

THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE SCRIPTURES IN MORAL THEOLOGY

The function of the Scriptures in moral theology has been a perennial question for the science of moral theology. Today the question assumes even greater importance and urgency in the light of two tendencies in contemporary theology which may even represent contradictory trends. On the one hand, the biblical renewal has made a great contribution to the development of moral theology in the last decade. The contemporary moral theologian has rejected the moral manuals of the past for many reasons, but the failure to find a basic orientation and grounding in the Scriptures frequently is mentioned as a most important lack in the older textbooks.

On the other hand, there has been another trend which has expanded the concept of revelation to cover much more than just the word of God in the Scriptures. An increasing emphasis, at some times in an exaggerated way, has been given to this world and the wisdom which persons in this world can acquire from one another and from their worldly existence. Theologians have recently been asking what if anything is distinctive about Christian ethics which has its primary source in the Scriptures. In the midst of a plurality of sources of ethical wisdom what are the role and function of the Scriptures?

This paper will discuss the question from three different aspects: the advantages that have accrued to Catholic moral theology in the last decades because of a greater emphasis on the Scriptures; the inherent limitations of the use of the Scriptures in moral theology; two fundamental methodological questions governing the use of the Scriptures in moral theology.

I. CONTRIBUTIONS OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Vatican Council II attests that a greater stress is given to the role of the Scriptures in moral theology than has been given in the past. It would be wrong to ascribe the beginnings of such a move-

ment to Vatican II, for the Council merely made its own and officially sanctioned a movement which had already begun in the Church. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation emphasized that Sacred Scripture is the soul of all theology.¹ The Decree on Priestly Formation reiterated these words and specified that the scientific exposition of moral theology should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching.²

The history of moral reflection in the Catholic tradition from certain Fathers of the Church such as Clement of Alexandria and Augustine down to the present reveals an insistence on the fact that Sacred Scripture is not the only source of ethical wisdom and knowledge for the Christian. There is a human wisdom in which all men share and participate because of their common humanity. This gnoseological recognition of a source of ethical wisdom and knowledge (human reason) outside the Scriptures corresponds to the more ontological understanding of the relation of the human to the divine, or of what was later called the relationship between the natural and the supernatural. The theological understanding of love in the Catholic tradition well illustrates this approach. Catholic theology has understood the revealed *agape* of the Bible in terms of continuity with, and a perfection of, human love. Likewise the knowledge and understanding of human love also contribute to our understanding of Christian love.³

The use of the Scriptures in moral theology has varied at different historical periods, and in the period from Trent to Vatican II the role of the Scriptures in moral theology was very limited.⁴ Recent

¹ Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, n.24. English references to Council documents are taken from: *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J.; trans. ed. Joseph Gallagher (New York: Guild Press, 1966).

² Decree on Priestly Formation, n. 16.

³ Contrast the different approaches to *agape* in the Protestant and Catholic traditions in the following: Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1969); M. C. D'Arcy, S.J., *The Mind and Heart of Love* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956). For further comment on these discussions about the meaning of love within the Roman Catholic tradition, see Jules Toner, *The Experience of Love* (Washington/Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1968); Giovanni Volta, "Per un'indagine razionale sull'amore," in Carlo Colombo, *et al.*, *Matrimonio e Verginità* (Milan: La Scuola Cattolica, 1963), pp. 9-49.

⁴ For an adequate historical summary and for further bibliographical references, see Édouard Hamel, S.J., "L'Usage de l'Écriture Sainte en théologie

historical studies show that in this period moral theology became separated from dogmatic and spiritual theology and acquired the narrow goal of training priests as judges in the sacrament of penance, with an accompanying minimalistic and legalistic approach concerned primarily with sinfulness of particular acts. At best the Scriptures were employed in a proof text fashion to corroborate arguments that were based on other reasons. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a call for a more scriptural approach to moral theology, but the attempts along this line failed because they were entwined in the polemic of the rigorists and probabiliorists against the laxists and probabilists. A more biblically oriented approach to the whole of moral theology first appeared in the Tübingen school and is best exemplified in the manual of Bernard Häring which, despite its necessarily transitional character, stands as the greatest contribution to the renewal of moral theology since the sixteenth century.⁵

Perhaps the major contribution of the biblical renewal in moral theology has been the insistence that Christian morality is a religious ethic. Rudolph Schnackenburg in his influential book *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament* insists on seeing the moral teaching of Jesus as part of the entire God-man relationship. The ethical teaching of Jesus must always be seen in the light of the good news. The manuals of moral theology by wrenching Christian ethics away from its relationship with the full Christian mystery of the saving act of God in Christ very often fostered a Pelagian mentality. The biblical renewal together with the ecumenical dialogue with Protestants has rightly emphasized the primacy of the saving intervention of God and thus avoided the one-sided approach of the past, which pictured man as saving himself by his own effort and actions.⁶

morale," *Gregorianum*, XLVII (1966), 56-63; J. Etienne, "Théologie Morale et renouveau biblique," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, XL (1964), 232-241.

⁵ Bernard Häring, C.S.S.R., *The Law of Christ*, (3 vols.; Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1961, 1963, 1966).

⁶ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), pp. 13-53. The original German edition of his very influential work appeared in 1954.

The Model of Relationality and Responsibility

The insistence on a religious ethic in the context of the entire God-man relationship has helped alter the basic structure or model of moral theology itself. The Christian is viewed as one who responds to the activity and the call of God. The theological emphasis on the Word only accentuates the dialogical structure of the Christian life. The Christian moral life is man's response to the saving word and work of God in Jesus Christ. The important biblical concept of covenant reinforces the primacy of response and of the dialogical structure of the Christian life.⁷

Ethicists in general and Christian ethicists in particular have discussed three general types of ethical models which depend on the basic understanding of the structure of the moral life: teleological, deontological, and responsibility ethics. Teleological ethics conceives the ethical model primarily in terms of the end or goal. Actions are then good or bad insofar as they help or hinder this movement to attain the end. Deontological ethics sees ethics primarily in terms of duties, obligations, or imperatives. The model of responsibility understands man as freely responding in the midst of the multiple relationships in which he finds himself.⁸

In commenting on the use of the Bible in Christian ethics Edward LeRoy Long, Jr. employs such a threefold typology.⁹ The Bible has been used in a prescriptive sense as the revelation of God's will. In a more fundamentalistic approach, some see the Bible as a book containing the revealed will of God. Others such as Calvin and Dodd also accept this basic model but employ it in a more nuanced way. Dodd, for example, speaks of precepts that give a quality or direction to our actions. The second model sees the Scriptures as supplying principles or ideals which the Christian tries to attain in his daily life. Such an approach obviously corresponds to the teleological ap-

⁷ J. L'Hour, *La morale de l'alliance* (Paris: Gabalda, 1966).

⁸ For a description of these three different types of ethical models and arguments in favor of the responsibility model, see H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

⁹ Edward LeRoy Long, Jr., "The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics," *Interpretation*, XIX (1965), 149-162.

proach. Long sees the third model of responsibility and relationality in the ethics proposed on the basis of the Scriptures by Joseph Sittler and Paul Lehmann.

One could interpret the very perceptive study by James M. Gustafson on ethics and the Bible in much the same way.¹⁰ Gustafson sees the Bible as being used by the Christian ethicist in two different ways—either as revealed morality or as revealed reality. Conservative, evangelical Protestants exemplify the revealed morality approach, for they see in the Scriptures the revealed will of God for man. Such a model obviously employs deontological language and imagery. Liberal Protestants adopted a variation of the revealed morality approach by taking biblical notions such as the kingdom of God and making them the ideal or the goal for the social life of man. Reinhold Niebuhr and John C. Bennett followed somewhat the same path by making love the ideal or the goal towards which the Christian strives. Notice the teleological model in such ethics.

Gustafson points out that a revolution has occurred in biblical theology especially under the influence of Karl Barth so that the bible is not the revelation of a morality but the revelation of the living God and his activity. "In the place of moral teachings particularized or generalized, the new theology put God in his living, free activity. Thus Christian ethics had to think not about morality reduced to propositions, but about God and how life ought to be rightly related to his power and his presence."¹¹

Gustafson then shows how such an understanding of the Scriptures leads to the relationality and responsibility motif as the primary model for the understanding of Christian ethics. Man constantly responds in his freedom to the concrete action of God working in this world.¹² I believe that the biblical renewal for the reasons mentioned earlier has brought about the same emphasis on the model of relationality and responsibility in Catholic moral

¹⁰ James M. Gustafson, "Christian Ethics," in *Religion*, ed. by Paul Ramsey (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 309-316.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 316-320.

theology without necessarily accepting all the presuppositions of a Barthian theology of the Word.¹³

The Scriptural renewal not only emphasized the primacy of the relationality motif but also argued against the primary insistence on either the teleological or deontological models in Christian ethics. There is no doubt that in popular Catholic life and thought the deontological model was primary. The moral life of the Christian was seen in terms of law and the will of God. The biblical renewal with its emphasis on covenant and the love of God runs somewhat counter to the supremacy of the deontological model.¹⁴

Even more importantly, in Catholic theology the biblical renewal pointed out the secondary role of law in the life of the Christian. The ten commandments were now viewed not as laws in themselves, but within the context of the covenant as expressions of personal commitment and relationship with God.¹⁵ The renewal of biblical theology showed the subordinate and relative position of law not only in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament. The ethical teaching of Jesus was seen primarily in terms of conversion, *agape*, or the following of Christ and not primarily in terms of law.¹⁶ Scripture scholars exercised considerable influence by showing the true nature of the law of the Spirit in Paul, which is not primarily

¹³ It is precisely the anti-philosophical stance and the theological actualism in Barthian thought that I cannot accept.

¹⁴ Albert Gelin, *The Key Concepts of the Old Testament* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955). In this and the following paragraphs references will be made to works which seem to have been influential within the Roman Catholic world. There are obviously other studies which are of equal and even more importance that were done within the Protestant community.

¹⁵ Philippe Delhay, *Le Decalogue et sa place dans la morale chrétienne* (Bruxelles: La Pensée Catholique, 1963); Matthew J. O'Connell, "Commandment in the Old Testament," *Theological Studies*, XXI (1960), 351-403.

¹⁶ Examples of these different approaches in Catholic theology with considerable emphasis on the biblical themes include: Bernard Häring, "Conversion," in P. Delhay *et al.*, *Pastoral Treatment of Sin* (New York: Desclée, 1968), pp. 87-176; Ceslaus Spicq, O.P., *Agape in the New Testament*, (3 vols.; St. Louis: B. Herder, 1963, 1965, 1966); Fritz Tillmann, *The Master Calls* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1960). Again note the European origin of these influential works in Roman Catholic theology even in the United States.

a written or propositional law, but the love of the Spirit poured into our hearts.¹⁷

The Thomistic understanding of the moral life employed the teleological model—God as the last end of man. The biblical witness, however, does not picture God primarily as the ultimate end but as the person who invites man to share in the fullness of his life and love through the Paschal Mystery.¹⁸ In Protestant liberal theology there had been the tendency to adopt some scriptural ideal such as the kingdom of God as the goal for the social life of Christians. Catholic theology was never tempted to accept some biblical concept as the goal or ideal of social life, since Catholic social ethics was based almost exclusively on the natural law concept of the common good as the controlling idea in social ethics.

There are also reasons inherent in contemporary biblical scholarship itself which argue against using deontological or teleological models for the development of biblical moral theology or Christian moral theology. Biblical scholars acknowledge the cultural and historical limitations imposed on the written word of the Scriptures. Thus parts of the Scriptures cannot be wrenched from their original context and applied in different historical and cultural situations without the possible danger of some distortion. What might be a valid and true norm in biblical times might not be adequate today. Thus one cannot without further refinement take biblical norms and automatically see them as always obliging in different contexts of our historical lives. The same reasoning also argues against finding goals and ideals in the Scripture which can then be proposed without any modification for our contemporary circumstances.

¹⁷ Perhaps the most influential article in this area was: Stanislas Lyonnet, S.J., "Liberté du chrétien et loi de l'Ésprit selon saint Paul," *Christus*, I (1954) 6-27. This article has been translated into numerous languages and has appeared in many different places. See also Philippe Delhaye, "Liberté chrétienne et obligation morale," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, XL (1964), 347-361; Florence Michels, O.L.V.M., *Paul and the Law of Love* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1967).

¹⁸ In this context E. Hamel seems to present a position that has not fully integrated moral theology into a newer perspective derived from the biblical approach. He wants to maintain the existing tracts in moral theology; e.g., *de fine ultimo*, but give them a biblical perspective. Hamel, *Gregorianum*, XLVII (1966), 76.

The breakthrough book in Catholic moral theology, Bernard Häring's *The Law of Christ*, well exemplifies the dialogical understanding of man the moral responder in the context of the covenant relationship. The title of Häring's book, however, illustrates the transitional character of the work, for the primary model of law, even though understood in terms of the law of Christ, bespeaks a primacy of deontological categories. In contemporary Catholic moral theology the responsibility and relationality motif has emerged as most fundamental.¹⁹ There are important philosophical reasons also supporting such a choice, but the original impetus in the historical development came from the Scriptural renewal. In my understanding of Christian ethics the primary model should be that of responsibility and relationality, but there remains a need for some teleological and deontological considerations even though they are of secondary importance.

Other Biblical Contributions

A third important contribution of the Scriptural renewal in moral theology has been the realization that all Christians are called to perfection. An older theology reserved the gospel call to perfection to those who received the vocation to follow the evangelical counsels, whereas the majority of Christians merely lived in the world and obeyed the commandments and precepts (primarily of a natural law character) required of all. The biblical teaching did not inspire such a neat distinction between precept and counsel, but rather called for the total response of the Christian to the gift of God in Christ Jesus.²⁰ This important attitude changed the purpose and format of Catholic moral theology which could no longer be content with the partial goal of training judges for the sacrament of penance to distinguish between mortal and venial sin and between

¹⁹ Albert R. Jonsen, *Responsibility in Modern Religious Ethics* (Washington/Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1968).

²⁰ For an illustration of the approach of biblical theology in this area, see Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., and Stanislas Lyonnet, S.J., *La Vie selon L'Esprit* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1965). For a theological development based on the scriptural evidence, see John Gerken, *Toward a Theology of the Layman* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963).

sin and no sin. Moral theology now considers the life of Christians who are called to be perfect even as the heavenly Father is perfect.

The realization that all Christians are called to such perfection in their change of heart and moral response led to a fourth contribution of biblical morality to moral theology. Growth, development, and creativity became important ideas for contemporary moral theology. The Christian life no longer could be viewed in terms of passive conformity to minimalistic laws obliging all. A closer study of Old Testament ethics forced Catholic moral theology to be more open to the realities of growth and development in the moral life. A few years ago Catholic commentators reflected on the problems proposed for moral theology in the light of the ethical teaching of the Old Testament which in many ways exemplified the reality of growth and development.²¹ In theoretical areas such as the understanding of conscience or man's response to the call of God there was a development in the understanding which gradually placed more emphasis on the interiority of the personal response. God calls his people through conscience or the innermost part of the person and not through extrinsic means or persons such as angels.²²

In practical moral matters the Old Testament created questions for moral theology precisely because some of the values and norms proposed by moral theology today were not accepted in the Old Testament. To explain the Old Testament attitudes to questions of marriage and sexuality it was necessary to accept some concept of growth and development. Logically moral theology would also see the need to apply the same attitude toward growth and development to some contemporary situations.²³

The emphasis on growth and development in the light of the call to perfection called for a greater appreciation of the active virtues and the creative aspects of the Christian's response to God. The

²¹ Philippe Delhay, "Le recours à l'ancien testament dans l'étude de la théologie morale," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, XXXI (1955), 637-657.

²² Antonio Hortelano, *Morale Responsabile* (Assisi: Cittadella editrice, n.d.), pp. 19-27.

²³ The importance of growth in the moral life was emphasized by Louis Monden, S.J., *Sin, Liberty and Law* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), pp. 87-144.

model of responsibility without denying the place of goals and norms also gives priority to the more active and creative aspects of the Christian life.

A fifth important contribution of the biblical renewal in moral theology was the importance given to historicity. Biblical studies indicated the importance of salvation history, which gave a more central role to eschatology. Many differences in moral theology can often be traced to different understandings of eschatology which so profoundly color our understanding of man and his life in this world.

The centrality of history in biblical thinking was in contrast with the lesser importance attributed to history in the manuals of Catholic moral theology. From a philosophical perspective it was only natural that theories giving more importance to the historical aspects of existence should come into prominence in Catholic thought. The biblical renewal exercised another influence in the area of historicity. Biblical scholars used the tools of historical research in examining the Scriptures because of the historical and cultural limitations inherent in the Scriptures and other historical documents. The need to understand and interpret the Scriptures in their historical context easily led to a study of the moral teachings of the Catholic Church in the light of their historical contexts. The way thus opened up for a constant reinterpretation and reevaluation of past teaching in the light of changing historical circumstances.

A sixth important contribution of the biblical influence on moral theology concerns the stress on interiority and the total person with a corresponding lesser emphasis on the individual, external act itself. The Scriptures view man primarily in terms of his faith relationship to God and neighbor, with individual acts seen as expressing the basic attitude of the person and his relationships. Contemporary theologians elaborated on the biblical theme of conversion as the fundamental response to the call of God. Conversion as the basic change of heart interiorizes the moral response of the total person but at the same time has a social and a cosmic dimension.

The reasons contributing to the primacy of the relationality and responsibility motif also give greater importance to interiority in the Christian life. The teaching on the law of the Spirit as the primary law of Christian morality insists on the moral life embracing the

heart of the person, with the external act seen as an expression of this fundamental orientation of the person. The biblical theology of sin put great emphasis on interiority, the change of heart, and the breaking of man's multiple relationships with God, neighbor, and the world.²⁴ Theologians on the basis of the Scriptural data and in the light of other philosophical data developed the theory of the fundamental option as a better understanding of the reality of sin in the life of the Christian.²⁵

The biblical contribution to moral theology in the last few years has not only affected the important aspects mentioned thus far, but has also had some influence on the approach to particular moral questions. One illustration is the teaching on private property and the goods of creation. Studies of both the Old Testament and the New Testament have underlined the communal dimension of property.²⁶ The goods of creation exist primarily for all mankind. Old Testament legislation such as the Jubilee Year indicates a way to safeguard the communal aspect of the goods of creation. The prohibition against usury or interest on a loan was based on the fact that an Israelite should not take advantage of a brother's need to make money from him. Again these biblical attitudes together with other considerations, such as the influence of increasing socialization brought about renewed emphasis in Catholic theology on questions of property and the goods of creation.

The influence of the Scriptural renewal in moral theology has been enormous. Many significant changes which have occurred in moral theology in the last two decades owe much to the fact that the Scriptures was taken as the soul of theology and the starting point for systematic reflection on the Christian life. Obviously other factors such as philosophical considerations and signs of the times also played an important part in the renewal of moral theology, but

²⁴ *Théologie du Péché*, ed. by Philippe Delhaye (Tournai: Desclée et Cie, 1960).

²⁵ For a recent and representative article with pertinent bibliography, see John W. Glazer, S.J., "Transition between Grace and Sin," *Theological Studies*, XXIX (1968), 260-274.

²⁶ P. Christophe, *L'usage chrétien du droit de propriété dans l'Écriture et la tradition patristique* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1964); P. Grelot, "La pauvreté dans l'Écriture Sainte," *Christus VIII* (1961), 306-330.

the starting point of the renewal was the return to the Scriptures. However, moral theology has also become aware of the inherent limitations of the Scriptures in moral theology.

II. LIMITATIONS IN THE USE OF THE SCRIPTURES IN MORAL THEOLOGY

The most succinct summary of the limitations of the Scriptures in moral theology is the statement that biblical ethics is not the same as Christian ethics. This point is readily acknowledged today by both Catholic and Protestant ethicists. The biblical renewal has emphasized the historical and cultural limitations of the Scriptures so that one cannot just apply the Scriptures in a somewhat timeless manner to problems existing in different historical circumstances. In addition the Scriptures were not really confronted with many of the moral problems we face today. Even among biblical theologians there are those who admit that the Scriptures teach little or no social morality.²⁷ There has been in theology an embarrassment about the attitude towards slavery and woman in certain parts of the Scriptures, especially in Paul. Also the teaching of the Scriptures is often colored by eschatological considerations which make it difficult to apply them directly to any contemporary situation. The hermeneutic problem arises precisely because biblical morality and Christian morality are not the same.

From this basic understanding of the limitation of biblical ethics in the discipline of Christian ethics one should be cautioned about possible dangers in the use of the Scriptures in moral theology. A perennial danger is the use of the Scriptures as a proof text. An isolated Scriptural text is used to prove an assertion for the present time without realizing the vast difference which might exist between the biblical and the contemporary contexts. Likewise there is the constant danger that the individual biblical text may be taken out of its own proper biblical context. Sacred Scripture cannot be legitimately employed in a proof text manner.

²⁷ "Jesus no more intended to change the social system than he did the political order. He never assumed a definite attitude on economic and social problems" (Schnackenburg, p. 122).

Too often the manuals of moral theology did employ such a use of the Scriptures. The conclusion was arrived at on other grounds, and then one text from the Scriptures was given as a proof of the assertion. Even today there continue to exist in both Catholic and Protestant theology some glaring examples of a proof text approach to the Scriptures in moral theology.

Bo Reicke translates the first Epistle of Peter, 2:18 as: "You workers, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and reasonable ones, but even to the difficult ones."²⁸ Reicke in his commentary defends his choice of workers rather than slaves so that the passage will have meaning for contemporary Christian workers. The meaning of the passage according to Reicke is clear. "Regardless of provocation Christian workers should not rebel or fail in respect towards their employers."²⁹ Christ is the model of every suffering worker. "He did not stoop as many oppressed people on earth to reviling and threatening, vs. 23, but committed his case to the righteous Judge. No striving after personal liberty or antisocial behavior or opposition to the existing order can be allowed to impair the Christian workers' imitation of Christ."³⁰ He later comments that Christianity will bring about a social revolution but through spiritual means.³¹ However, I do not think that one can use the Scripture in this way to argue against the possibility of a legitimate strike by Christian workers.

Eschatological Influence

Another vexing aspect of the hermeneutic problem concerns the eschatological coloring of the teaching of Jesus especially the Sermon on the Mount. In opposition to the liberal Protestant theology which saw the Sermon on the Mount as a blueprint for bringing about the presence of the kingdom of God in this world, Schweitzer and others maintained that such an intention was far removed from Jesus who was just proposing an interim ethic for the short time before

²⁸ Bo Reicke, *The Anchor Bible: The Epistles of James, Peter and Jude* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 97.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

the coming of the end of the world.³² There has been much theological discussion about the ethical teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, but in one way or another eschatological considerations must enter into the picture.³³ Thus one cannot simply transpose the ethical teaching of the Scriptures to the contemporary scene without some attention to eschatological considerations.

The biblical teaching on marriage and celibacy calls for some such interpretation, for eschatological considerations apparently downplayed the importance which marriage should have.³⁴ One major problem in Catholic life and moral theology at the present time, the question of divorce and the pastoral care of divorced people, raises the crucial question of the teaching on the indissolubility of marriage in the New Testament. In my view such a teaching can be interpreted in the light of eschatology so that the absoluteness of Catholic practice and teaching should be somewhat relaxed.

Catholic teaching upholds the indissolubility of *ratum et consummatum* marriages and frequently invokes Scriptural references including Mt. 19:9, as well as Mt. 5:32. However, some problems arise even within the Catholic tradition, for only *ratum et consummatum* marriages are declared absolutely indissoluble while other marriages can be dissolved. There is no explicit warrant within the Scriptural tradition for this. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians allows some exceptions in the case of the indissolubility of marriage despite the absoluteness of the saying of Jesus. In fact, even the famous exception clauses in Matthew, (except for the case of *πορνεία*), have always proved somewhat difficult to interpret in the light of the present teaching of the Catholic Church.³⁵

³² Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1948). The famous second edition of this volume was first published in Germany in 1913.

³³ For a summary and evaluation of approaches to the eschatological aspect of Jesus' teaching with arguments against realized eschatology, see Richard H. Hiers, *Jesus and Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968).

³⁴ Gerken, pp. 37-54.

³⁵ For recent bibliography on the question, see William W. Bassett, "Divorce and Remarriage: The Catholic Search for a Pastoral Reconciliation," *American Ecclesiastical Review*, CLXII (1970), 100-105; Richard A. McCormick, S.J., "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies*, XXXII (1971), 107-122.

Many different interpretations have been proposed for the exception clauses in Matthew. The more traditional solution among Catholic exegetes interpreted Matthew to allow separation but not remarriage. A more modern interpretation indicates that the exception clauses refer to a marriage which is not valid from the very beginning. One cannot debate here the merits of the various solutions which have been proposed, but I would conclude that even in the New Testament times of Paul and the redactor of Matthew some exceptions were apparently made in the absolute teaching proposed by Jesus. Likewise the teaching of Matthew on divorce is also found in the context of the Sermon on the Mount where eschatological considerations are of considerable importance. I propose that the indissolubility of marriage is proposed as an ideal, but that in the world between the two comings of Jesus it is not always possible to achieve the fullness of that ideal.³⁶ Another important factor concerns the practical problems involved in coming up with pastoral solutions to the question of divorces so that one can maintain the ideal, protect innocent persons, and still realize that in this world it is not always possible to live up to the fullness of the ideal.

Problems of Systematization and Selection

In general the limitations of the use of biblical ethics in Christian ethics arise from the differences between the two. However, problems exist even within the context of biblical ethics itself which also serve as a limitation and possible danger in the use of biblical ethics in Christian ethics. Two different possible approaches to biblical ethics are illustrated by the two most widely acknowledged contributions by Catholic authors to biblical ethics. Rudolf Schnackenburg adopts an historical or chronological approach to the moral message of the New Testament by considering the moral teaching in the Synoptics, in the early Church in general, in John, in Paul, and in the other New Testament writers.³⁷ Ceslaus Spicq in his well docu-

³⁶ Among exegetes who accept such an approach are: Bruce Vawter, C.M. "The Biblical Theology of Divorce," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, XXII (1967), 223-243; Wilfrid Harrington, "Jesus' Attitude Towards Divorce," *Irish Theological Quarterly*, XXXVII (1970), 199-209.

³⁷ Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*.

mented, two volume study arranges the moral teaching of the New Testament around ten major themes each of which includes some subsidiary themes.³⁸

Spicq himself is well aware of the difficulty of presenting any synthetic or systematic understanding of biblical morality.³⁹ Within the Scriptures different books treat the same matter with different emphasis (e.g. the concept of love). Likewise any attempt at systematization or synthesis involves an interpretation of the biblical teaching. The fact remains that there is great divergence even within the biblical message itself which makes it most difficult to arrive at a satisfying synthesis of biblical teaching or biblical morality. In a somewhat larger context Roland Murphy argues that the notion of "the unity of the Bible" should be interred precisely because of the diversity existing within the Scriptures. "In every case the rubric of unity turns out to be incomplete, whether it be covenant, *Heilsgeschichte*, or promise-fulfillment. Every such category, while it has a value in itself, is simply too limited to deal with the variety offered by the biblical material."⁴⁰ I would argue that even in the area of biblical morality such a unity or perfect synthesis remains impossible of achievement. There exists even within the Scriptures a plurality of understandings of the moral life. Thus even within the Scriptures themselves there remains an inherent limitation in developing a systematic biblical morality.

A more noticeable limitation arises from the fact that the Scriptures themselves even in moral matters are in need of interpretation. Whether implicitly or explicitly the theologian will bring his own presuppositions to his interpretations of biblical morality. The danger is that we often forget the existence of such interpretations and presuppositions and uncritically acclaim the biblical approach of a particular author.

Spicq, for example, in summarizing his massive two volume work obviously shows his own theological presuppositions. Spicq insists

³⁸ Ceslaus Spicq, O.P., *Théologie Morale du Nouveau Testament*. (2 vols.; Paris: Galbada, 1965). For a discussion of the different approaches to biblical morality itself, see Franco Festorazzi, "Il problema del metodo nella teologia biblica," *La Scuola Cattolica*, XCI (1963), 253-276.

³⁹ Spicq, *op. cit.*, I, 9-16.

⁴⁰ Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm., "Christian Understanding of the Old Testament," *Theology Digest*, XVIII (1970), 327.

that the Christian life does not primarily consist of obedience to rules but is a living out of the life of the new creature in Christ Jesus. The moral life follows from an ontology of the new creature. Spicq obviously interprets the biblical message in the light of the Catholic teaching on the transformation of the individual by God's redeeming grace. The Christian now has a regenerated nature which becomes the source of his life and actions.⁴¹ Roger Mehl on the basis of his theological presuppositions takes issue with Spicq's interpretation. God's gift is his presence, but his presence never becomes a nature or a structure. Such an ontology or substantialist philosophy according to Mehl can never truly present the biblical understanding of the God-man relationship.⁴²

Two different interpretations of Paul's understanding of the Christian life also illustrate the different theological presuppositions of the two authors. George Montague's study of Pauline morality exhibits on its cover jacket the basic presupposition of his thesis. The full title is: *Maturing in Christ: Saint Paul's Program for Christian Growth*.⁴³ The cover jacket then cites one Pauline text: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creature*." Montague's thesis maintains that a basic transformation into the new creature takes place in the life of the Christian.⁴⁴ Victor Paul Furnish in his study of Pauline ethics denies the two fundamental presuppositions of Montague. First, Furnish refuses to accept the concept of a mystical union of the Christian with Christ. The being of the believer is not merged with the being of Christ. "The categories used to describe the believer's association with Christ are all *relational* not *mystical* categories."⁴⁵ Logically, Furnish also denies at the end of his book any possibility of progress in the life of the Christian according to Paul. Paul's preaching insists that the "fullness of life is not attained but given, and that Christian obedience is not an ex-

⁴¹ Spicq, *op. cit.* II, 756-761.

⁴² Roger Mehl, *Catholic Ethics and Protestant Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), p. 112.

⁴³ George T. Montague, S.M., *Maturing in Christ: Saint Paul's Program for Christian Growth* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1964).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, especially pp. 101-110.

⁴⁵ Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), p. 176.

pression of man's effort gradually to realize his own innate possibilities, but an ever repeated response to the ever newly repeated summons of God."⁴⁶ Montague's basic thesis is thus denied by Furnish although Montague would not positively explain his thesis in the same terms in which Furnish denied the possibility of progress in the life of the Christian.

Another example of differing interpretations of biblical teaching is illustrated in James Sellers' choice of the concept of promise and fulfillment as the basic stance in Christian ethics. "The Judaeo-Christian faith then affirms a distinctive understanding of what is happening to man; he is moving from promise to fulfillment."⁴⁷ Paul Ramsey also argues from the Judaeo-Christian tradition and from the concept of covenant, but he emphatically denies Sellers' emphasis on fulfillment. Precisely on the basis of eschatology and of covenant fidelity Ramsey rules out the primacy of fulfillment in any understanding of the Christian moral life. Ramsey consistently opposes a teleological approach to Christian ethics precisely because of the fact that fulfillment or the attainment of the goal is not always possible for the Christian.⁴⁸

A related danger in the use of the Scriptures in moral theology involves the selective use of the Scriptures in keeping with one's own presuppositions. The Social Gospel approach to Christian ethics, for example, concentrated on the teaching of the prophets in the Old Testament and the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament, since these two sources are most consonant with the theological presuppositions of the Social Gospel approach. Walter Rauschenbusch in his *Christianity and the Social Crisis* well illustrates such an approach.⁴⁹

The first of Rauschenbusch's seven chapters considers the teaching of the prophets, while the second chapter deals with the teaching of Jesus. In the third chapter he treats the more difficult problem of

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 239-240.

⁴⁷ James Sellers, *Theological Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 63.

⁴⁸ Paul Ramsey, *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), pp. 178-192.

⁴⁹ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, ed. by Robert D. Cross (New York: Harper and Row, Torchbook, 1964), pp. 93-142.

the social impetus of early Christianity. Rauschenbusch realizes there is not much social teaching in Paul, whom he describes as a radical in theology but a social conservative. But Paul was not as apathetic towards social conditions as is generally presumed. In this context he praises the social concerns of the Epistle of James, which had been rejected in the strict Lutheran tradition.⁵⁰ Rauschenbusch's attempts to prove the social implications in the teaching of the early Church are often exaggerated and unacceptable. "The Christian Church was of immense social value to these people. It took the place in their life which life insurance, sick benefits, accident insurance, friendly societies, and some features of trade-unions take today."⁵¹ There are other exaggerated claims made to support his basic contention.⁵² Thus one can see the dangers of selectivity in the choice of the Scriptural texts which are used and the twisting of other parts of the Scriptures to fit in with the presuppositions.

Obviously those who make Christ the center of the moral life of the Christian tend to be quite selective in their use of Scripture and place importance on those texts which support their positions while passing over much of the biblical materials (especially the Old Testament) in silence. Bonhoeffer understands the foundation of the Christian life in terms of formation, or better, conformation with the unique form of him who was made man, was crucified, and rose again. Man does not achieve this formation by dint of his own efforts, but Christ shapes man in conformity with himself.⁵³ The Scripture employed by Bonhoeffer includes many important Christological texts in the New Testament—Gal 4:19; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:10; Rom 8:29, 12:2, Phil 1:21; Col 3:3.⁵⁴ Again the critical ethicist realizes the selectivity involved in such a use of Scripture.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵² Rauschenbusch's summary of the attitude of the primitive Church is exaggerated (pp. 139-142). The Spirit of Christianity stirred women to break down restraints, caused some people to quit work, awakened in slaves a longing for freedom, disturbed the patriotism and loyalty of citizens. "All of its theories involved a bold condemnation of existing society. . . . Christianity was conscious of a far-reaching and thorough political and social mission" (p. 140).

⁵³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 17-23.

⁵⁴ These Scripture texts are cited by Bonhoeffer, pp. 17-19.

Obviously some selectivity must be employed, but the critical ethicist needs to probe the implicit presuppositions behind the selection of certain aspects of the Scriptures.

Another somewhat related danger arises from the selection of one biblical theme as primary and as coloring one's whole approach to Christian ethics. Reference has already been made to Sellers' choice of promise and fulfillment as the most basic aspect in Christian ethics. Again, it will always be necessary to choose some basic starting point in Christian ethics; but some themes which have been chosen do not seem to be that basic or central. Thus such a selection tends to distort the Christian ethics built around it. Today some theologians are developing a theology of liberation based also on biblical categories.⁵⁵ Difficulties arise, however, when this becomes the primary and even the exclusive emphasis in moral theology, for other important considerations go unheeded. In the field of social ethics, order and security are other aspects of the question even though some theologians may have overemphasized these aspects in the past. Especially in the light of the fads which have existed in theology in the past few years there remains the constant danger of taking one aspect of the biblical message and making it so central and exclusive that the full biblical message is not properly understood.

III. TWO METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

There are two important foundational questions concerning the use of the Scriptures in moral theology which relate to the question of methodology. The first question concerns the precise way in which Christian ethicists have employed or should employ the Scriptures. The second question centers on the exact relationship between the content of the ethical teaching of the Scriptures and the content of non-biblical ethical teaching.

In examining the different ways in which moral theology employs the Scriptures, I believe that the fundamental difference stems from one's basic understanding of the relationship between Christian

⁵⁵ E.g. Gustavo Gutiérrez M., "Notes for a Theology of Liberation," *Theological Studies*, XXXI (1970), 243-261.

ethics and other forms of ethics especially philosophical ethics. Is Christian ethics just a certain type or species, if you will, of ethics in general? Does the methodological approach to Christian ethics depend on considerations common to all forms of ethical discourse? Or is the methodological approach to Christian ethics different from all other ethical methodologies precisely because of the distinctive aspect of Christian ethics? If the methodology of Christian ethics differs from the methodology of other forms of ethics because of the distinctive nature of Christian ethics, the ultimate reason must be found in the relationship of Christian ethics to revelation, grace and the Scriptures.

A Fundamental but Limited Question

Note the limited yet very fundamental aspects of the question being pursued. The answer to this question will not solve all the methodological questions about the use of the Scriptures in moral theology, but it will indicate the first steps that should be taken in constructing such a methodology. At least logically there are two different methodological approaches which could be taken in response to our question. The one approach derives its content from the Scriptures, revelation, and the other sources of ethical wisdom for the Christian. In this approach one could use the Scriptures to argue for a particular methodological approach (e.g. a responsibility model rather than a deontological model), but the methodological structure would be common to all possible forms of ethics. The second approach would be a methodology which is peculiar to Christian ethics because of the distinctive character of Christian ethics which must bear some relationship to its Scriptural basis.

With these two possibilities in mind one could set out to examine the different generic approaches which have been employed by moral theology or Christian ethics in the past to determine if there have been two such generic approaches to the methodology of Christian ethics. Such a thorough review is impossible here, but one can use the research of others in this area. James M. Gustafson has analyzed two different approaches in Christian theological ethics.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ James M. Gustafson, "Two Approaches to Theological Ethics," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, XXIII (1968), 337-348.

Gustafson briefly describes the one approach as the more intuitional and the other as the more rational approach. Gustafson cites Paul Lehmann as an example of the intuitional approach, for Lehmann maintains that Christian ethics responds to the question of what God is doing in the world to make and keep human life more human. Lehmann generally does not spell out criteria for discerning this humanizing activity of God, but he often appeals to intuition. The second approach is more rational in its methodology and allows for more ethical argument in discussing what should be done.

One could argue that the difference between these two generic approaches comes from different philosophical understandings of ethics. The one would follow an intuitional, philosophical method and the other a more rational, philosophical method. However, I propose that the ultimate reason for the two different methodological approaches mentioned by Gustafson does not come from two different philosophical approaches as such. Rather the difference lies in an approach which employs a rational methodology which could be common to any and all forms of ethics, and in an approach which sees Christian ethics as so distinctive that it even has a methodology which is distinctive from all other ethical methodologies.

Those who employ the approach Gustafson describes as intuitional are in general those Christian ethicists who see Christian ethics as essentially distinct from other forms of ethics and thus posit a distinctive methodology for Christian ethics. This distinctive methodology bears some relationship to the revealed character of Christian ethics. Gustafson cites Lehmann as an example of the intuitional approach, but Lehmann willingly admits there is neither identity nor an intrinsic relationship between Christian ethics and philosophical ethics. Rather there is an ultimate chasm and even opposition between Christian ethics and philosophical ethics. "The radical incompatibility between Christian and philosophical ethics is the irreconcilability of their respective views of human self-determination."⁵⁷ Lehmann adopts the Barthian position by asserting that for philosophical ethics man makes ethics, but for Christian ethics, God makes ethics, for God initiates and estab-

⁵⁷ Paul L. Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 274.

lishes the humanity of man. Lehmann then cites Barth again to prove his fundamental assertion that the grace of God protests against every humanly established ethic as such. The specifically and formatively ethical factor cannot be given rational generalization.⁵⁸

Lehmann thus indicates that a Barthian approach to theology accepts a distinctive methodology for Christian ethics which differs from every other ethical methodology. The Bible tells us of the actions of the living God, and it is with the actions of the living God that Christian ethics must begin and not with any philosophical understanding of man. Barth in no way accepts a fundamentalistic approach to the Scriptures. The Word and concrete command of God are not the same as the written word of the Scriptures. The role of the Scriptures in moral theology is secondary, but through analogy man may arrive at his decision in the light of the Scriptures. Barth's Christian social ethics with its emphasis on analogy has been challenged precisely because of its seeming lack of rational structure. There are few criteria given to indicate how the analogy occurs, and many of the analogies which Barth draws seem to be quite arbitrary. Barth cannot accept rational criteria for establishing any movement by analogy from the Word of God to concrete ethical problems.⁵⁹

Barth and Lehmann both illustrate the first approach which views Christian ethics as an altogether distinctive type of ethics precisely because of the theology of revelation, the Word and Scriptures. The distinctive aspects of Christian ethics stems from their theology of the Word and the concrete command of God. Since such an approach rejects a biblical fundamentalism, the written word of God does not have the primary place in their ethic; but somehow or other, as the record of the acts of the living God, it does bear on the concrete situation here and now. Although Lehmann and Sittler in the United States seem to adopt such a generic approach, there can be no doubt that such an approach with its

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 268-284.

⁵⁹ Karl Barth, *Community, State and Church*, introduction by Will Herberg, (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1960), pp. 171-186. For an analysis and critique of Barth's use of analogy, see Herberg's introductory essay, "The Social Philosophy of Karl Barth," pp. 31-38.

Barthian roots is much stronger in continental, European Protestant thought.⁶⁰

A. Dumas raises the precise problem of how Christian social ethics goes from Sacred Scripture to contemporary problems.⁶¹ Dumas points out the difficulties in the approach of liberalism which tried to reduce the gospel message to the essential core which would be true in all circumstances. On the other hand the Orthodox approach tries merely to repeat perhaps in different language the revealed word of the Scriptures. Both approaches are wrong because in trying to assure a universalism to the word of God they fail to come to grips with the existentialism and singularity of the biblical message. Dumas proposes a hermeneutic of explicitation in which the contemporary Christian and the Christian ethicist see the Bible not as an archetype but as a parable which is normative for the present circumstances. However, there exists little or nothing in terms of rational criteria or even debatable criteria for discerning how precisely the Bible functions as a parable for normatively directing Christian ethics today.

The editors of *Christianisme Social* describe the function of Christian ethics not as applying principles derived from other historical and cultural circumstances to questions of the present times, but rather as interpreting for our times a Word which had been a living word in a different setting. The editors of this journal try to find a direct relationship between the concrete biblical word and the precise social situation of the present.⁶² Again, little or nothing is said about the criteria for developing this hermeneutic, and no criteria which can be rationally debated or discussed are proposed. In somewhat the same vein, F. Florentin speaks of a certain discernment which contemporary man receives from the Scriptures, but the process of how this discernment takes place is not developed.⁶³

⁶⁰ Joseph Sittler, *The Structure of Christian Ethics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958).

⁶¹ A. Dumas, "De l'archétype à la parabole," *Le Supplément*, XCII (1970), 28-46.

⁶² "Au lecteur," *Christianisme Social*, LXXIV (1966), 281-283.

⁶³ Françoise Florentin, "L'éthique sociale et l'étude biblique," *Christianisme Social*, LXXIV (1966), 297-302.

I personally cannot accept this generic approach to the methodology of Christian ethics, which sees it as distinctive from all other ethical methodology. Although the proponents of this generic approach do not make the written word of the Scriptures normative in itself without further interpretation, their use of the Scriptures in terms of analogy, parables, etc. does not seem to furnish an adequate methodology for Christian ethics in general and for the use of the Scriptures in Christian ethics in particular.

In general I would opt for a methodology in Christian ethics which is common to the ethical enterprise and is not distinctive. The methodology of Christian ethics exists in continuity with ethical methodology in general. This position is in keeping with the Catholic theological tradition and is also accepted by many contemporary Protestant ethicists. Obviously this is a very generic approach and there can be many different methodological approaches within this generic option. This paper is considering just the most fundamental and basic of the questions confronting methodology in Christian ethics. Christian ethicists adopting such a generic approach that sees Christian ethics in continuity with the general ethical enterprise will generally admit the Scriptures are not the sole source of ethical wisdom for the Christian, but that Christian ethics also derives wisdom and knowledge from other human sources. This generic approach will thus rely on human wisdom and reason as well as on the Scriptures, a factor that will greatly influence the role and function of the Scriptures in moral theology.

Once one has opted for a methodology common to all ethical theory, there remains almost an infinite variety of such theories which one can choose. One must try to establish on the grounds of ethical thinking and Christian understanding what is the best type of theory to employ. Obviously this paper cannot consider all the different possibilities. The consideration will be limited to one brief observation and then a sketch of a possible development of the methodology to be employed in Christian ethics and the way in which it would use the Scriptures.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ For a very similar approach which also strives to be more comprehensive than most approaches, see James M. Gustafson, "The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study," *Interpretation*, XXIV (1970),

The brief observation concerns the danger of oversimplification. Some methodological approaches to Christian ethics appear to be erroneous precisely because they fail to consider all the elements that should enter into the ethical consideration. Perhaps no mention is made of the decision process itself, or the attitudes and dispositions of the subject, or the values and goals in the Christian life. In general an ethical approach must try to be as comprehensive as possible by considering all the elements that go into ethical considerations, even though some will obviously have priority and be of greater importance. The Scriptures as well as human wisdom can be of help in all these areas.

Perhaps the most fundamental question in ethics is that of stance, horizon, or posture. The horizon or ultimate way in which the Christian looks at reality lies in my judgment in the light of the Christian mysteries of creation, sin, incarnation, redemption, and resurrection destiny. Obviously, such a posture includes its own presuppositions. The stance is not defined in terms of any one value, disposition, or goal, precisely because any one such value, ideal, or goal with its specific content does not seem apt to serve as a basic stance. The basic stance proposed here is more formal in the sense that it indicates the structure of the Christian experience. This tries to give a formal intelligibility rather than a content intelligibility. Such a choice obviously indicates a distinct emphasis on the subject pole of human experience.

The second most fundamental ethical question concerns the general model for understanding the Christian moral life. Earlier, mention was made of the three general approaches of ethics to this question, and the model of relationality and responsibility was chosen in the light of the biblical understanding of man.

There are at least four other important considerations which should be present in ethics: 1) values, goals, or ideals; 2) dispositions and attitudes of the subject, or virtues, if you prefer; 3)

430-455. Gustafson exemplifies his methodological use of the Scripture in Christian ethics by considering one particular problem. For a study of the methodological use of the Scriptures by Rauschenbusch, see James M. Gustafson, "From Scripture to Social Policy and Social Action," *Andover-Newton Quarterly*, IX (1969), 160-169.

norms; 4) the process of moral judgments and decisions. Obviously the question of moral judgments and decisions will always be the most decisive consideration, but these other aspects cannot be neglected.

In the more general questions of stance and model, the Scriptural input will be more important, but it will not be the only aspect of the question. There are ethical presuppositions in my own decision to see the stance, not in terms of content, but as a way of structuring the manner in which the Christian intends reality and the world in which he lives. On the other more specific ethical considerations, with the emphasis on the judging and decision making process, the role and function of the Scriptures will be less. The precise way in which the Scriptures can contribute in all these areas is both partial and limited in view of the hermeneutic question itself. This has only been a brief sketch of a possible development of methodology in Christian ethics, once one answers the basic question by seeing the methodology of Christian ethics in terms of ethical theory in general and not as something distinctive to Christian ethics. Obviously, within this generic approach there remain many possible options. In all these the input of the Scriptures will be limited because of the historical and cultural limitations of the word of God as found in the Scriptures, and will be interpreted in the light of the ethical methodology chosen.

A Content Question with Methodological Overtones

In the midst of the ethical and religious pluralism in which we live there arises not only the question of the ethical methodology employed by moral theology and its use of the Scriptures, but also the question of the content or the substance of biblical ethics and moral theology in comparison with other religious and philosophical ethics. The generally accepted approach of the past affirms a great difference between the revealed morality of the Bible and the non-revealed morality of other ethics. Today there appears to be a tendency, with which I concur, to disagree with the older approach.⁶⁵ This question obviously has important methodological implications for Christian ethics.

⁶⁵ Charles E. Curran, "Is There a Distinctively Christian Social Ethic?" in

In the past, the question of the relationship between Christian ethics and other ethics was phrased in terms of the existence of a source of ethical wisdom and knowledge which the Christian shares with all mankind in addition to the revealed wisdom of the Scriptures. An affirmative response to the question led to the further question of the exact relationship between the revelational and the non-revelational sources of ethical wisdom and knowledge for the Christian. Precisely under the impact of the consciousness of religious and ethical pluralism, as well as the apparent lack of ethical superiority in Christian ethics and in the Scripture, the question now takes on a different aspect: is there any great difference in content between Christian ethics, with revelation and the Scriptures as the reason for its possible distinctive character, and other human ethics?

One way to approach the problem is to institute a comparison between biblical ethics and non-revealed ethics. Some significant work has been going on in this area and is illustrated by the question of the decalogue in the Old Testament. Christians generally have the image that God revealed his law to the people of the Old Testament even if they are sophisticated enough to realize there was no historical apparition or revelation to Moses amid thunder and lightning. The developing research in this area is most interesting, for the trend shows an ever growing awareness of the lack of distinctiveness between the biblical law of the Old Testament and the non-revealed law of the contemporaries of Israel.

Albrecht Alt in 1934 distinguished two types of law in Israel, the apodictic and the casuistic and acknowledged that the casuistic law was common to all people in the Near East, but the apodictic law was unique and peculiar to Israel. Such a position bolstered the notion of the distinctive and unique qualities of the revealed moral-

Metropolis: Christian Presence and Responsibility, ed. by Philip D. Morris (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Publishers, 1970), pp. 92-120. A French translation appeared in *Le Supplément*, XCVI (1971), 39-58. A brief summary of the conclusion appears on p. 114: "The explicitly Christian consciousness does affect the judgment of the Christian and the way in which he makes his ethical judgments, but non-Christians can and do arrive at the same ethical conclusions and also embrace and treasure even the loftiest of proximate motives, virtues, and goals which Christians in the past have wrongly claimed only for themselves."

ity.⁶⁶ More contemporary scholarship, however, disputes the conclusion proposed by Alt and realizes that apodictic law was also common to other peoples in the Near East. Even the general covenant form is not something unique, but exists also in the Hittite Suzerainty treaties.⁶⁷

In this context the question has been raised about the origin of the decalogue as we know it today. Obviously there is a connection between the form of the decalogue and its use in worship, so that some commentators have concluded that the form of the decalogue as we have it today probably arose within the context of the cult. However, Gerstenberger and others claim that the apodictic law of the decalogue had its origin not in the treaty or in the cult but in the clan.⁶⁸ Again notice in these theories a tendency away from a distinctiveness concerning the circumstances of the decalogue.

J. J. Stamm appears to accept the conclusion that the content of the revealed morality of the Old Testament "came about in a much more secular way than is often supposed."⁶⁹ Gerstenberger maintains that one cannot conclude that Israel's law is better or more moral than that of her neighbors, or that it is unique because it is revealed. Israel's law when brought into the context of the covenant comes to express fully what was already inherent in it: the necessity of the framework of relationship which breaks through that which is merely moral.⁷⁰ Thus the Old Testament gives the new context of the cove-

⁶⁶ Albrecht Alt, "The Origins of Israelite Law," *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958). In this section I am heavily dependent on the following summaries of recent biblical interpretations: Alexa Suelzer, S.P., *The Pentateuch* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964). This book gives a fine history of the development of thinking on the Pentateuch especially in Roman Catholic thought, but it is now too dated to include the results of more recent scholarly investigations. Johann Jakob Stamm with Maurice Edward Andrew, *The Ten Commandments in Recent Research*, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series, n. 2 (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1967); Edward Nielsen, *The Ten Commandments in New Perspective*, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series, n. 7 (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1968); Carroll Stuhlmueller, "The Natural Law Question the Bible Never Asked," *Cross Currents*, XIX (1969), 55-67.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

⁶⁸ Stamm and Andrew, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-68.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75. Note that these authors here report and generally accept

nant with Yahweh for a law which was not unique, and even this general covenant context is somehow or other inherent in the law.

Carroll Stuhlmueller in the light of recent biblical studies (primarily relating to the Old Testament but also including some studies about the New Testament) specifically asks the question about the relationship between revealed morality and the so-called natural law. Stuhlmueller concludes that the origins of the revelation to Israel will be recognized not as a lightning bolt from above but as God's living presence with all men of good will.⁷¹ "Biblically, the world at large contributes what men of faith can then identify as the presence of God speaking His will for human well-being."⁷² At this juncture I would only add the cautionary note that human experience also reflects the limitations and sinfulness of men so that not everything that appears in human experience is necessarily good and to be accepted uncritically.

One could continue such a comparative study down through all the Scriptures including the teachings of the prophets, the wisdom literature, Jesus, Paul, John, and the early Christian community as compared with their contemporaries and others. This area provides a fertile field for possible future development and research. Interestingly, recent studies tend to be very modest in claiming any superiority for the biblical morality. Seán Freyne in a recent study of biblical morality in both the Old and the New Testaments admits that the content of biblical morality is similar to the content of non-revealed morality.⁷³ The contribution of the prophets to the moral teaching of Israel does not derive from any special revelation of content from God, but the prophets merely refined the traditional morality.⁷⁴ Freyne comments that what is striking in the teachings of Jesus is his agreement with and acceptance of the better insights and formulations of the late Jewish moral thinking.

the conclusions of Gerstenberger. They do express the wish that Gerstenberger had repeated near the end his earlier emphasis on the distinctive context of the covenant and the Sinai revelation.

⁷¹ Stuhlmueller, *art. cit.*, 63.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁷³ Seán Freyne, "The Bible and Christian Morality," in *Morals, Law and Authority*, ed. by J. P. Mackey (Dayton: Pflaum Press, 1969), p. 7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

As far as the content of the moral life is concerned, Jesus inherited and refined rather than innovated.⁷⁵

Freyne does, however, admit a purifying influence of faith on the insights of secular morality.⁷⁶ Freyne staunchly argues for a different motivation and context for biblical ethics, but "the actual content of their morality will thus be often similar to that of their surrounding neighbors, at least in the more lofty formulations of these."⁷⁷ The difference he sometimes mentions in content between biblical and non-biblical morality is that of refinement and purification. Perhaps this coheres with the caveat expressed earlier that human experience will also always contain the limitations and sinfulness which mark our human existence, but the loftiest aspects of human experience will often correspond with the best of the biblical ethic.⁷⁸

One can also examine the questions of the relationship between biblical, or Christian, and non-revealed morality in a more systematic and theological approach. Is there a distinctively Christian ethic? A growing number of studies indicate that on the level of ethical conclusions and proximate values, norms, and dispositions, there is nothing distinctive about the Christian ethic. John Macquarrie maintains that the distinctively Christian criterion coincides with the criterion which is already guiding, at least implicitly, the moral aspiration of all men—the idea of an authentic or full humanity. Macquarrie finds the distinctiveness of Christian ethics not in the ultimate goals or fundamental principles but in the special context within which the moral life is considered.⁷⁹ Interestingly, Macquarrie links Christian and non-Christian ethics not on the basis of redemption but of creation.⁸⁰

I have denied the existence of a distinctively Christian ethic with

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁷⁸ I would tend to disagree with Freyne's comment (pp. 34-35) that the added element in biblical morality is the assurance that what they are doing is God's will for them.

⁷⁹ John Macquarrie, *Three Issues in Ethics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 87-91.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

regard to ethical conclusions and proximate dispositions, goals, and attitudes; but the reason for the identity was not creation but redemption. It seems to me that Josef Fuchs takes much the same approach. Fuchs first distinguishes between the level of the transcendental or intentionality and the level of the categorical. On the level of the categorical Christ did not really add anything new. The distinctively Christian appears on the level of the transcendental and intentionality. Near the end of the article Fuchs also admits that the humanist operates not only on the level of the categorical but also on the level of the intentional, the transcendental, and the unthematic.⁸¹

If one were to interpret Fuchs in the light of Rahner, which is acceptable in the light of Fuchs' own writings, the difference on the level of the transcendental or unthematic could possibly be only the difference between the explicit and the implicit, and not necessarily a difference of greater and lesser. In accord with Fuchs' article one could also conclude that the specifically Christian aspect does not add anything to the "proximate dispositions, goals, and attitudes of Christians." Yet these dispositions, goals, attitudes, and values would be considered in an explicitly Christian context, but non-Christians too can and do cherish "self-sacrificing love, freedom, hope, concern for the neighbor in need, or even the realization that one finds his life only in losing it."⁸²

In the above paragraphs I am trying to clarify and further a dialogue begun by Richard A. McCormick, S.J.⁸³ McCormick argues that the gospel should bring about distinctive attitudes and intentions. He then appeals to both Fuchs and Gustafson as supporting or being close to his position. McCormick finds support in Fuchs

⁸¹ Josef Fuchs, S.J., "Gibt es eine spezifisch christliche Moral?" *Stimmen der Zeit*, CLXXXV (1970), 99-112.

⁸² I am here interpreting Fuchs as being in accord with my conclusions, *Metropolis: Christian Presence and Responsibility*, p. 114.

⁸³ McCormick, *Theological Studies*, XXXII (1971), 71-78. I am guilty of complicating the discussion by not correcting an earlier version of my manuscript which I had sent to Father McCormick. The final version differs somewhat from that which McCormick used, since I tried to clarify my thought as a result of helpful discussions with McCormick and others at the symposium where the paper was originally given.

because Fuchs refers to "transcendental norms (e.g. the following of Christ, leading a sacramental life, the life of faith, etc.)."⁸⁴

Perhaps the following of Christ can illustrate the question. I am interpreting Fuchs as agreeing with my conclusion: "The explicitly Christian consciousness does affect the judgment of the Christian and the way in which he makes his ethical judgments, but non-Christians can and do arrive at the same ethical conclusions and also embrace and treasure even the loftiest of proximate motives, virtues and goals which Christians in the past have wrongly claimed only for themselves."⁸⁵ Certainly the Christian explicitly reflects on the imitation of Christ, but the proximate attitudes, values, and goals that come from this are the same attitudes that other people can arrive at in other ways. My earlier article spelled out some of these attitudes as self-sacrificing love, freedom, hope, concern for the neighbor in need, or even the realization that one finds his life only in losing it.

Another way of trying to express the same reality was to say that Christians and non-Christians "can and do share the same general ethical attitudes, dispositions and goals."⁸⁶ "General" in this case refers to such a concept as self-sacrificing love which the Christian could share with other men in general, but he sees it in terms of explicit reference to Jesus Christ, which thus modifies the general concept not necessarily by adding to its content but by explicitly referring to Jesus Christ. In this way the following of Christ motif leads the Christian to the same conclusions and proximate attitudes that others can arrive at on other grounds and through other conceptualizations. Obviously I am not saying that all non-Christians do arrive at these dispositions, but they can come to them. Likewise all Christians do not live up to such lofty ideals.

Gustafson has not directly asked the question as posed here, but he appears to assume that there is a greater difference between Christian and non-Christian ethics than the solution proposed here. Gustafson does stress the "differences that faith in Jesus Christ *often does make, can make, and ought to make* in the moral lives

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁸⁵ *Metropolis: Christian Presence and Responsibility*, p. 114.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

of members of the Christian community."⁸⁷ The question must eventually go back to the theological discussion of the relationship between the Christian and the non-Christian. Since in my opinion this difference can at times be only the difference between explicit and implicit, then one can maintain the conclusion proposed above.

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World proposes a methodology of viewing reality in terms of the gospel and human experience. Accepting this formulation, I would conclude that the gospel does not add a power or knowledge which *somehow or other* is not available in the consciousness of man called by God with regard to ethical conclusions and proximate dispositions, goals, and attitudes. The gospel does make explicit, and explicitly Christian, what can be implicit in the consciousness of all men who are called by God. Precisely because the link between the Christian and the non-Christian is not based on creation only, but also on redemption, then the redemptive power and knowledge that the Christian has in the gospel are also available somehow or other to all men. The difference in the specific area of ethics mentioned above is between explicit and implicit, and not between more or less.

Human experience thus can have implicitly what is explicitly found in the gospel and also cherish the same proximate ethical ideals, dispositions, and decisions; but human experience also reflects the limitations and sinfulness of man (as the Scriptures do also). This realization will also have important repercussions on the way in which moral theology uses the Scriptures. I still see the important role of the Scriptures in terms of explicitly allowing us to reflect on who the Christian is and what his attitudes, dispositions, goals, values, norms, and decisions are. However, in no sense can the Scriptures be used as a book of revealed morality precisely because of the hermeneutic problem. The Scriptures do furnish us with information about the self-understanding of the people who lived in covenant relationship with God and how this helped shape their lives and actions. The Christian and the Christian ethicist today must continue to reflect on this experience as recalled in the Scriptures, but they must also reflect on the experience of other

⁸⁷ James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 240.

men as they try to determine how they should live and respond to Jesus Christ in our times.

This section has not attempted to develop a complete methodology for the use of the Scriptures in moral theology, but rather has considered perhaps the two most fundamental questions involved in constructing such a methodology. The methodology of Christian ethics is not distinctive but is based on ethical methodology in general as viewed in the light of the gospel message and human experience. Secondly, the ethical wisdom and knowledge portrayed in the Scriptural experience remains quite similar to the ethical experience of all mankind. The primary difference is the explicitly Christian character of the gospel which will not affect the proximate ethical dispositions, attitudes, and goals as well as concrete conclusions, but will color the explicit self-understanding of the Christian and the decision process he employs.

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