

# **A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND HUMANIST ETHICS.**

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## **Abstract**

*Albeit Christian ethics and Humanist ethics emanate from different sources, a critical comparative study of them discovers that regardless of their different sources, they contain several similar moral values that seek the wellbeing of humans. The dissimilarities in their ethical principles are few and apparently the main cause is the God factor.*

**Keywords: Christian ethics, Humanist ethics.**

## **Introduction**

This study compares Christian ethics with Humanist ethics identifying some of the ethical values and principles that are common to both and those that are different.

## **CHRISTIAN ETHICS**

Basically, Christian ethics is a systematic study of the way of life<sup>1</sup> laid down by Christ Jesus. It studies in the “light of Christian faith and of reason the guidelines which man must follow to attain his final goal.”<sup>2</sup> Christian ethics can be defined as that part of “theology whose object is the

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<sup>1</sup> This includes the teachings, examples and entire way of living one’s life as exemplified in Jesus Christ, who is “the way, the truth and the life” (*John*14:6).

<sup>2</sup> Peschke, K. (1981). *Christian Ethics*. Alcester: C. GoodliffeNeale.p. xv.

foundations, attitudes, and guidelines which enable a person to attain to his or her final goal in the light of Christian faith and reason.”<sup>3</sup>According to Bernard Haering, the first concern of Christian ethics should not be with individually distinct acts nor with decision-making. Rather, “its basic task and purpose is to gain the right vision to assess the main perspectives, and to present the truths and values which should bear upon the decisions to be made before God”<sup>4</sup>It studies also the free acts of man in his response to God’s invitation. Its context includes all humans and created values and norms based on God’s revelation and their consequences for Christ-like living. Its ambit extends from revelation about man’s destiny and personal dignity before God to such specific applications as war, racial justice, abortion, lying and divorce.<sup>5</sup>

Christian ethics, deals with the norms observed, the presuppositions and ideas expressed in the behaviour that Christians endorse and believe about God, Christ, the world, each other, the history of Christian salvation and the hope of eternal redemption.<sup>6</sup>

### *The nature of Christian Ethics*

Christian ethics has a distinguished nature. It has a special form, namely, “a form of divine-position.”<sup>7</sup> It is based on God’s will. The main bedrock of Christian ethics is the bible and so the Holy Scripture becomes a vital source for Christian ethics. Christians consider the bible as the word of God. Hence, Christian ethics is based on God’s will with biblical examples and norms, rules and ideas, revelations of judgment, promises and leanings being considered as the foundations of morality in Christian ethics.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Peschke, K. (1996). *Christian ethics. Moral theology in the light of Vatican II*. Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Haering, B. (1978), *Free and faithful in Christ*, Vol. 1. Middlegreen, Slough: N.J.:Paulist Press, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>Regan, G. M. (1971). *New trends in moral theology*. New York: Newman Press, pp. 3-5.

<sup>6</sup>Peschke, K. (1996), pp. 4-6.

<sup>7</sup>Geisler, N. (2001). *Christian ethics. Options and issues*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Biblical foundations/sources such as the Decalogue (*Exodus* 20:1-17); the Beatitudes (*Matthew* 5:3-12; *Luke*, 6: 20-23) and the love commandment (*John* 13:31-35).

In Christian ethics, divine revelation in the Old and New Testament forms the substratum and fundamental sources of the moral knowledge and guidance in Christian ethics.<sup>9</sup> Christian ethics and moral philosophy have similar presuppositions. They both presuppose the freedom of the will (autonomous beings), accountability to an ultimate value (immortality of the soul), the reality or existence of God<sup>10</sup> and that individuals (and groups) are responsible for their decisions and actions.

As rightly affirmed by Geisler, Christian ethics is absolute.<sup>11</sup> It is absolute in the sense that since God's moral character does not change (*Malachi* 3:6; *James* 1:17), and the moral obligations that flow from God's nature are absolute. Thus, Christian ethical principles have cross-cultural significance. In fact, Christian ethics is universal in character.

Christian ethics points out what God, the lawgiver, expects of his people. Since "moral rightness is prescribed by a moral God, it is prescriptive."<sup>12</sup> Hence, Christian ethics is prescriptive in nature and not descriptive. From a Christian perspective, a purely descriptive ethics may not be very helpful for the Christian way of living. Basically, when we describe human behaviour that is sociology but when one attempts to prescribe human behaviour then one enters into the arena of morality. For some Christian ethicists including David Bohr,<sup>13</sup> George V. Lobo,<sup>14</sup> John Paul II,<sup>15</sup> Christ is the concrete and universal norm of moral life.

Christian ethics is deontological in that it is duty-centered. Deontological ethics "looks to one's obligations to determine what is moral."<sup>16</sup> Deontological ethics objectifies one's obligations or moral duties, thereby answering the question what should I do? Actually, deontological ethics regards duty as the basis of morality. Christian ethics as a form of deontological ethics underscores the importance of assessing human actions by "reference to particular rules, duties, or norms which

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<sup>9</sup>Peschke, K (1996). *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup>See Fagothey, A. (1972). *Op. Cit.*; See also Peschke, (1996), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>11</sup>Geisler, N. (2001).

<sup>12</sup>Geisler, (2001), *Op. Cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup>See Bohr, D. (1998). *Catholic moral tradition* (Revised). Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, p. 33.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. George V. Lobo, G. L. (1984). *Guide to Christian living*. Westminster: Christian Classics, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup>John Paul II, (6<sup>th</sup> August, 1993), *Veritatis Splendor*, No. 15.

<sup>16</sup>Shannon & Kockler, (2009). *An introduction to bioethics*. Fourth Edition. New Jersey: Paulist Press, p. 31.

ask primarily whether *the means* constitute or violate such duties.”<sup>17</sup> The Ten Commandments and Kant’s Categorical Imperatives<sup>18</sup> are examples of deontological ethics.

In Christian ethics the human community plays a very significant in role morality. Birch and Rasmussen affirm that “it is true with even greater force for the Christian moral life, and for Christian ethics. The reason is this community is at the very heart of Christian faith itself.”<sup>19</sup> The Christian community is known as the people of God. Thus, “the beginning experiences for both Jewish and Christian ethics are the experience of God as the One who generates community as the One who is experienced in community, as its deepest source and meaning.”<sup>20</sup> Birch and Rasmussen rightly infer that one of the basic questions for Christian ethics is as follows: “what character and conduct is in keeping with who we are as a *people of God*?”<sup>21</sup> Hence, Christian ethics can be said to be communal and theocentric.<sup>22</sup>

## HUMANISM

In order to understand the ethics of Humanism, one needs to know what Humanism is. In fact, there are several definitions of Humanism. However, each definition captures the basic tenets of Humanism. According to the American Humanist Association, Humanism is a Philosophy and value system that seeks the total wellbeing of humans here and now without any belief in a personal deity or "higher power." <sup>23</sup> The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), defines Humanism as follows:

Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their

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<sup>17</sup>Shanon&Kockler, (2009), *Op. Cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>18</sup>Kant, I. (2002). *Groundwork for the metaphysics of morals*, (ed. & trans. Allen W. Wood). New Haven, CT:, Yale University Press.

<sup>19</sup>Birch, B.C. & Rasmussen, L. L. (1989). *Bible & ethics in the Christian life*, Minneapolis MN.: Augsburg Fortress, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid..

<sup>21</sup>Ibid..

<sup>22</sup>Birch & Rasmussen, *Op. Cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup>American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifestos i & ii*, <http://www.americanhumanist.org> - Retrieved 03/03/2016. See also *Humanist manifestos i & ii*, Lamont, C. (1997). *The philosophy of Humanism* (8<sup>th</sup>Ed.). Amherst, New York: Humanist Press, pp. 310-327.

own lives. It stands for the building of a humane society through an ethics based on human and other natural values in a spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality.<sup>24</sup>

According to the American Humanist Association (AHA), Humanism is a Philosophy and value system that seeks the total wellbeing of humans here and now without any belief in a personal deity or "higher power."<sup>25</sup> Precisely, the American Humanist Association, "Humanism is a progressive life stance that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity (<http://www.americanhumanist.org>).

Humanism does not accept any supernatural reality. For humanists, there is no heaven or hell, no netherworld. Humanism does not believe in the life hereafter and similar views that are espoused by some religions such as Christianity and Islam.

Defining Humanism, the Bristol Humanist Group maintains that "Humanism is an approach to life based on reason and our common humanity, recognizing that moral values are properly founded on human nature and experience alone" (<http://www.nfuu.org/definitions/humanism.htm>). The definition of the Bristol Humanist Group accentuates reason and the common nature of humans. In fact, all the aforementioned definitions clearly affirm that Humanism does not accept supernaturalism. Humanism believes that humans are naturally capable of living meaningful lives without any reference to a supernatural being or deity. AHA affirms this stance by asserting that "Humanism is a progressive life stance that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifestos i&ii*, <http://www.americanhumanist.org>-Retrieved 03/03/2016; See also <http://www.iheu.org/amsterdamdeclaration>. Confer also *Humanist manifestos i&ii* Lamont, C. (1997). *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>25</sup>American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifestos i & ii*, <http://www.americanhumanist.org>- Retrieved 03/03/2016. See also *Humanist manifestos i & ii*, Lamont, C. (1997). *The philosophy of Humanism* (8<sup>th</sup>Ed.). Amherst, New York: Humanist Press, pp. 310-327.

<sup>26</sup> See American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifestos i&ii*, <http://www.americanhumanist.org>- Retrieved 03/03/2016. See also *Humanist manifestos i & ii*, Lamont, C. (1997). *Op. Cit.*.

Furthermore, Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance that claims that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a humane society through an ethics based on human and other natural values in a spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality.<sup>27</sup>

For the Bristol Humanist Group, Humanism is an approach to life based on reason and our common humanity, recognizing that moral values are properly founded on human nature and experience alone.<sup>28</sup>

Corliss Lamont (1996) defines Humanism as a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and for advocating the methods of reason, science, and democracy.<sup>29</sup>

## HUMANIST ETHICS

Humanist ethics deals with the values of right, wrong, good, evil, and responsibility according to the beliefs/teachings of Humanism.<sup>30</sup> Humanist ethics relies on reason and scientific method<sup>31</sup> and does not have faith in prayer, divine revelation or a supernatural God for the solution of ethical or other problems.

Reason and intelligence are the most effective instruments that humankind possesses. There is no substitute: neither faith nor passion suffices in itself. The controlled use of scientific methods, which have transformed the natural and social sciences since the Renaissance, must be extended further in the

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<sup>27</sup> See <http://www.iheu.org/amsterdamdeclaration>.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. <http://www.nfuu.org/definitionsofhumanism.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> Lamont, C. (1997). *The philosophy of Humanism* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Amherst, New York: Humanist Press, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> On definitions of Humanism see Corliss Lamont who defines Humanism as a Philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and for advocating the methods of reason, science, and democracy. Cf. Lamont, C. (1997). *The philosophy of Humanism* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Amherst, New York: Humanist Press, p. 13; Cf. also, American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifestos i & ii*, <http://www.americanhumanist.org>- Retrieved 03/03/2016. See also *Humanist manifestos i & ii*, in Lamont, C. (1997). *The philosophy of Humanism* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Amherst, New York: Humanist Press, pp. 310-327; <http://www.nfuu.org/definitionsofhumanism.htm>; <http://www.iheu.org/amsterdamdeclaration>.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Lamont, C. (1997). *The philosophy of Humanism* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Amherst, New York: Humanist Press, Chapter, v.

solution of human problems. But reason must be tempered by humility, since no group has a monopoly of wisdom or virtue.<sup>32</sup>

According to the teachings of Humanism, Humanist ethical principles<sup>33</sup> include the following:

- Morality stems from our situation as social beings.
- The emphasis is on the human being and the here-and-now.
- The origin of morality/ethics is the human society without reference to any metaphysical or spiritual source.
- It is the society that determines the uniqueness of human beings.
- One can be morally upright without necessarily being religious.

Unlike other ethics, such as Christian and Islamic ethics, Humanist ethics is based on happiness in this one and only life and not concerned with a supernatural realm, immortality<sup>34</sup> and the glory of God. Humanism denies the philosophical and psychological dualism of soul and body and contends that a human being is a oneness of mind, personality and physical organism. It can be deduced from the Humanist's concern for humankind, that international peace is a prime ethical objective. In working for peace, the Humanist combines self-interest with altruism making every possible effort for the successful functioning of the United Nations and for the permanent establishment of international peace (Lamont, 1980). Another ethical imperative for Humanism is the support of political democracy and liberties. Humanists rely primarily on reason and scientific method for the solution of all problems. They necessarily uphold freedom of expression in all fields of human endeavor. Humanist ethics rejects resorting to threats or violence as a method of settling disputes.

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article four.

<sup>33</sup> See American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifestos i & ii*, <http://www.americanhumanist.org> - Retrieved 03/03/2016. See also *Humanist manifestos i & ii*, Lamont, C. (1997). Op. Cit..

<sup>34</sup> American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article two.

The ethics of Humanism incorporates whatever seems relevant from other philosophies or religions, even while rejecting their theologies. For Corliss Lamont, some of the Decalogue, can be understood as principles of Humanist ethics. They include “Thou shall not steal”, “Thou shall not kill”, “Honor thy father and thy mother”, “Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor” (Lamont, 1980). In fact, Humanist ethics acknowledges that there is much ethical wisdom in the New Testament<sup>35</sup> and the teachings of Jesus. For example, the Humanist welcomes the words of Jesus when he says: “I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full” (John10:10). Another teaching of Jesus, namely, “The truth shall make you free,” (John 8: 32), is also in line with the ethics of Humanism. In fact, Humanist ethics claims that this quotation from Jesus can be made complete by adding that falsehood shall make you slaves (Lamont, 1980).

Paul Kurtz (1988) claims that there can be morality without religion. Kurtz sees morality as deeply rooted in the common moral decencies (these relate to moral behaviour in society) and the ethical excellences. For Kurtz, the common moral decencies are widely shared. They are essential to the survival of any human community. They are handed down through countless generations. They are recognised throughout the world by friends and relatives, colleagues and co-workers and the native-born or immigrants, as basic rules of social intercourse. They express the elementary virtues of courtesy, politeness, and empathy so essential for living together. Indeed, they are the very basis of civilised life itself. The common moral decencies are trans-cultural in their range and have their roots in generic human needs. The following are examples of the common moral decencies:<sup>36</sup> (a) Personal integrity;<sup>37</sup> (b) Trustworthiness;<sup>38</sup> (c) Benevolence;<sup>39</sup> (d) The principle of

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<sup>35</sup> American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, <http://www.americanhumanist.org> - Retrieved 03/03/2016.

<sup>36</sup> Kurtz, P., (1988). *Forbidden fruit: The ethics of Humanism*, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, pp. 93-110.

<sup>37</sup> Personal integrity involves moral values such as telling the truth, not lying or being deceitful; being sincere, candid, frank, and free of hypocrisy; keeping one's promises, honouring pledges, living up to agreements; and being honest, avoiding fraud. See Kurtz, P., (1988), *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>38</sup> Trustworthiness deals with loyalty to ones relatives, friends and co-workers, being dependable, reliable, and responsible. See Kurtz, P., (1988), *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>39</sup> Benevolence involves manifesting goodwill and noble intention and having a positive concern for one's fellow human beings; Avoidance of malicious acts that can harm to other persons or their property. One should not kill or rob; inflict physical violence or injury; or be cruel, abusive or vengeful. This implies the moral obligation to be



fairness;<sup>40</sup> Tolerance is also a moral decency; one should also respect other individuals' rights to their beliefs, values, and styles of life, even though they may differ from one's own. Each individual is entitled to his convictions as long as one does not harm others or prevent them from exercising their rights. Humans should try to cooperate with each other, seeking to negotiate differences peacefully without resorting to hatred or violence.

Humanism sees the common moral decencies as general principles and rules and individuals or nations may deviate from practicing them. In fact, the moral decencies are not absolute but general parameters to guide human conduct. Sometimes they may conflict and humans may have to establish priorities between them. They need not be divinely ordained to have moral force, for they are tested in the last analysis by their consequences in practice.

On sexuality, humanist ethics affirms that one should not force one's sexual passions on others. Rather, a sexual relation should be a mutual consent between adults. Humanist ethics allows sexual freedom,<sup>41</sup> homosexuality, abortion, birth control and easy divorce of marriages.<sup>42</sup>

### *The Ethical Excellences*

Humanist ethics outlines the following as some of the ethical excellences: <sup>43</sup> autonomy<sup>44</sup>; intelligence<sup>45</sup> and reason, self-discipline,<sup>46</sup> self-respect,<sup>47</sup> creativity,<sup>48</sup> high motivation,<sup>49</sup> affirmative attitude,<sup>50</sup> joie de vivre,<sup>51</sup> good health<sup>52</sup> and exuberance.<sup>53</sup>

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beneficent, that is, kind, sympathetic, compassionate and lend a hand to those in distress and try to decrease their pain and suffering and contribute to their welfare. See Kurtz, P., (1988), *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>40</sup> The principle of fairness demands that one should show gratitude to those that deserve it; Being civil and holding people accountable for their deeds, insisting that those who wrong others do not go completely unpunished and perhaps must make reparations to the aggrieved. This also involves the principle of justice and equality in society. See Kurtz, P., (1988), *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>41</sup> See American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article eleven.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article six.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Kurtz, P., (1988). *Forbidden fruit: The ethics of Humanism*, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, pp. 133-143.

As a summary, Lamont (1980) couches Humanist ethics into eleven main points which he describes as guiding principles not absolutes. They include the following: (1) Humanist ethics is concerned wholly with actions, ideals and values on this earth in our and only life. The utopia that is heaven must be built in this world or not at all. (2) Humanist ethics is an affirmative one of joy and happiness, repudiating the Christian idea of original sin in human beings and any sense of puritanism. (3) Humanist ethics holds a liberal view on sex relations, but insists on high standards of conduct and believes in the institution of marriage, with easy divorce and some latitude of sexual variety for husband and wife. (4) Humanist ethics relies on reason and scientific method in working out ethical decisions. There is no room for prayer or divine guidance by some supernatural being. (5) While Humanism believes in general ethical principles, most ethical decisions must be considered on an individualistic basis that evaluates the probable consequences and possible alternatives. (6) Concerning self- interest versus altruism, Humanist ethics sees a false dichotomy and claims that a man or woman can harmoniously combine relative self-interest and relative

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<sup>44</sup> Autonomy: A person's autonomy is an affirmation of one's freedom. See Kurtz, P., (1988), *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>45</sup> Intelligence and reason are high on the scale of values. According to this humanist ethical excellence, to achieve the good life, one needs to develop one's cognitive skills that can help the individual to make wise choices. See Kurtz, P., (1988), *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>46</sup> Self-discipline: One needs self-discipline over one's passions and desires. Self-discipline involves moderation under the guidance of rational choice, recognizing the harmful consequences that imprudent choices can have upon the individual and others. See Kurtz, P., (1988), *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>47</sup> Self-respect is vital for a human being's psychological balance. Self-hatred can destroy one's personality. This implies that there is the need to develop some appreciation for oneself as an individual and a realistic sense of one's own identity. See Kurtz, P., (1988), *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>48</sup> Creativity is closely related to autonomy and self-respect. It highlights the fact that the independent person has some confidence in his/her own powers and is willing to express his/her unique talents. The uncreative person is usually a conformist. See Kurtz, P., (1988), *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>49</sup> High motivation involves willingness to enter into life and undertake new plans and projects. A motivated person finds life interesting and exciting. See Kurtz, P., (1988), *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>50</sup> Affirmative attitude deals with the need for one to cultivate some measure of optimism that what one does will matter. Although one may suffer defeats, one must believe that one will overcome and succeed despite adversities.

<sup>51</sup> Joie de vivre: The individual human being must have full appreciation for the full range of human pleasure - from the so-called bodily pleasures such as food and sex to the most ennobling and creative aesthetic, intellectual and moral pleasures. See Kurtz, P., (1988), *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>52</sup> Good health: This implies that one avoids smoking and drugs, drinks only in moderation, seeks to reduce stress in one's life, and strives to get proper nutrition, adequate exercise, and sufficient rest, and to achieve sexual fulfillment and love. See Kurtz, P., (1988), *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>53</sup> Exuberance is an active, not a passive, process of perfecting one's talents, needs, and wants. The end or goal of life is to live fully and creatively, sharing with others the many opportunities of life. Contrary to the biblical injunction in Genesis chapter three, Humanist ethics posits that this can be found by eating the succulent fruit of the tree of life and by living in the here and now as fully and creatively as one can. See Kurtz, P., (1988), *Op. Cit.*.

altruism in working for the community good. (7) The community good is one's family, one's state, one's nation, or all humanity; with the happiness and progress of the entire human race as the ultimate community good and the supreme ethical aim of Humanism. (8) It follows from ordinary self-interest and the Humanist's concern for fellow humans that international peace is a principal ethical objective. This is truer today than ever before in view of the terrible nuclear weapons that have developed and which threaten, if used in a war, the existence of all humankind. (9) Humanism is eclectic and incorporates whatever seems relevant from other philosophies or religions. For instance, many of the Christian precepts in the New Testaments have an important place in the ethics of Humanism. (10) The support for democracy and civil liberties is an ethical imperative for Humanism, with complete freedom of expression in every field of human endeavour. (11) The Humanist ethics functions on the basis that human beings have true freedom of choice at the moment of making an ethical decision. Universal determinism that includes humankind would make any sort of ethics impossible and irrelevant.

## **SIMILARITIES AND DISSIMILARITIES**

A critical comparative study of Christian ethics and Humanist ethics shows that both ethics have several moral values that are very similar. The dissimilarities are few.

### *Some Similarities*

In both Christian ethics and Humanist ethics, the wellbeing of humans is of significant importance. In fact, both Christian ethics and Humanist ethics denounce egoism. Christian ethics and Humanist ethics<sup>54</sup> promote altruistic acts that benefit one's fellow human being. For Christian ethics, whatever one does to one's neighbor, one does it to Jesus Christ and one will receive one's reward on the judgment day when the Lord Jesus comes with his angels.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, articles ten, eleven, twelve and thirteen.

<sup>55</sup> See *Matthew* 25:31-45.

Both Christian ethics<sup>56</sup> and Humanist ethics<sup>57</sup> affirm communal life characterized by mutual respect, interdependence and inter-relatedness among humans. Hence, Christian ethics and Humanist ethics regard discrimination, segregation, tribalism and the like as morally unacceptable.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore both Christian ethics<sup>59</sup> and Humanist ethics<sup>60</sup> assert that it is morally right to care for the disadvantaged members of the human society.

On issues such as international peace,<sup>61</sup> poverty<sup>62</sup> and the environment<sup>63</sup> and the like that significantly affect human wellbeing, both Christian ethics and Humanist ethics treat them with great care, consider them very important and accord them prime attention.

The scope of issues that Humanist ethics and Christian deal with is very wide touching on the various aspects of human life such as religion,<sup>64</sup> ethics,<sup>65</sup> marriage,<sup>66</sup> sex,<sup>67</sup> abortion,<sup>68</sup> euthanasia,<sup>69</sup> suicide,<sup>70</sup> international peace,<sup>71</sup> poverty<sup>72</sup> and the environment.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994). English Translation for the United States of America, Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications - Liberia Editrice Vaticana.

<sup>57</sup>For example, Humanism declares, “We deplore racial, religious, ethnic, or class antagonisms. Although we believe in cultural diversity and encourage racial and ethnic pride, we reject separations which promote alienation and set people and groups against each other; we envision an integrated community where people have a maximum opportunity for free and voluntary association.” See American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article eleven; See also *Humanist manifestos ii*, Lamont, C. (1997). *The Philosophy of Humanism* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Amherst, New York: Humanist Press, p. 323.

<sup>58</sup>For Humanist ethics, see American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article eleven. For Christian ethics see *Matthew* 7:12; *Matthew* 22:39; *Matthew* 25:31-45; *Luke* 6:27-36; *John* 13:34.

<sup>59</sup>See Pope John Paul II (1984). *Sacred in all its forms*. Edited by J. V. Schall, (Boston: St. Paul Editions, p. 96. Cf. also *Luke* 14:12-14.

<sup>60</sup>Humanist ethics categorically affirms that Humanists “are concerned for the welfare of the aged, the infirm, the disadvantaged, and also for the outcasts - the mentally retarded, abandoned, or abused children, the handicapped, prisoners, and addicts - for all who are neglected or ignored by society.

<sup>61</sup>American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article thirteen; See also *Humanist manifestos ii*, Lamont, C. (1997). *The Philosophy of Humanism* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Amherst, New York: Humanist Press, p. 324.

<sup>62</sup>American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article ten; See also *Humanist manifestos ii*, Lamont, C. (1997). *The Philosophy of Humanism* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Amherst, New York: Humanist Press, p. 322.

<sup>63</sup>For Christian ethics, see Pope Francis (2015). *Laudato si, encyclical letter of the Holy Father Francis on care for our common home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, nos. 12, 13, 14 and especially nos. 20 -34. For Humanist ethics, cf. American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article fourteen.

<sup>64</sup> See American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, articles one and two. From <http://www.americanhumanist.org> - Retrieved 03/03/2016.

<sup>65</sup>American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article three and four.

<sup>66</sup>American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article six; See also *Humanist manifestos ii* Lamont, C. (1997). *The Philosophy of Humanism* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Amherst, New York: Humanist Press, p. 321.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid..

<sup>68</sup> Ibid..

<sup>69</sup>American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article 7.

Both Christian ethics and Humanist ethics seeks to promote the observance of the common good<sup>74</sup> (*bonum commune*) as a moral value among humans. In fact, while Christian ethics,\* Humanist ethics seeks the democratization of the world economy that can be judged by its responsiveness to human needs, testing results in terms of the common good. In fact, whereby some individuals are unable to contribute to their own betterment, humanist ethics endorses that society provides the means to satisfy the said individuals' basic economic, health, and cultural needs.<sup>75</sup>

### *Some Dissimilarities*

Christian ethics acknowledges the roles that God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit play in morality. Humanist ethics rejects all forms of supernaturalism.

Whereas for Christian ethics, sacred scripture (in the Old and New Testaments - the bible) forms the source of morality, for Humanist ethics, humans form the ultimate source of what is morally right or wrong. In fact, Humanist ethics is a result of several minds, including numerous signers of the Humanist manifestos, which as it were, serve as a compendium of the principles and stances of Humanist ethics.

Albeit both Christian ethics and Humanist ethics are open to other philosophies and the boundless limits of reason and scientific methods thereby gaining the advantages of progressiveness, flexibility, tolerance, openness to new developments and the like, Christian ethics (unlike Humanist ethics) regards some scientific feat as morally unacceptable.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid..

<sup>71</sup>American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article thirteen; See also *Humanist manifestos ii*, Lamont, C. (1997). *The Philosophy of Humanism* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Amherst, New York: Humanist Press, p. 324.

<sup>72</sup>American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article ten; See also *Humanist manifestos ii*, Lamont, C. (1997). *The Philosophy of Humanism* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Amherst, New York: Humanist Press, p. 322.

<sup>73</sup>American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article fourteen.

<sup>74</sup>On the common good for the world community/human family, for Christian ethics, cf. Pope Francis (2015). *Laudatosi, encyclical letter of the Holy Father Francis on care for our common home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, nos. 18 and 23; For Humanist ethics, see American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, articles twelve, thirteen and fourteen.

<sup>75</sup>See American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, articles ten and eleven.

<sup>76</sup>Examples include scientific experimentation on human beings. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994). *Op. Cit.*, Nos. 2295-2296.

While Christian ethics teaches that a good moral life in this world will merit an eschatological reward in heaven, and a bad moral life, hell punishment as its respective reward, Humanist ethics does not accept any eschatological reward in heaven and hell for a good and bad moral life respectively. In other words, while Christian ethics teaches that one's good moral life will hereafter lead one to an eternal life in heaven and a bad moral life to eternal hell, Humanist ethics teaches that there is no supernatural heaven or hell. For Humanist ethics one is immortalized through one's progeny and one's good legacy in this one and only life.

Even though both Humanist ethics and Christian ethics deal with various aspects of human life such as religion,<sup>77</sup> ethics,<sup>78</sup> marriage,<sup>79</sup> sex,<sup>80</sup> abortion,<sup>81</sup> euthanasia,<sup>82</sup> and suicide,<sup>83</sup> their respective positions differ.

## EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

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<sup>77</sup>Christian ethics acknowledges the importance of Christian religion and its doctrines/teachings. Humanism, however, is non-religious and even sees some religious doctrines and teachings as doing a disservice to humanity. Cf. American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, articles one and two. From <http://www.americanhumanist.org> - Retrieved 03/03/2016.

<sup>78</sup>Divine law/God's law features in Christian ethics; (Cf. The Decalogue, *Exodus* 20:1-17; The Beatitudes *Matthew* 5:1-12; The love commandment *John* 13:34). In Humanist ethics, Human reason/intellect (without any supernatural being) form the bedrock of morality. (See American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article three and four.

<sup>79</sup>For Christian ethics, marriage is monogamous, heterosexual and indissoluble. (Cf. *Matthew* 19:3-9;). For Humanist ethics, cf. American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article six; See also *Humanist manifestos ii* Lamont, C. (1997). *The Philosophy of Humanism* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Amherst, New York: Humanist Press, p. 321.

<sup>80</sup>Even though Humanist ethics share a similar position with Christian ethics that sexual relation should be a mutual consent between two adults, the stance of Humanist ethics differs from that of Christian ethics because the former also allows individual sexual proclivities such as homosexuality while the latter seems to be battling with or unsure about the moral rightness and/or wrongness of homosexuality and its related issues.

<sup>81</sup>Christian ethics sees direct procured abortion as ethically wrong; (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994). English Translation for the United States of America, Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Nos. 2270-2272. Humanist ethics permits abortion. See American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article six.

<sup>82</sup>For Christian ethics, euthanasia is ethically wrong; (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), *Op. Cit.*, Nos. 2276-2279. Humanist ethics allows euthanasia. See American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article 7.

<sup>83</sup>Christian ethics teaches that suicide is ethically wrong. (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), *Op. Cit.*, Nos. 2280-2283). Humanist ethics does not see suicide as ethically wrong but as an expression of one's autonomy. (Cf. American Humanist Association, *Humanist manifesto ii*, article 7.

From the above comparative study of Christian ethics and Humanist ethics, it can be deduced that notwithstanding the differences in sources and on issues such as marriage, sex, euthanasia and suicide, they have several moral principles that are very similar and are of great benefit to humanity. Perhaps the elimination of the supernatural dimension is the major point of divergence and the main cause that is responsible for the dissimilarities between the two systems of ethics.

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