**COURSE TEXT and WORKSHEET (required to be completed and submitted)**

**Name: ………………………………………………………………………..**

**ANSWER in writing**

**- What are the two biblical text introducing the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission?**

**- What are the two objectives of the document?**

**- What is the key concept of "revealed morality"?**

**Worksheet 6: *The Bible and Morality***

***BIBLICAL ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN CONDUCT***

(The document of PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION; abbreviated)

**Exodus 20.2-17**

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of their parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labouher and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male of female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

**Matthew 5.3-12**

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against your falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

***PREFACE***

*The yearning for happiness, the desire to achieve a fully satisfying life, is forever deeply rooted in the human heart. The realization of this desire depends mainly on our behaviour, which agrees, but sometimes clashes with that of others. In which way is it possible to arrive at an effective decision regarding the just behaviour that leads individuals, communities and entire nations towards a successful life, in other words, towards happiness?*

*For Christians Holy Scripture is not only a source of revelation on which to ground one’s faith, it is also an indispensable reference point for morality. They are convinced that in the bible they can find indications and norms of right behaviour to attain fullness of life.*

*Such a conviction encounters various objections. The first difficulty is the instinctive refusal of norms, obligations and commandments within the human person, particularly strong in our own days. Equally cogent in contemporary society is the desire to attain full happiness together with unlimited liberty, that is, freedom to act in accordance with one’s whims, without the constraint of any norms. For some people such an unlimited freedom is in fact essential for the attainment of true happiness. Within this frame of mind human dignity itself demands that it not be subjected to externally imposed norms: each human person should freely and autonomously decide for himself what he deems just and acceptable. Hence the normative complex present in the Scriptures, the development of Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church that interprets and actualizes these norms appear as obstacles to happiness of which we must free ourselves.*

*A second difficulty derives from Sacred Scripture itself: biblical writings were redacted at least nineteen hundred years ago and belong to distant epochs in which life conditions were very different from those of today. Many actual situations and problems were completely unknown in these writings and therefore one may think that they can offer no appropriate answers to these problems. Consequently even if the fundamental value of the bible as an inspired text is acknowledged some people retain a strong sceptical attitude and maintain that Scripture is of no use for offering solutions to the numerous problems of our times. Present humanity is confronted every day with delicate moral problems continually presented by the sciences and by globalization; even convinced believers have the impression that many of our past certainties have been annulled; just think about such themes as violence, terrorism, war, immigration, distribution of wealth , respect for natural resources, life, work, sexuality, genetic research, the family and community life. Faced by such complex problems one is tempted to marginalize, totally or partially, Sacred Scripture. In this case too, though for a variety of motives, the sacred text is laid aside and solutions to the grave and urgent problems of today are sought elsewhere.*

*Already in 2002 the Pontifical Biblical Commission, at the behest of the then President Card. Joseph Ratzinger, set about to examine the problem of the relationship between the bible and morality by posing itself the question: what is the value and the significance of the inspired text for today’s morality, regarding which the above mentioned difficulties cannot be neglected?*

*In the bible we find many norms, commandments, laws, collections of codices, etc. An attentive reading, however, draws attention to the fact that such norms are never found by themselves in isolation, they always belong to a definite context. It can be stated that in biblical anthropology the primary and basic factor is God’s action, forestalling human behaviour: his gifts of grace, his call to communion. The normative complex is consequential; it shows the proper way to accept and live out God’s gift. At the root of this biblical concept is the view of the human person as created by God, it is never an isolated, autonomous being, detached from everything and from everyone; it stands in a radical and essential relationship with God and with a brotherly community. God created mankind in his own image, its very existence is the first and basic gift received from God. In biblical perspective a discourse on moral norms cannot treat them in isolation and in a restricted fashion, but it needs to insert them into the context of the entire biblical view of human existence.*

*The first part of the document therefore sets out to present this characteristic biblical concept in which anthropology and theology intertwine. Following the canonical order of the bible the human person first appears as a creature to whom God had donated life itself, it then appears as a member of the chosen people with whom God had entered a special covenant, and finally, as brother and sister of Jesus, incarnate Son of God.*

*The second part of the document stresses the fact that direct solutions to the numerous outstanding problems cannot be found in Sacred Scripture. However, although the bible does not offer prefabricated solutions, it does present some criteria whose application is certainly of help in finding valid solutions for human behaviour. Two basic criteria are presented in the first place, conformity with the biblical concept of the human being and conformity with the example of Jesus. These are followed by other more particular criteria. From Holy Scripture as a whole at least six strong lines of reasoning emerge that can lead to making solid moral decisions with a Scriptural foundation: 1) opening up to various cultures, hence a certain ethical universalism (criterion of convergence); 2) a firm stand against incompatible values (criterion of opposition); 3) a process of refinement of the human conscience which can be observed within each of the two Testaments (criterion of progress); 4) a rectification of the tendency to leave moral decisions to the subjective, individual sphere alone ( criterion of community dimension); 5) an aperture towards the absolute future of the world and of history that enables us to mark out clearly the goal and the motivations of human behaviour (criterion of finality); 6) an attentive evaluation, in each case, of the relative or absolute value of moral principles and precepts in the bible (criterion of discernment).*

*All these criteria, whose listing is only representative not exhaustive, are deeply rooted in the bible; their application can certainly be of help to the believer. They show which points biblical revelation offers to help us, in our own day, in the delicate process of correct moral discernment.*

*I wish to express my thanks to the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission for their patient and demanding work. I hope that the present text will be of help in discovering ever more the fascinating values of a genuine Christian life, and to consider the bible as an inexhaustible treasure, ever actual for determining just behaviour, on which the attainment of happiness in its fullness by individuals and by the entire human community depends.*

*William Cardinal Levada, President*

*11th May 2008, Solemnity of Pentecost*

**Introduction**

1. Human beings have always been in search of happiness and meaning. As St. Augustine well expressed it: “They want to be happy even living a life that will not make them so.” (De civitate Dei, XIV,4). This statement already poses the problem of the tension between profound desire and moral choices, whether conscious or not. Pascal aptly describes this tension: “If human beings are not made for God, why is it that they attain happiness only in God? If they are made for God why do they show themselves so averse to God?” (Pensées, II,169)

In presenting this reflection on the delicate subject of the relationship between the Bible and morality the Biblical Commission premises two crucial propositions: 1 – For every believer and for every person God is the ultimate answer to this search for happiness and meaning. 2 – The one Holy Scripture, comprising both Testaments, is a valid and useful locus of dialogue with our contemporaries on questions concerning morality.

0.1. **A world in search of answers**

2. In advancing this project it is not possible to overlook present conditions. In an era of globalization a rapid transformation of ethical options is visible in many areas of our society under the impact of population migrations, the increasing complexity of social relationships, and of scientific progress, particularly in the fields of psychology, genetics and communications. All this has a profound influence on the moral conscience of many individuals and groups to the point of fostering the development of a culture based on relativism, tolerance and on an acceptance of new ideas dependent on inadequate philosophical and theological foundations. Also for a good number of Catholic Christians this culture of tolerance is accompanied by an increasing mistrust, or even an outright impatience, with certain aspects of the Church’s moral teaching, which are firmly founded on Scripture

0.2 **Our objectives**

3. In the present document the reader will not find either a complete biblical moral theology or recipes for ready answers to moral problems, whether old or new, currently discussed in all forums, including the mass-media. Our undertaking makes no claim to replace the work of philosophers and moral theologians. An adequate discussion of moral problems posed by moralists would need a methodical investigation and a study of the human sciences which are completely outside our field of competence. Our purpose is more modest; it has two objectives.

1. First of all we would like to situate Christian morality within the larger sphere of anthropology and of biblical theologies. This will bring out more clearly its specific nature and its originality both in relation to natural ethics and those moralities which are founded on human experience and reason, and to the ethical systems of other religions.

2. The other objective is in some ways a more practical one. While it is not easy to make proper use of the Bible to throw light on moral questions or to provide a positive answer to delicate problems or situations, the Bible does provide some methodological criteria for progress along this road.

This double purpose determines and explains the twofold structure of the present document. First : “A revealed morality: divine gift and human response”; then : “Biblical criteria for moral reflection”.

From the point of view of method: without wishing to side-line the historico-critical method, for many reasons indispensable, we considered our research would benefit from an overall preference for the canonical approach to scripture (Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, I,C,1).

0.3 **Basic guidelines to the orientation of the document**

0.3.1 **The key concept: “revealed morality”**

4. To convey the basic thrust of scripture as a whole we need first to introduce the concept of “revealed morality”, despite its possible unfamiliarity. This is a key concept for our enquiry. To understand this concept certain common prejudices must be set aside. The reduction of morality to a code of individual or collective conduct, a sum of virtues to be practised or to the requirements of an assumed universal law, obscures the special character, the values and the permanent validity of biblical morality.

At this point two basic concepts must be introduced, which will later be developed.

1. Logically, morality is secondary to God’s founding initiative, which we express theologically in terms of gift. In the biblical perspective morality is rooted in the prior gift of life, of intellect and of free will (creation), and above all in the entirely unmerited offer of a privileged, intimate relationship between human beings and God (covenant). Morality is not primarily the human response but a revelation of the God’s purpose and of the divine gift. In other words, for the Bible, morality is the consequence of the experience of God, more precisely the God-given human experience of an entirely unmerited gift.

2. From this premise, the Law itself, an integral part of the covenant process, is seen to be a gift from God. Law is not primarily a juridical concept, founded on conduct and attitudes, but a theological one, which the Bible itself aptly expresses with the term “way” (derek in Hebrew, hodos in Greek): a way to follow.

In the present context this approach is necessary in a very special way. Moral instruction certainly forms part of the Church’s essential mission, but only secondarily, i.e. in relation to our appreciation of the gift of God and of a spiritual experience. This is something which our contemporaries often find it difficult to understand and adequately appreciate.

The term “revealed morality” is perhaps neither classical nor current. Nevertheless it finds its place within the orbit traced by the Second Vatican Council in the dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. The God of the Bible reveals not primarily a code of conduct but “Himself” in his mystery and “the mystery of his will”. “This pattern of revelation unfolds through deeds and words which are intimately interconnected: the works performed by God in the history of salvation illustrate and confirm the doctrine and realities signified by the words; the words, for their part, proclaim the works, and bring to light the mystery they contain.” (Dei Verbum, I.2). Accordingly, all the deeds through which God manifests himself possess a moral dimension in so far as they invite human beings to conform their thought and their actions to the divine model: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” (Lev 19.2); “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”. Mt 5.48)

0.3.2. **The unity of the two Testaments**

5. The whole of revelation – that is, the design of God, who wants to make himself known and to open to all the way of salvation – converges on Christ. At the heart of the first covenant the “way” denotes both an exodus (the original liberating event) and a body of teaching, the Torah. As the heart of the New Covenant Jesus says of himself: “I am the way, the truth and the life.” (John 14.6). He therefore sums up in his own person and in his mission all God’s liberating dynamism, and, in a certain way, also the whole of morality, theologically understood as God’s gift, as the way spontaneously offered to men and women to attain eternal life, total intimacy with him. The profound unity of the two Testaments is here evident; Hugh of St. Victor expressed this intuition in his incisive expression: “The whole of Scripture is in one book alone, and this one book is Christ.” (De arca Noe, II.8).

We shall therefore take care to avoid oppositions between the Old and the New Testament in the moral sphere or in any other. In this regard the previous document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission offers useful pointers when it describes the unity of the two Testaments in terms of continuity, discontinuity and advance. (The Jewish People and their Holy Scriptures in the Christian Bible, nn. 40–42).

0.4.1. **The addressees of the document**

6. Our exposition is relevant primarily to believers, to whom it is primarily addressed. However, we hope to stimulate a broader dialogue among men and women of good will, from diverse cultures and religions, in search of an authentic progress beyond their daily troubles towards happiness and meaning.

Source: Pontifical Biblical Commision: The Bible and Morality: Biblical roots of Christian Conduct. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 1, 2020.