Christian Bioethics Sample Responses and Scaffold

Describe the main teachings of Christianity on ONE of the following areas:
- Bioethics
- Environmental ethics
- Sexual ethics (6 marks)

- Bioethics covers a range of ethical issues to do with life, such as abortion, euthanasia & human cloning. Christian ethical teachings on bioethics are based on Christian sources of authority on ethics, namely the scriptures, tradition, reason and conscience.
- Derived from these sources and fundamental to Christian bioethics is the principle of “the sanctity of life”. Christians believe that God is the creator of all life. All life is holy – a gift from God. 10 Commandments: “Do not murder” (Exodus 20:13). Our lives are not ours – they belong to God. It is only God who has the right to take our lives away.
- The Catholic and Orthodox Churches condemn abortion as a form of murder as they believe life begins at fertilization. The Didache from the 2nd century says that “you must not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish.”
- The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes.”
- There are a range of Protestant views on abortion. Some (e.g. American Baptists) say that there is no specific Biblical teaching on it and consider it just a medical procedure. Some approve of abortion only in the early stages of pregnancy or under certain conditions (e.g. Uniting Church) whilst others oppose it altogether (e.g. Hillsong).
- Catholics and Orthodox Christians also oppose active euthanasia as a form of murder/suicide but support passive euthanasia in some cases. They also oppose human cloning as interfering with the natural order created by God. Protestants have a range of views on these issues.

If the question asks for a description of examples of ethical teachings you might cut out the first few dot point above and go into more depth with euthanasia and cloning. Remember to keep an eye on the time. For a 6 mark question I suggest you spend 12 minutes. Test how much you can write in 12 minutes – you might need to cut things out or add them in.
- Euthanasia is the act or practice of killing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy. Catholic and Orthodox Christians oppose euthanasia. Voluntary euthanasia (requested by the sick person) is considered to be a form of suicide, which is a form of murder as our lives belong to God. They also oppose active euthanasia as “murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church). However passive euthanasia - “discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome” and the use of “painkillers to alleviate the suffering of the dying” – is supported by the Catholic Church. There are a range of Protestant views on euthanasia, with some who support both voluntary and active euthanasia.
- Most Christians are opposed to human cloning as they feel that it is interfering with God’s creation of the natural order. Those opposed to abortion also oppose cloning as it involves the destruction of human embryos.

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Evaluate how the ethical teachings of Christianity influence the life of adherents in ONE of the following:
- Bioethics
- Environmental ethics
- Sexual ethics (6 marks)

Note: I have included too much information to be written out in a 6 mark response. It is possible that the above question could be asked as a 20 mark response. You would need to modify the material provided in the 20 mark example that follows but incorporate the ideas I have provided here. For a 6 mark response you would need to cut down on the following material, possibly cutting out the material I have put in brackets.

- Christian adherents follow bioethical teachings based on Christian sources of authority: the scriptures, tradition, reason and conscience. Derived from these sources and fundamental to Christian ethics is the principle of “the sanctity of life”.
- (Christianity is a religious tradition that sets moral standards and ethical guidelines for its adherents to follow. However it also accepts that people are not perfect and sometimes do not live up to Christian ideals.)
- The Catholic, Orthodox and evangelical Protestant churches are very firm and clear in their moral condemnation of abortion as they believe life begins at fertilization. The Didache from the 2nd century says that “you must not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish.” Pope John Paul II has said that the murder of a defenseless innocent by the mother who is supposed to love and nurture her/him is a particularly abhorrent sin (The Gospel of Life).
- (In Australia it is estimated by the government that almost a quarter of all pregnancies are terminated with over 70,000 abortions being carried out every year. Between half and two thirds of women requesting abortion were using contraception when they fell pregnant.)
- Many Christians follow the trends in the rest of society and have abortions despite their churches’ strict bioethical teachings against it. Some more liberal Protestants say that the Bible does not provide clear teachings on abortion and leave it as a personal decision for the people involved.
- However there are also many Christians who do follow Christian bioethical teachings on abortion. Some would avoid having sex outside of marriage as they believe that any child conceived should be welcomed into a loving and secure family. Thus they would do their best to avoid a situation that would bring up the question of abortion.
- Others who have unplanned pregnancies make the difficult moral decision to keep the child and possibly become a single mother despite pressure from society, family and friends to abort. Such decisions to follow Christian ethical teachings have significant implications for a person’s relationships and lifestyle and involve personal sacrifice.
- (According to Canon Law, a Catholic adherent who has an abortion, or encourages someone to have an abortion, has automatically excommunicated themselves from the Catholic Church. However, Catholic adherents support women who have had abortions to come to terms with their actions and return to the Church through programs such as Project Rachel.)
Analyse/Explain the ethical teachings of Christianity on ONE of the following areas:
- Bioethics
- Environmental ethics
- Sexual ethics (20 marks)

Introduction

• “Ethics is the justification for and formal reasoning behind human moral behaviour.” (Macquarie dictionary)
• Bioethics covers a range of ethical issues to do with life, such as abortion, euthanasia & human cloning. Bioethical issues are particularly interesting as they are at the intersection between science, medicine, ethics, law and religion. The development of new technology brings new ethical questions that must be faced by Christianity.
• Christian adherents base their ethics on the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Incarnation of God. By his word and example Jesus teaches Christians how they should live their lives. The central message of Jesus was for Christians to love others the way that God has first loved them. This has major implications for the morality and ethics of Christian adherents.

Christian Ethical Sources

• Christian ethical teachings on bioethics are based on Christian sources of authority on ethics, namely the scriptures, tradition, reason and conscience.
• Most Christian denominations believe that ethics are objective (true for everyone) unlike modern society which has relativist ethics (true only for those who believe in it).
• The foundation of all Christian belief is the Holy Bible which Christians believe to be the inspired Word of God. The Bible contains commandments and teachings from God on how to live an ethical life.
• For Catholic and Orthodox Christians the tradition of the church as interpreted by the Pope and Bishops are also an important source of moral guidance. For bioethical issues that are not mentioned in the Bible Catholics and Orthodox Christians look to their religious leaders for guidance.
• The Catholic Church’s use of Natural Law to determine ethical teachings emphasizes the use of philosophy and reason in making ethical determinations.
• Ultimately, it is up to the individual conscience of each adherent to make informed personal moral decisions based on what they believe God wants of them.
• Derived from these sources and fundamental to Christian ethics is the principle of “the sanctity of life”.

Christian Bioethical Principles

• Fundamental to Christian ethics is the principle of “the sanctity of life”.
• God is the creator of all life. All life is holy – a gift from God. Human life is extra special: “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.’” (Genesis 1:26). As all humans are made in the image of God, human life is precious and every life has equal and intrinsic value. 10 Commandments: “Do not murder” (Exodus 20:13). Our lives are not ours – they belong to God. It is only God who has the right to take our lives away.

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• Jesus said “Love one another as I have loved you.” (John 13:12) Thus the way Christians treat one another should be based on Jesus’ example of unconditional love.
• Jesus also gave the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” (Matthew 7:12). This gives Christians a criteria on how to make ethical decisions.
• We have a responsibility before God to care for our own life and the lives of others. We are called to show compassion in our treatment of others. The way we respect the body and deal with death and suffering are thus of great religious significance.

Ethics of Abortion
• Abortion is the killing of an unborn baby, either as an embryo or foetus, most often by being torn or cut apart in the womb then sucked out with a vacuum suction tube. In Australia it is estimated by the government that almost a quarter of all pregnancies are terminated with over 70,000 abortions being carried out every year. Between half and two thirds of women requesting abortion were using contraception when they fell pregnant.
• The Catholic and Orthodox Churches condemn abortion as a form of murder as they believe life begins at fertilization –this is the time when the soul enters the body. The Didache from the 2nd century says that “you must not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish.”
• The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes.” Pope John Paul II has said that the murder of a defenseless innocent by the mother who is supposed to love and nurture her/him is a particularly abhorrent sin (Gospel of Life).
• According to Canon Law, a Catholic adherent who has an abortion or encourages someone to have an abortion has automatically excommunicated themselves from the Catholic Church. However, Catholic adherents support women who have had abortions to come to terms with their sorrow and return to the Church through programs such as Project Rachel.
• There are a range of Protestant views on abortion. Some (e.g. American Baptists) say that there is no specific Biblical teaching on it and consider it just a medical procedure. Some approve of abortion only in the early stages of pregnancy or under certain conditions (e.g. Uniting Church) whilst others oppose it altogether (e.g. Hillsong).

Ethics of Euthanasia
• Euthanasia comes from the Greek words for “good death.” Webster’s dictionary defines it as: “the act or practice of killing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy.”
• For voluntary euthanasia, the ethical questions raised are related to the ethics of suicide – do humans have the right to take their own life? The Old Testament forbids murder. 10 Commandments: “Do not murder” (Exodus 20:13). As life belongs to God, suicide is seen as a form of murder and forbidden in Christianity. For this reason Catholic and Orthodox Christians oppose voluntary euthanasia. Some Protestants allow voluntary euthanasia.
• With involuntary euthanasia (e.g. when a person is in a coma and unable to make the decision themselves) the question becomes: “who has the right to end another person’s life?” The Catholic Church provides very clear guidelines on the conditions that
euthanasia may be permitted – active euthanasia is always prohibited whilst passive euthanasia may be permitted in some circumstances.

- **Active euthanasia** is a deliberate action taken to end a person’s life, e.g. a lethal injection of morphine. It is opposed by the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Active euthanasia is “murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church).

- **Passive euthanasia** involves “discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome” (Catechism of the Catholic Church). The Catholic and Orthodox churches allow people to die naturally without medical intervention in certain circumstances. Also, the use of painkillers to alleviate the suffering of the dying – even if this shortens life – is supported by the Catholic Church. However the Catholic Church rejects the removal of artificial hydration and nutrition as starving a person to death is not considered morally acceptable. People in a coma still have a right to food and water.

- There are a range of Protestant views on euthanasia, with some liberal Protestants who support both voluntary and active euthanasia.

**Ethics of Reproductive Human Cloning**

- Human cloning has not yet been attempted but the cloning of animals has met with some success through the process of **somatic cell nuclear transfer**. It involves asexual reproduction by placing DNA into an egg cell that has had its nucleus removed. This is then electrically shocked or chemically treated to act as if it has been fertilized and begin to grow into a genetic copy of the organism from which the DNA was taken. A clone is not an exact replica of the original, but just a much younger identical twin.

- Most Christians are opposed to human cloning as they feel that it is interfering with God’s creation of the natural order. Human cloning involves a distortion in the understanding of human beings – they are a created product rather than resulting from a loving act of co-creation with God.

- Human clones bypass the natural order of reproduction and lead to a reduction in the genetic diversity that was intended by God when God created sexual reproduction by two parents. Clones are not created by an act of love by a married couple which is what the Bible tells us that God intended.

- Those opposed to abortion also oppose cloning as it involves the destruction of human embryos. As mentioned above many Christians believe that life begins at conception. It is not morally acceptable to destroy one life in order to create another.

**Conclusion**

- Give an overview of your answer summing up your main points.
Essay Scaffold:
Explain Christian ethical teachings on bioethics with a focus on the topic of abortion.

Introduction
- Define Ethics (1-2 sentences) (p.11)
- Briefly describe Christian ethics (1-2 sentences) (p.11)
- Briefly define bioethics & abortion (1-2 sentence)
- Outline Christian position on abortion (1-2 sentences)

1) Christian sources of ethics
- Opening sentence: Restate the question adding the point you will discuss in this paragraph – E.g. “Christians ethical teachings on bioethics are based on Christian sources of authority on ethics, namely the scriptures, tradition, experience and logic.”
- Describe the Christian belief that ethics are objective (true for everyone) unlike modern society which has relativist ethics (true only if you believe in it).
- Write a couple of sentences on each of the four sources of authority (see table 4.0 p.3 & p.11)
- Concluding sentence: Reword the question and answer it – E.g. “Thus these four sources of authority are essential in understanding Christian bioethical teachings.”

2) Bioethics
- Opening sentence: Restate the question adding the point of this paragraph: E.g. “Christian ethical teachings on abortion are a part of its broader teachings on bioethics.”
- Define bioethics.
- Describe why bioethical issues are so topical – they are at the intersection between science, ethics and religion. New technology brings new questions etc.
- Give a couple of brief examples of other bioethical issues and how Christianity responds to them based on its sources of authority.
- Concluding sentence: Reword the question and answer it.

3) The ethical issue of abortion
- Opening sentence: Restate the question adding the point of this paragraph
- Give a medical definition of what abortion is and how it occurs.
- Discuss reasons people give for abortion.
- Discuss issue: when does life begin? Conception, birth or somewhere in between?
- Concluding sentence: E.g. “Thus abortion is a controversial ethical issue but Christianity in general believes it to be wrong.”

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4) Biblical statements on abortion
- Opening sentence: Restate the question adding the point of this paragraph
- No direct Biblical quotes on this issue.
- However: some quotes are relevant (p.22 of notes)
- Concluding sentence: “The Bible has no clear teaching on abortion but it does say…”

5) Catholic view of abortion (may split this into a couple of paragraphs)
- Opening sentence: Restate the question adding the point of this paragraph
- Because Catholic Church believes life begins at conception therefore…
- Use range of Catholic quotes to back up your points:
  - Quote from Didache (p.20)
  - Quote from Vatican II (p.20)
  - Quote from Catechism (p.23)
  - Quote from Pope John Paul II (Gospel of Life) (p.23)
- Concluding sentence: Thus the Catholic Church opposes abortion because … give overview of above points.

6) Orthodox view of abortion
- Opening sentence: Restate the question adding the point of this paragraph
- The Orthodox Church believes…. (p.16 & 24)
- Concluding sentence: Thus the Orthodox Church opposes abortion because … give overview of above points.

7) Protestant views of abortion
- Opening sentence: “There are a great variety of Protestant views on abortion varying from denomination to denomination.” (see p. 15, 22 & 24)
- Some Protestant groups (e.g. Baptists in the USA) support some forms of abortion because…(p.22)
- Some Protestants (e.g. Anglicans) allow abortion in certain situations (p.15)
- Other Protestants are strongly against abortion because…(use quotes from sources)
- Concluding sentence: Thus there are a variety of Protestant views on abortion … give overview of above points.

8) Influence of these ethical beliefs on the lives of adherents
- Opening sentence: “Christians adherents have a range of responses to the ethical teachings of their religion.” (No notes on this one, use your heads!)
- Explain how a Christian who opposes abortion would live their lives.
- Discuss how some Christians do not follow the church’s teachings and follow their conscience or the practices of society instead.
- The Catholic church is particularly strict and Catholics who have an abortion excommunicate themselves from the Church.
- Concluding sentence: “Thus Christian adherents have a range of responses to Christian ethical teachings on abortion.”

Conclusion
- Give an overview of your answer summing up your main points.
Quotes to Memorise on Christian Bioethics

- Ethics is the justification for and formal reasoning behind human moral behaviour.” (Macquarie dictionary)
- “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.’” (Genesis 1:26).
- “Do not murder” (Exodus 20:13).
- Jesus said “Love one another as I have loved you.” (John 13:12)
- The Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” (Matthew 7:12).
- “You must not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish.” (Didache, 2nd century)
- “Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church)
- Euthanasia is “the act or practice of killing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy.” (Webster’s dictionary)
- Active euthanasia is “murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church).

Structure of extended response:

Introduction
1. Sources of Ethics
2. Bioethical Principles
3. Abortion
4. Euthanasia
5. Human Reproductive Cloning
Conclusion

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