mathematician or a scientist, or he may just simply need to answer the question "why?" frequently. We, as religious leaders, should not become alarmed when young people begin to exercise these abilities. We need to be supportive of them, and assure them that many of the religious truths are not to be explained in a logical or scientific way, but that they are to be accepted by revelation.

The second factor that Clark mentions is the influence of the religious tradition in which one has been reared. Some groups encourage the young people to develop a faith that is more the result of their authentic experience, while others have taught that truths are to be accepted from God, the Church, or the spiritual leader, without question.

The first principle that works to cause doubt among young people is the natural logical development of the

(mind)

Give the second factor that causes doubt.

Those who have studied composite groups indicate that Protestants and Jews tend to have more doubts than Catholics. The reason is that these faiths encourage the people to make a personal commitment based upon their own personal search. They reach the age and the point of deciding for themselves, and do not simply accept something that they have learned by rote memory from childhood classes. Starbuck made a study quoted by Clark which showed that women tend to have more doubts than men, but this is primarily because of the fact that more women are religious than men. It is also indicated that men doubt more on a rational level, while the emotional element enters more strongly in the doubts of women.

The third factor that Clark mentions as influencing doubt is the physiological differences between men and women. Studies made indicate that women tend to doubt at a younger age than men, which is attributed to the earlier development of the woman. Doubts in women seem to follow a cycle that is closely related to their emotional make-up. Their religious doubts seem to be closely related to periods of emotional despondency, and when other issues have them in a period of turmoil.

Clark calls the fourth factor which influences doubt the "life and death" urges. Doubt which is an expression of the life urge would have to do with activity and change in the life of the person. The search for truth might be classified as a doubt that emanates from the life urge. An illustration of doubt that is born of the death urge would be those which involve one's move towards passivity. When doubt arises from one's desire to evade responsibility, this could be classified as the death urge.

Doubts caused by spiritual malady. – Frequently the hypocrites in the church are cited as the reason that one has doubts. As a young pastor I frequently heard this excuse as the reason to justify people's lack of participation in church activity. I am sure that there must have been some justification at least at times because some people who are active in church are not always completely honest in all their business dealings. Nor are they beyond the possibility of being tempted. Occasionally some of them fall into sin. The church needs to deal with those who have questionable testimonies in the community; but at the same time, the pastor needs to recognize that these people may be scapegoating in their efforts to excuse themselves. It is easy to find much in the church to condemn if one is looking for such. People who have studied church history may be able to cite specific cases, such as the Crusades, when blood was shed in the name of service to Christ, and people were conquered through the sword and not with love. They may cite cases when heretics were burned at the stake because they did not pronounce the right words in verbalizing their beliefs. Cases such as these and many others may be used as excuses to explain or justify a lack of involvement in the Christian movement.

It is important for the pastor to recognize expressions of doubt as symptoms of a spiritual malady. It is useless to

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Physiological differences between men and women help to cause _____

(doubt)

What is the fourth factor given by Clark that influences doubt?

(Compare your answer with the text.)

The pastor needs to recognize that some people may be _____

(scapegoating)

attempt to answer with logic or to try to counteract the criticisms that a doubter may hurl at us. Their expressions may be their way of rationalizing themselves as being O.K. the way they are. The wise pastor will help the person to come to recognize what he is doing by following a gentle supportive approach. He can agree with what is true in the accusations that others make against Christianity.

Areas of religious doubt

Doubts related to the origin of religion. – There are many who have doubts related to the origin of religion. They suspect that the concept of God is a fabrication of man.⁹ Attempts to analyse the origin of religious impulses have caused some to doubt. It is the opinion of many that religious feelings have their origin in some of the primitive expressions of fear on the part of man because he could not understand the phenomenon of nature in the world. For instance, primitive man could not understand the cause of thunder, and so he developed the idea that the spirits were angry either among themselves or with man for some reason. Man sought therefore to appease the angry spirits through a kind of behaviour that would be acceptable. The sending or withholding of rain was interpreted to be an expression of the divine favour or wrath, depending upon whether the people had acted in a way to please or to anger the divine.

While the present work does not purport to be an attempt to delve deeply into the origins of religions, perhaps it is in order to emphasize the biblical message related to God's creation of the universe and man. Man has God's image, and many see this as the fundamental factor in man's religiosity. In the first chapters of Genesis we see man bringing his offerings to God in a spontaneous act as a response to his gratitude for the blessings of the harvest. The kinds of offering that each brought and the consequences of these offerings leave room for a lot of discussion about what is acceptable to God and why some types of offering were not acceptable. Most commentaries conclude that the acceptableness or inacceptableness of the offering had more to do with the attitude of heart of the one making the offering and not so much the nature of the offerings that were brought.

Doubts involving science and religion. – Occasionally the pastor will find people with a scientific background or an inquiring mind who insist that to be religious is to be unscientific. One of the basic traits of the scientific method is the tentativeness with which they look at life. They are trained to doubt everything until it is proven. This undoubtedly leads to progress, because advancement takes place as a result of the struggle that comes through a constant search for new truth. To submit religious faith to the tests that are a part of the scientific method presents many difficulties, because religious experience is subjective and based upon revelation. It is also difficult for the scientist to use the scientific method in his work and still to leave place for the supernatural. However, there are many who do so.

There are many who have doubts related to the
of religion.

(origin)

The fundamental factor in man's religiosity is believed by
many to be in the fact that man was created in God's

(image)

Some people insist that to be religious is to be

(unscientific)

In recent years more and more scientists are taking a second look at their creations.¹⁰ They realize that technology has brought many blessings to mankind, but it has also tended to dehumanize man and make life much more impersonal. More and more scientists are returning to more positive positions on religious beliefs and a recognition of the importance of moral and spiritual values.

People who doubt because of religion's lack of acceptance of the scientific method may be less inclined to use this as an excuse, since there does seem to be a turning to the Christian faith on the part of many scientists and an attempt to recognize religious impulses as valid for the people who are involved in scientific as well as other secular matters. Both the scientist and the religionist in the past tended to accuse the other of compartmentalizing the various aspects of life in areas in which they did not let reason or faith become a part of the other compartment.

In many ways the religionist has a more difficult time than the scientist. The scientist has his method whereby he verifies hypotheses until there is a certainty, which produces a law. On the other hand the religionist seeks to determine meaning in life through the affirmation of belief in a set of doctrines which produces life that has ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual validity for the individual. There is a lot of subjectiveness in this pilgrimage. The precision of the scientist eludes the religionist, but he continues to struggle with the possibility of being comfortable with what science discovers and what religious faith reveals. There is something within which causes him to continue his pilgrimage in both directions.

In dealing with persons with religious doubts because of supposed or purported conflicts with science, we must show openness and sincerity. We cannot have a closed mind and insist that one who accepts scientific explanations of the origins of the universe and man is impossible to help. We do not have to insist on the surrender of one viewpoint in order for one to have faith. It is better to encourage one to search for truth and continue in his pilgrimage to find faith rather than to try to enter into a polemical discussion about one or the other. Most people will be led to a deeper faith gradually as they see the workings of God in the universe. An open-minded person can come through a time of doubting to a more genuine and deeper faith.

Doubts related to the Bible. – There will be others who come to the pastor who believe in God and appreciate and practise their faith consistently, but who have difficulty with certain tenants of the Christian faith. They may have doubts about the inspiration of the Bible and its interpretation for us today, the Virgin Birth, the resurrection of Christ, the validity of some of the miracles that are recorded in the Bible, and other specific teachings. How do we help these people? First, we must recognize that there is a certain amount of religious pluralism that is normal and inevitable. It is impossible to dictate an exact creed or body of truth and then force everyone else to believe it without variation. Individual differences in personality, temperament, and intellectual abilities makes for a diversity of

Circle the correct answer.

Science is a field of its own and no scientist today would seriously consider religion as a part of his life. true false

(false)

Circle the correct answer.

Since the religious doubter has his mind set, there is no way that the pastor can help him. true false

(false)

beliefs. This diversity may be helpful ultimately for the Christian faith, because it gives variety and creativity which are positive forces and contribute to the expansion of the Christian message.

Some people can accept teachings without requiring a logical explanation. Their God is powerful and their faith is all-encompassing. Others tend to need more room for their own intellectual tendencies to be satisfied on a logical basis. I believe that we need to be accepting of those people who see much of scriptural teachings as figurative, though I personally accept them as literal.¹¹ It is better to give room to the people who differ from us and not be too insistent that they explain their theology exactly in the terminology that we use. The meaning of words and the difference between the understanding of the sender and the receiver is something that must be taken into account. Therefore, if we can be flexible in our expressions of belief, and permit a certain flexibility, it will be helpful.

Doubts involving the finality of the Christian religion. – Some people will complain that there are so many different religions in the world and all of them claim to have the truth. Why should Christianity be accepted as the final religion when others make the same claim? We can quote Scriptures which help to show that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of mankind (Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:19-21). Jesus said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

The pastor who has a background in comparative religions can point out the different aspects of the Christian religion that are unique.¹² While little will be gained through a polemical approach, those who have sincere doubts with this issue will appreciate the pastor’s sharing with them why we consider the Christian religion to be unique.

One of the best explanations as to the power of Christianity will be given as the pastor mentions the significant changes that come to those who have the New Birth. He can cite individuals whose lives have been changed. Some will have been drug addicts; others may have been alcoholics. Some may have been skeptics. But when they all come into contact with the living Christ who saves from sin, they have a testimony which defies doubt. They are living testimonies to the truth and validity of the Christian faith and its power to transform lives.

The ethical dilemmas that come because of man’s advancement through science and technology challenge us as we hold on to the traditional religious and moral values and strive to make the best decisions. The religious doubts come to some and leave them uncertain as to what to believe. The pastor is present to help these who struggle with the issues of life and death, faith and doubt, and good and bad. The relationship which he maintains with his people will help him to walk with them through the pathways of death, doubt, and evil. Instead of trying to think of the appropriate response to any statement, he will seek to assure them of his presence and acceptance. This will bring them through.

Some people have doubts related to the Bible. EXPLAIN what the author means by this statement:

“If we can be flexible in our expressions of belief, and permit a certain flexibility, it will be helpful.”

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Some doubt the _____ of the Christian religion.

(finality)

How can a strong Christian testimony help when dealing with one who has doubts as to the finality of the Christian religion?

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Footnotes

¹Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics—The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), pp. 26-31.

²Paul Ramsey, *The Patient As Person* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 246-48.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 70, 71.

⁴Edgar Jackson, "Is Euthanasia Christian?" *Christian Century*, (March 8, 1950), p. 300.

⁵Gordon W. Allport, *The Individual and His Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), pp. 100, 101.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁷Tennyson, Alfred Lord, "In Memoriam."

⁸Walter Houston Clark, *The Psychology of Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), pp. 139-41.

⁹Allport, *Op. cit.*, pp. 107-110.

¹⁰James H. Jauncey, *Science Returns to God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961).

¹¹John P. Newport and William Cannon, *Why Christians Fight Over the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1974).

¹²E. Luther Copeland, *Christianity and World Religions* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1963), pp. 136-46.

Recommended Reading

Joseph Fletcher, *Morals and Medicine*. Boston: Beacon Hill Press, 1954.

James H. Jauncey, *Science Return to God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1961.

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity(Levels 1,2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. List and briefly explain three factors that have helped to create ethical dilemmas for us in the twentieth century. _____

2. List and explain three philosophies that compete for the mind of mankind today. _____

3. What implications are there for pastors as they face important ethical issues? _____

4. Give three principles that can guide the pastor when counselling someone considering an abortion.. _____

5. What is informed consent? _____

How does the pastor help his members who are struggling with this issue? _____

6. Define euthanasia. _____

7. List reasons for resisting euthanasia. _____

8. What are some unconscious factors that contribute to doubt. _____

9. List the four factors given by Walter Houston Clark that cause doubt. _____

10. Why does the author suggest that people who have doubts and are critical may be scapegoating? _____

11. How does the Bible explain the origin of religion? _____

12. How may the pastor help people to cope with crises in their lives?_____

13. How may the pastor help the person with religious doubts?_____

14. How may the pastor help the person with doubts about the Bible?_____

15. What is one of the best answers one can give to those who doubt the validity of the Christian faith?_____

16. State the aims for this lesson._____

Supplementary activity(Levels 2 and 3). Read pages 200-13 in *Pastoral Care in the Church* and answer the following questions.

1. List the stages of life that a pastor has the privilege of sharing with his people.
2. What should the pastor be aware of when calling on a new mother in the hospital?
3. Suggest ways to help new parents learn to nurture and discipline their children.
4. List the aspects of pastoral work to new believers.

Advanced activity(Level 3). The following activities are based on the Supplementary reading assignment.

1. Write a paper entitled: "Ministering to the New Born and their Families."
2. What is Dr. Brister talking about when he talks of the renewal of life? How is pastoral care involved in renewal of life?

Seminar Discussion

1. Discuss three factors that have created ethical dilemmas in the twentieth century.
2. Discuss three major philosophies that compete for the mind of mankind today.
3. Discuss the following issues: abortion, informed consent, and euthanasia.
4. What causes religious doubt? How can the person with religious doubts be helped?