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978-0-521-16483-2 - The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics: Second Edition

Edited by Robin Gill

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
CHRISTIAN ETHICS

In this second edition of the best-selling *Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, Robin Gill brings together twenty chapters by leading experts, to provide a comprehensive introduction to Christian ethics that is both authoritative and up to date. This volume boasts four entirely new chapters, while previous chapters and the bibliography have been updated to reflect significant developments in the field over the last decade. Gill offers a superb overview of the subject, examining the scriptural bases of ethics as well as discussing Christian ethics in the context of contemporary issues, including war and the arms trade, social justice, ecology, economics, medicine, and genetics.

All of the contributors have a proven track record of balanced, comprehensive and comprehensible writing, making this book an accessible and invaluable resource not only for students in upper-level undergraduate courses, graduate students and teachers, but for anyone interested in Christian ethics today.

Robin Gill is Professor of Applied Theology at the University of Kent, Canterbury and General Editor of the New Studies in Christian Ethics series. His recent books include *Health Care and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, 2006), *A Textbook of Christian Ethics* (2006) and a forthcoming three-volume work, *Sociological Theology*.

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*University of Kent*



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*Community, Scripture and the Moral Life* (2002) and *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine* (2003).

**Rowan Williams** is Archbishop of Canterbury and a former Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford. His recent publications include *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology* (1999), *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement* (2000) and *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (2008).

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## Preface

It is a sign of the vibrancy of Christian ethics that, ten years after it was first published, this *Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics* needed to be radically updated. At first I thought that a couple of fresh chapters and a slight updating of endnotes would be sufficient, but I was soon proved wrong. Vibrant developments in Asian Christian ethics, in global studies of Christianity and in religious ethics needed to be properly addressed. In addition, the traumatic destruction of the Twin Towers in 2001 and the London bombings in 2005, as well as the economic crisis that emerged in 2008, could not be ignored. The issue of sexuality could no longer simply be assumed under the heading of ‘world family trends’: throughout the last decade deep divisions over homosexuality, especially, have emerged within many denominations. The result is four entirely new chapters – Chapters 2, 4, 10 and 19 – and many changes in other chapters.

Following the same formula as other Cambridge Companions, this collection of twenty chapters has been written by leading experts in the subject and is aimed at students in upper-level undergraduate courses, graduate students, teachers and other interested parties within churches or in adjacent academic disciplines. It should provide a fairly comprehensive introduction to Christian ethics that is both authoritative and up to date. All of the contributors have also been chosen because they have a proven track record of balanced, comprehensive and comprehensible writing.

The Companion is in three parts. The first of these considers the crucial relationship of Christian ethics both to the Bible itself and to modern biblical studies. Rowan Williams’ opening chapter sets the broad theological and ecclesiastical contexts for this relationship. An earlier version of this chapter was given at a key plenary session of the Anglican Lambeth Conference of Bishops in the summer of 1998 in Canterbury. Underlying many of the debates at this vexed international conference was the question of the authority of scripture. The second

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chapter, by Robin Lovin, puts the discipline into a global perspective, comparing and contrasting moral traditions in both eastern and western Christian ethics. John Rogerson then examines the challenges facing Christian ethics in its use of the Old Testament. Allen Verhey turns to the gospels, showing how they can be used within Christian ethics today. Finally in this part Stephen Barton looks critically at the epistles and Christian ethics.

The second part of the Companion examines different, and sometimes competing, approaches to Christian ethics. Stephen Pope provides a wide-ranging survey of natural-law approaches to the discipline. This is followed by a similar critical survey by Jean Porter of different forms of virtue ethics. Lisa Sowle Cahill then examines the contentious questions of gender and Christian ethics and, in the process, makes extensive use of Susan Frank Parsons' well-received threefold typology of feminist ethics. Tim Gorringe next examines the concept of liberation in Christian ethics, a concept that has been highly influential within both political and gender issues. Peniel Rajkumar, himself a Dalit theologian, brings an insider's perspective on the fascinating forms of Christian ethics that are emerging in Asia. Ronald Green and Gavin D'Costa then provide contrasting chapters on the relationship of Christian ethics to other forms of religious ethics. Ronald Green writes as a Jew who also has extensive knowledge of Christian ethics. Indeed, an earlier version of this chapter was first given as his Presidential Address to the Society of Christian Ethics. Gavin D'Costa writes as a Roman Catholic who has a high reputation as a mediator between Christians and Jews.

The third part of the Companion examines some crucial issues in modern Christian ethics. It would be impossible to cover adequately all of the issues that currently concern Christian ethicists, so inevitably I have been selective. Christian ethics has been influential in several political and social contexts around the world over the last few decades. Despite evidence of growing pluralism and secularity in many countries, a number of theologians and church leaders have been instrumental in effecting crucial changes. Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Robin Eames and Dr Martin Luther King, Jr all proved to be surprisingly influential in deeply troubled political and social contexts in the second, supposedly godless, half of the twentieth century.

The first two chapters in this third part, by John Elford and myself, analyse an area of Christian influence in social ethics that has been more abiding than almost any other, namely a discussion about the concept of the just war. John Elford's chapter sets the broad frame of

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this discussion, whereas my own locates it specifically in the debate about the arms trade in a context of recent wars and conflicts in the Gulf, Iraq and the Balkans. Duncan Forrester's chapter then examines rival accounts of social justice and locates them specifically in the context of welfare provision. Michael Northcott next provides a forceful theological case for deeper ecological involvement by Christian ethicists. Max Stackhouse, assisted in his chapter by David Miller, presents a broad critical survey of different Christian ethical approaches to business and economics. The late Don Browning's chapter offers a powerful Christian critique of family trends around the world. My own subsequent chapter looks specifically at contentious issues in sexuality, finally arguing that different religious traditions might actually learn something from each other in the modern world. They then might be able to contribute more constructively on global issues such as AIDS. Finally James Childress provides a wide-ranging chapter in the area that he has made so effectively his own, namely medicine and genetics as they relate to Christian ethics.

Of course, this Companion is only a taster. However, I hope that these chapters and the notes attached to them will inspire readers to delve more deeply into Christian ethics in the future. For thoughtful Christians who are concerned about the modern world there surely cannot be a more important discipline.