

IS THERE A CATHOLIC AND/OR CHRISTIAN ETHIC?

In one sense the title of this paper has been a perennial question. Catholic and/or Christian ethics have constantly needed to reflect on their own identity *vis-à-vis* other types of ethics whether they are religious ethics or philosophical ethics. However, this questioning has become even more acute in the last few years. Our own age in many ways can be characterized as a time of crisis and radical questioning which has taken place in theology on the most ultimate of issues, namely, the God issue. It should not surprise us that the same type of questions arise about the identity of Christian and/or Catholic ethics in relationship to other ethics.

THE CONTEXTS

To situate the discussion it will be helpful to indicate the major contexts within which the questioning about the identity of Christian and/or Catholic ethics has arisen in the last few years. The first context that gives rise to the question of the identity of Christian and/or Catholic ethics is the dialogue between Christians and non-Christians in the modern world. All men of good will, to use a phrase employed by Pope John XXIII in addressing his encyclical letter *Pacem in terris* to these people as well as to the bishops and members of the Roman Catholic Church,¹ seem to share many of the same ethical values as Christians. In actual experience Christians have worked side by side with non-Christians for the same social causes and ethical concerns. Many Catholics and Christians have personally experienced with non-believers the common ethical concerns which unite them and frequently feel more in harmony with the ethical concerns of non-Catholics and non-Christians.

Such a practical experience has been mirrored in the more theoretical realm through dialogue with atheists and with Marxists. These two types of dialogue and discussion characterized much of Roman Catholic

¹Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 55 (1963), 257. For a readily available English translation: *Pacem in terris*, ed. by William J. Gibbons (New York: Paulist Press, 1963).

theology in the 1960's. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World devotes a large section to the phenomenon of atheism and, generally speaking, recognizes some positive values in this phenomenon.² "While rejecting atheism, root and branch, the Church sincerely professes that all men, believers and unbelievers alike, are to work for the rightful betterment of this world in which we alike live. Such an ideal cannot be realized, however, apart from sincere and prudent dialogue" (n. 21).

In a parallel way with Marxism, while the Roman Catholic Church continues to reject the basic tenets of Marxism, there has been a growing recognition of the agreement on many issues confronting society and also in some countries a growing practical alliance between Marxists and some Christians and Roman Catholics.³ In this same connection, the phenomenon of a theology of the secular and secularization has also had its impact on the identity of Christian ethics.⁴ Thus the contemporary experience has brought to Christian consciousness, probably more so than in preceding times, the recognition that there are great similarities between Christian ethics and non-Christian ethics.

The second context in which the question of the identity of Christian ethics occurs is on the level of theological theory, especially involving a rethinking of three important sets of concepts—nature-supernature; creation-redemption; Church-world. An older Catholic theology seemed to hold a dualistic approach reserving some things for the area of nature and others for the area of supernature. Contemporary Roman Catholic thought has been trying to overcome that dichotomy. In a speculative context Karl Rahner has employed the concepts of the

²Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, nn. 19-21. The most available and reliable English translation of the documents of Vatican Council II is *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by Walter M. Abbott (New York: Guild Press, 1966).

³For theoretical aspects of this dialogue, see Roger Garaudy and Quentin Lauer, *A Christian-Communist Dialogue* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968). For practical aspects of this dialogue, see Peruvian Bishops' Commission for Social Action, *Between Honesty and Hope: Documents From and About the Church in Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Maryknoll Publications, 1970).

⁴Coenraad van Ouwkerk, "Secularism and Christian Ethics," *Concilium* 25 (1967), 97-139.

supernatural existential and the anonymous Christian to overcome the dichotomies between nature and supernature and between creation and redemption.⁵

On the level of action and moral theology, Gustavo Gutierrez emphasizes the concept of one history to overcome both the dichotomy of nature and supernature and the dualism of creation and redemption and thereby shows a proper relationship between the Church and the world. There are not two histories, one profound and one sacred, juxtaposed or closely linked. There is only one human history and human destiny irrevocably assumed by Christ, the Lord of history. Gutierrez himself recognizes that such an acceptance of only one history, a Christ-finalized history, raises the suspicion of not sufficiently safeguarding divine gratuitousness or the unique dimension of Christianity.⁶

Gutierrez then develops the reasons for his position. The Bible itself establishes a close link between creation and salvation. In this light the understanding of the relationship of Church and world must be changed. In an older approach it was thought that the salvific work of God was present primarily in the Church and not in the world, but such an approach can no longer be accepted. The building of the temporal city is not simply a stage of humanization or pre-evangelization as was held in theology until a few years ago; rather it is a part of a saving process which embraces the whole of man and all human history.⁷ "The perspective we have indicated presupposes an uncentering of the Church, for the Church must cease considering itself as the exclusive place of salvation and orient itself toward a new and radical service of people."⁸ The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, but the work of salvation is a reality which occurs in the one history of the world.

While agreeing with the general thrust of such an approach, I personally have some problems and difficulties which might better be

⁵For an exposition of Rahner's thought, see William C. Shepherd, *Man's Condition: God and the World Process* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).

⁶Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 153.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 153-60.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 256.

called amendments or modifications. Contemporary theology must overcome the dichotomies between nature and grace and between creation and redemption which were present in an older Catholic thought. But in overcoming the dichotomies there is the great danger of seeing everything in terms of the supernatural and of redemption. Roman Catholic theology, as well as Christian theology and human thought in general, in the late 1960's suffered from a naively optimistic approach that too often forgot about human limitations and sinfulness and mistakenly gave the impression that the fullness of the eschatological future was readily within our grasp. The stark realities of war, violence, hatred, and the inability of nations and individuals to live in peace and harmony have shattered such an illusion. My modifications to the approach taken by Gutierrez would insist that liberation is a long, hard, difficult process that will never be fully accomplished, but the Christian must be committed to strive to make liberation more present in our society. In my judgment much of the disillusion which characterizes life today, both in the world and in the Church, comes from the crushing of a naive optimism which forgot about the realities of limitation, sin and the eschaton as the absolute future. In addition, I have difficulty in accepting any one concept as being all controlling in ethical theory, even if that concept be liberation. In the past, for example, an overemphasis on freedom resulted in the doctrine of laissez-faire capitalism.

A third context in which the question of the identity of Christian and/or Catholic ethics arises refers to the methodological change which has occurred in Roman Catholic moral theology and which to some extent was influenced by the broader theological realities mentioned in the second context. To illustrate this changing methodology, compare the 1963 encyclical *Pacem in terris* of Pope John XXIII with the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

Pacem in terris stands in the tradition of the papal social encyclicals beginning with *Rerum novarum* of Leo XIII, who decreed the teaching of thomistic philosophy and theology in Catholic universities and seminaries and employed the natural law concept to questions of the social and economic order. The sources of the papal teaching were often referred to as reason and revelation, but the heavy emphasis rested on reason and natural law.⁹

⁹For explanations and commentaries on the papal social encyclicals see

Pacem in terris, as mentioned above, was addressed not only to Catholics but to all men of good will. The methodology employed by the encyclical was in keeping with such an address, since the basic appeal was not to the Scripture and revelation but to human reason. At the very beginning of the encyclical Pope John insists that peace on earth can be firmly established only if men dutifully observe the order laid down by God the Creator. The Creator has imprinted an order in the universe in which we live and in the hearts of men. In the nature of man and the universe conscience can find the order and the norms by which men are guided to live together in peace and harmony. Appeal is thus made only to creation, human nature and human reason which all men share in common whether they are Christians or not.¹⁰

The revival of Catholic moral theology, which first appeared in the 1950's and can be illustrated in the pioneering work of Bernard Häring,¹¹ insisted that moral theology must be rooted in the Scriptures and in grace and not just in reason and in human nature. This newer emphasis was encouraged by the dialogue with other Christians which was beginning to occur at that time in a more regular and visible way. Protestant ethics had consistently emphasized the primary place of revelation and the need to see Christian ethics in this context. The Decree on Priestly Formation of Vatican II declared "special attention needs to be given to the development of moral theology. Its scientific exposition should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching. It should show the nobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful and their obligations to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world" (n. 16).

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World tries to propose such a new framework and methodology for its consideration of the political, social and economic problems of our day. No longer is the methodology based on creation alone or human nature

J. Y. Calvez and J. Perrin, *The Church and Social Justice* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1961); John F. Cronin, *Social Principles and Economic Life* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1959); John F. Cronin, *The Social Teaching of Pope John XXIII* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1963).

¹⁰*Pacem in terris*, nn. 1-7.

¹¹Bernard Häring, *The Law of Christ*, trans. by Edwin G. Kaiser, 3 vols. (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1961, 1963, 1966).

alone, but the document addresses these questions in the light of the gospel and of human experience (n. 46). The methodological approach of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World can most adequately be described as a history of salvation approach which sees man's life in the world in the light of the whole history of salvation—creation, sin and redemption, and not merely on the basis of creation alone. Thus the tone and methodology of this document differ greatly from *Pacem in terris*.

At first sight the very obvious methodological differences between the older papal encyclicals and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World seem to indicate there is a heavy insistence on the distinctively Christian aspect in social ethics which was lacking in the approach of the hierarchical magisterium before that time. However, a deeper investigation of the question raises some contrary indications. The factors mentioned in the second context above—the overcoming of the dichotomy between nature and supernature and between creation and redemption—are also very much present in this document. There are also some startling individual statements about the identity of the fully human and the Christian. These questions will be discussed later in greater detail.

A fourth and final context refers to the specifically Catholic aspect of the question. Post *Humanae vitae* Catholic theology acknowledges the possibility and right of dissent to the authoritative or authentic, non-infallible teaching of the hierarchical magisterium. The possibility of dissent extends much more broadly than just to the specific question of the condemnation of artificial contraception which was proposed in *Humanae vitae*. Theoretically within Roman Catholicism today there are proposals going contrary to the official teaching of the Church on such questions as sexuality, abortion, euthanasia, and divorce.¹² In practice it also seems that many Catholics do not accept and follow the official teaching of the Catholic Church on specific moral questions.¹³

¹²For a survey of recent developments in moral theology consult the "Notes on Moral Theology" which usually appear twice a year in *Theological Studies*.

¹³For references to European questionnaires showing such divergencies from the official teaching of the hierarchical magisterium, see Franz Böckle, "La Morale Fondamentale," *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 59 (1971), 331, 332.

At the same time in the last few years many Catholics have expressed their belief that the Roman Catholic Church can and should speak out on any number of ethical questions facing our society. The war in Southeast Asia was the occasion on which many Catholics deplored the fact that the Catholic bishops of the United States did not give clear teaching to their people, although individual bishops made statements condemning American involvement in the war and finally the American bishops as a whole did issue a statement calling for the American withdrawal from Vietnam.¹⁴ There have also been calls for explicit church teaching on questions such as prison reform, condemnation of the death penalty, backing particular groups of workers in their labor struggles, etc.

These two signs of the times, which in some ways appear to be conflicting, create the milieu in which theologians raise the question about a distinctive and specific Roman Catholic ethics.

A DISTINCTIVELY CHRISTIAN ETHIC?

This paper will consider first the question of a distinctively Christian ethic and then only later the question of a distinctively Roman Catholic ethic. Any solution depends on a comparison between Christian ethics and other religious and human ethics. In the past few years, particularly within Roman Catholicism, this question has been raised about the material content of Christian ethics. Does the material content of Christian ethics add anything distinctive to human ethics; and, if so, what?

One must be careful not to prejudice the argument. The question cannot be settled merely by comparing the ethical conduct proposed in the Scriptures with the ethical conduct exemplified in the lives of non-believers. In one sense Scripture proposes the objective and somewhat ideal teaching which all would have to admit is not always verified even in the lives of Christian believers. A comparison can be made by studying the content of the ethical teaching proposed in Scripture with the content of morality as expressed in the writings of another religion or

¹⁴ "Resolution on Southeast Asia," a statement issued by the Roman Catholic Bishops of the United States in November, 1971, is available from the Division of Justice and Peace, USCC, 1312 Mass. Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005:

of a philosopher. It is possible, for example, to compare the teaching of the Old Testament with the ethical content proposed by those who lived in the same historical circumstances. Some comparative studies have been made, but they are quite limited.¹⁵ Comparative historical studies will always constitute an important aspect of the debate, but at the present time no one can claim to have made an exhaustive comparative study of the ethical teaching of the Old and New Testament with the teaching proposed by non-believers living in somewhat the same historical and cultural milieus.

In those discussions there can also be valuable data derived from experience and history. Does our own experience indicate that there is a specifically different Christian ethical content? Obviously our own personal experience is necessarily limited so that no conclusive answer can be drawn from experience alone although it can contribute insights to a final solution of the question. Can history itself indicate that the moral content of Christian ethics has differed from the moral content of non-Christian ethics? Here again it is very difficult, if not impossible, to do an exhaustive historical study to determine if there is a difference between the content of Christian ethics and of non-Christian ethics, but again some helpful insights can be obtained through history. In my judgment, the limited data we have from both experience and history give no clear evidence of indicating a distinctive content to Christian ethics. Even some who would admit to the existence of a different content recognize that history cannot prove the existence of a specifically Christian ethic as far as content is concerned.¹⁶

While all the above approaches to the question are helpful, they cannot at the present time give a definite and certain answer to the question of the existence of a specifically different content in Christian ethics. Such approaches unfortunately are necessarily incomplete. This paper will now concentrate on the more theological and theoretical

¹⁵Francesco Compagnoni, *La specificità della morale cristiana* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1972), pp. 27-61; Carroll Stuhlmueller, "The Natural Law Question the Bible Never Asked," *Cross Currents* 19 (1969), 55-67.

¹⁶James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 238; Donald Evans, "A Reasonable Scream of Protest," in *Peace, Power and Protest*, ed. by Donald Evans (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1967), p. 5.

approaches to the question of a specifically different material content in Christian ethics.

Some preliminary points deserve attention so that the question can be properly stated and pursued. Sometimes discussion about the specific contents of Christian ethics *vis-à-vis* others is only in terms of norms or precepts.¹⁷ In my judgment such a description of the material content of ethics in general and of Christian ethics is much too narrow. The material content of ethics also includes other elements besides norms—attitudes, dispositions or virtues; goals and ideals; moral judgments. One cannot reduce the material content of ethics just to the question of rules and norms.

Secondly, it should be noted that the question about a distinctively Christian content to ethics and especially the denial of such a distinctive content in comparison with human ethics has arisen primarily in the context of Roman Catholic theology. There has been some discussion of the question among Protestants but comparatively little in the form of this specific question.¹⁸

This fact is not all that surprising but rather coheres with the basic theological thrust of Catholic and Protestant ethics. One, however, must be very careful in speaking about either Protestant ethics or Catholic ethics as if either were a monolithic system. This has been especially true of Protestant ethics throughout its history, but classical Protestant ethics has generally downplayed the human and the role of the human in Christian ethics. Roman Catholic ethics on the contrary has insisted on the goodness of the human, and its natural law tradition claimed that human reason on the basis of its understanding of humanity can arrive at true ethical wisdom and knowledge. Catholic ethics traditionally has given a very important place to the human, whereas classical Protestant ethics has seen Christian ethics as starting from God

¹⁷Compagnoni, *La specificità della morale cristiana* pp. 17, 18.

¹⁸For one Protestant author who denies the existence of a distinctively Christian content in ethics, see John Macquarrie, *Three Issues in Ethics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 87-91. Macquarrie as an Anglican theologian with a strong emphasis on philosophy is very much in the mainstream of the Roman Catholic tradition on this question. For a Protestant critique of his position, see Hideo Ohki, "A New Approach to Christian Ethics," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 7 (1973), 11-26.

and his action and not from man.¹⁹

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World of Vatican II, despite the newer methodological approach mentioned above, still remains in basic continuity with the Catholic emphasis on the human. The acceptance of the goodness and importance of the human can be illustrated from a number of statements in the document itself. "Above all the Church knows that her message is in harmony with the most secret desires of the human heart when she champions the dignity of the human vocation restoring hope to those who have already despaired of anything higher than their present lives. Far from diminishing man, her message brings to his development light, life and freedom. Apart from this message nothing will avail to fill up the heart of man. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, Oh Lord, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee" (n. 21). A little further on, the document describes the ultimate vocation of man as in fact one and divine (n. 22). Jesus who entered world history as a perfect man revealed to us that God is love. "At the same time He taught us that the new command of love was the basic law of human perfection and hence of the world's transformation. To those therefore who believe in divine love he gives assurance that the way of love lies open to all men and that the effort to establish a universal brotherhood is not a hopeless one" (n. 38).

The encyclical letter *Populorum progressio* of Pope Paul VI follows the same general method of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World and also illustrates that the Catholic tradition has at the very least a high regard for the human. *Populorum progressio* builds its teaching around the concept of development. Since human beings, like all of creation, are ordered to their Creator, they should orientate their lives to God the first truth and supreme good. By reason of union with Christ man attains to a new fulfillment of himself, to a transcendent humanism which gives man his greatest possible perfection.²⁰ Later, the Pope comments that modern man is searching for a new humanism embracing the higher values of love and friendship, of prayer

¹⁹Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1963), especially pp. 165-367.

²⁰Pope Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967), 265, n. 16. For an available English translation see *On the Development of Peoples*, commentary by Barbara Ward (New York: Paulist Press, 1967).

and contemplation, which will permit the fullness of authentic development (n. 20).

The discussion about a specific content of Christian ethics takes place at least in Roman Catholicism, in the light of this basic acceptance of the goodness and importance of the human as well as its continuity with grace. This paper does not intend to summarize all of the writing which has appeared on this question in the last few years. Rather, the different positions will be illustrated and criticized. Interestingly, many Catholic authors writing on this subject in the last few years have denied the existence of a specifically different material content in Christian ethics, although there have been two distinct and different approaches arriving at this conclusion. On the other hand there are also some authors who affirm a Christian ethic which does not contradict human ethics but does add a distinctively Christian content beyond the human. It is only in the last few years that the question has been raised in the exact terms in which it has been raised now. For that reason, it would be an almost impossible task to determine how other thinkers in the past would have responded to this question because the question was not really posed exactly the same way as it is now.

*The position affirming a distinctively Christian content.*²¹ One of the characteristics of Roman Catholic moral theology has been its heavy emphasis on anthropology as the starting point of Christian ethics, and the opinion affirming a specific material content to Christian ethics can readily find a basis in anthropology. The comparison, however, is not between the sinful nature of man and the redeemed nature of man. There is no doubt about the great contrast existing here as illustrated, for example, in Paul's description of those who walk according to the flesh and those who walk according to the spirit. Likewise, the call to conversion as it is frequently proposed in the

²¹The following section, while bringing in other aspects, will basically follow the position proposed in an unsigned article "Esiste una morale 'cristiana'?" *La Civiltà Cattolica* 123, No. 3 (1972), 449-55. As illustrations of the wide attention given to this problem in different countries and of the position affirming a distinctive content in Christian ethics, see René Coste, "Loi naturelle et loi évangélique," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 92 (1970), 76-89; J. Gründel, "Ethik ohne Normen? Zur Begründung und Struktur christlicher Ethik," in *Ethik ohne Normen?* ed. by Gründel-Van Oyen (Freiburg: Herder, 1970), pp. 11-88; Dionigi Tettamanzi, "Esiste un'etica cristiana?" *La Scuola Cattolica* 99 (1971), 163-93.

Scriptures is not a call to man as such but rather to sinful human beings.

The human which is under discussion in the comparison of the human and the Christian must be that which pertains to the nature of man as such and not to the historical state of man after the fall. Since Catholic ethics has often accepted the axiom *agere sequitur esse*, then the starting point should be an anthropological understanding of the Christian as such. Christianity definitely adds a specific element in the area of anthropology. Faith and grace are the decisive elements in a Christian anthropology.

What do faith and grace add to ethics? A new way of being (life in grace) must result in a new way of acting. The teachings of Jesus indicate how he does extend the ambit of the human for those who are his followers. He calls for love of enemies, humility, renunciation, non-violence, virginity for the kingdom. The radical demands of gospel morality, including the cross and love of enemies, are not mere counsels but constitute ethical demands that go beyond the human and flow from the new life of those who are in Jesus Christ. The scriptural ethical teaching indicates that the gift of new life in Christ Jesus calls the Christian to act in a different way so that there is a specifically different material content in Christian ethics. However, the existence of an irreducibly specific Christian morality does not mean that such a morality stands in opposition to human morality. Christian morality goes beyond the human, but it is in the last analysis a fulfillment of the human and not in any way a contradiction of the human.

The above argumentation definitely shows the Catholic matrix out of which it comes. The Protestant approach would tend to see greater discontinuity between the human and the Christian; for example, human ethics is based on man giving his neighbor his due in accord with the rights of the neighbor, whereas Christian morality responds not to the rights of the neighbor but to the needs of the neighbor.²²

Many theologians within the Protestant tradition do give some importance and value to the human. This more positive relationship between the Christian and the human can best be described in the model of the Christian transforming the human. This concept of transforma-

²²Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), pp. 1-152.

tion implies not only continuity between the human and the Christian but also some discontinuity so that occasionally the Christian ethical demands will go against the purely human demands.²³ However, it is important to point out that in Catholic thought the human or the natural is a metaphysical and ahistorical concept referring to the meaning of man as such apart from either the fall or grace, whereas the Protestant concept of the human is more historical referring to the actual human condition.²⁴ This difference of perspective is very significant but still does not completely explain away the divergencies between Catholic and classical Protestant thought on the relationship between the human and the Christian. On the other hand liberal Protestantism is often more willing to see a great continuity between the human and the Christian and at times even an identity.²⁵

Denial of a distinctively Christian content. A comparatively large number of Catholic authors in the last few years denied the existence of a specifically different material content in Christian morality.²⁶ There

²³For an explanation of this model in contrast to other possible models, see H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956). Paul Ramsey has explicitly adopted such a model of transformism in his later writings, especially *Nine Modern Moralists* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962).

²⁴Josef Fuchs, *Natural Law: A Theological Perspective* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), pp. 85-122.

²⁵Lloyd J. Averill, *American Theology in the Liberal Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967).

²⁶The following list is illustrative and does not intend to be a complete bibliography on the subject. The authors cited do refer to other references to the question. Jean-Marie Aubert, "La spécificité de la morale chrétienne selon Saint Thomas." *Le Supplément* 23 (1970), 55-73; Franz Böckle, "Was ist das Proprium einer christlichen Ethik," *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 11 (1967), 148-58; James F. Bresnahan, "Rahner's Christian Ethics," *America* 123 (1970), 351-4; Josef Fuchs, *Human Values and Christian Morality* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970), esp. pp. 112-47; Fuchs, "Gibt es eine spezifisch christliche Moral?" *Stimmen der Zeit* 95 (1970), 99-112. The same article appears in Fuchs, *Esiste una morale cristiana?* (Rome: Herder, 1970), pp. 13-44; Fuchs, "Esiste una morale non-cristiana?" *Rassegna di teologia* 14 (1973), 361-73. Richard A. McCormick, "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies* 32 (1971), 71-8; Bruno Schüller, "Typen ethischer Argumentation in der katholischen Moralthologie," *Theologie und Philosophie* 45 (1970), 526-50; René Simon, "Spécificite de

are two possible ways of attempting to justify this assertion. The first approach which from a theological perspective is based on creation asserts that the material content of Christian morality adds nothing to the material content of human morality understood in a metaphysical way. The second approach which from a theological perspective is based on an understanding of redemption and grace asserts that the human as we know it today is already influenced by grace so that Christians cannot claim a distinctive content to their ethics which cannot be found in the ethics of non-Christians or others existing in this world.

The approach based on creation has been followed by most of the authors. Interestingly, some theologians (e.g., Aubert, Compagnoni, Fuchs) claim that Thomas Aquinas supported such a position even though he did not formulate the question as it has been proposed in the last few years.²⁷ Aubert arrives at this conclusion on the basis of Aquinas' teaching on the virtues and on the New Law. In his treatise on the virtues Thomas integrated the human virtues into the Christian perspective. Charity is the form of the virtues so that charity thus becomes the efficient and the final cause ordering the human virtues to their ultimate end. But charity is expressed in and through the moral virtues which thus constitute the material cause of Christian ethics. From the viewpoint of material causality the human and the Christian are the same. Aubert also points out that Aquinas acknowledges that the law of Christ introduces man into a radical newness, but the Angelic Doctor explicitly states that the law of Christ does not of itself add any new moral prescriptions to the human.²⁸

The proponents of this position do not deny a specifically distinct Christian ethics as such, but they do deny that there is a distinctive material content to Christian ethics. Thus such a position makes a distinction between the material and the formal element in Christian ethics or between the transcendent and the categorical aspects.

In explaining this position, the paper will follow in general the

l'ethique chretienne," *Le Supplément* 23 (1970), 74-104. For a more complete bibliography, see Compagnoni, *La specificità della morale cristiana*, pp. 172-82.

²⁷ Aubert, *Le Supplément* 23 (1970), 55-73; Compagnoni, *La specificità della morale cristiana*, pp. 63-96, Fuchs, *Rassegna di teologia* 14 (1973), 306.

²⁸ Aubert, *Le Supplément* 23 (1970), 64-70.

exposition of Joseph Fuchs who has written more articles on this subject than any other Catholic author although other positions will also be mentioned. According to Fuchs there is a twofold aspect in morality. There are the particular, categorical moral values such as justice, fidelity or goodness which are present in the moral act itself. In addition, and even more importantly, in the realization of particular moral values in individual actions the person attains and realizes himself as a person before the Absolute who is God. The realization of the self occurs in every specific act but we are often conscious of it only in a non-thematic and non-reflexive way, whereas the realization of a particular moral value in an action usually occurs with a thematic and reflexive consciousness. The self-realization of the person which occurs usually in a non-thematic and non-reflexive way in every moral act is the more important and determining element of the individual moral act.²⁹

The believer, however, can thematize his relationship as a person before the Absolute as his relationship to Jesus Christ and the Father of salvation. Although the Christian is not always reflexively conscious of this in every act, nevertheless this relationship is present as the most profound aspect in his moral life. Fuchs refers to this as Christian intentionality, understood as the decision for Christ and the Father, which is present and orientating the life of the believer as the most important aspect of Christian morality.³⁰

The categorical content of Christian morality, as distinguished from Christian intentionality or the transcendental aspect, is fundamentally and substantially human or a morality of humanity. The Christian teaching on creation establishes the existence of man among men in this world with the Creator God requiring that men should live and act in accord with their multiple relationships.³¹ Human morality, which Fuchs prefers to describe as *recta ratio* and not as natural law because of certain connotations connected with the concept of natural law, is the medium in which the Christian transcendentality realizes itself. Authentic human morality demands that the individual person live in accord with his relationships with God and with his interpersonal relationships with others working and striving with them for the formation of

²⁹Fuchs, *Esiste una morale cristiana?* pp. 17, 18.

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 18, 19.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 22, 23.

the world and of humanity. Fuchs goes on to indicate that the teachings of Scripture, as well as theologians such as Thomas Aquinas, Suarez, and even manualists such as Vermeersch and Zalba maintain that Christian ethics does not add anything to the material content of human ethics.³²

Fuchs and other defenders of this position realize that they must respond to the strongest arguments proposed in favor of a specifically distinct Christian ethical content—the anthropological argument and the argument derived from the moral teachings of the Scripture. Fuchs believes that those who argue for a new Christian action based on the new Christian being wrongly see Christ as a teacher of morality rather than as a redeemer of fallen man and correlatively see in the Church the duty to teach morality rather than to enunciate and communicate salvation. The newness that Jesus brings is not a new moral teaching but rather a new man, born in the spirit rather than a man of the flesh in the Pauline terms. To the new Christian *esse* there does correspond a Christian *agere*. This new Christian being calls the Christian person in faith, charity and the following of Christ to manifest his new existence by living in a Christian manner the true human morality. The material content remains the demands of human morality as such.³³

What about the biblical teaching on love of God and man, especially the love of enemies, self-denial even unto death, the role of the cross in the life of the Christian, care for those people who are in need and contribute nothing to society? Francesco Compagnoni devotes one chapter of his book, which was originally a doctoral dissertation, to show that the Scriptures do not add any moral content to human morality.³⁴

In what sense is the command of charity in the New Testament a new commandment? Aubert responds to this question by citing Pope Leo XIII who in the encyclical *Sapientiae Christianae* maintains that Jesus called his commandment new not because mutual love was not prescribed by the law of nature itself but because the manner of loving was completely new and unheard of. The newness in the New Testa-

³²Fuchs, *Rassegna di teologia* 14 (1973), 364-7.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 369.

³⁴Compagnoni, *La specificità della morale cristiana*, pp. 27-61.

ment commandment of love arises from its relationship to the fallen nature of man—the flesh in the Pauline sense. If one understands humanity in the metaphysical sense and not in the sense of fallen man, then there is no fundamental difference in the command to love. The natural law itself entails the precept of love of God and of other men as the expression of the specifically human tendency, for as a spiritual being man has as his end to tend toward God and love him and to love his images who are other persons.³⁵

Fuchs raises the question about a distinctive Christian content in the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and in the law of the cross. But he points out that the antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount are between the new man and sinful man and not between the new man and humanity as such. Human nature or *recta ratio* does call for man to love God and love neighbor. For fallen man this exigency of humanity requires renunciation, sacrifice and the cross so that such a man can free himself from the egoism which is not a part of humanity as such. The law of the cross for fallen man does not add a new material content beyond the human but rather shows how the essential demand of humanity is to be achieved by fallen man.³⁶

Interpretation and critique. Although these two positions come to a different conclusion about the material content of Christian ethics, they are in no sense diametrically opposed. Obviously, within the Catholic tradition those who have proposed a specifically different content to Christian morality also recognize that much of the content is the same as that of human morality. Most of Catholic ethics in the past has been based on the natural law. Contemporary official Church documents speak of Christian morality as being the truly or fully or perfectly human so that even what is different from the human must not be opposed to the human but rather is in continuity with it and ultimately the fulfillment of the human.

On the other hand those who deny any specific Christian content in morality do admit that grace and the supernatural are necessary for man (fallen man in this historical situation) to live in accord with human morality.³⁷ In addition, Aubert recognizes that the demands of

³⁵ Aubert, *Le Supplément* 23 (1970), 67.

³⁶ Fuchs, *Esiste una morale cristiana?* pp. 25-7.

³⁷ Fuchs, *La Rassegna di teologia* 14 (1973), 373.

charity lead to the importance and place of some human virtues such as humility whose importance purely rational reflection is not able to perceive: He goes on to point out that man has need of these virtues even in his natural state and not only because he is marked by sin and in need of salvation.³⁸

Compagnoni affirms that the precepts of the New Law add nothing to the material content of human morality, but they do bring about a radicalization of the precepts of human morality. Although the content of the moral precepts remains the same, they become more clearly manifest and their implications are seen more readily. Above all since grace now permits their realization, they are able to develop everything that is contained in them even virtually, as is evident in the Christian understanding of the virtue of humility.³⁹

Fuchs himself is willing to admit that there are human moral truths which are *per se* accessible to human intelligence but in fact are not known by some men. He draws the comparison with what Vatican Council I said about man's natural knowledge of God. Reason is able to achieve this knowledge, but man because of his fallen state often does not acquire such knowledge.⁴⁰ These authors thus acknowledge some limitations in reason's ability to arrive at the full understanding of human morality.

Although I deny there is a specifically different content to Christian ethics that is not available to all other human beings and ethics, I prefer to propose the reasoning in a different manner. There are, in my judgment, difficulties with the argument based on creation and the metaphysical concept of humanity implied in such reasoning. Such a metaphysical concept of humanity is truly an abstraction which does not correspond to any given historical state of human existence. As a matter of fact, human beings are existing in the one order of creation and redemption in which all are called to a saving and loving union with God. It will always be difficult if not impossible to say what belongs to the metaphysical state of man as such because one can never abstract that perfectly from the influence of grace and sin that are always a part

³⁸ Aubert, *Le Supplément* 23 (1970), 64.

³⁹ Compagnoni, *La specificità della morale cristiana*, p. 95.

⁴⁰ Fuchs, *Rassegna di teologia* 14 (1973), 373.

of human existence as we know it.

The proponents of this position admit that historical man cannot live according to such moral precepts without the help of grace and that existing human beings cannot even know these moral teachings expeditiously, with certitude and without any mixture of error without grace, if we are to fully apply the analogy Fuchs drew between reason's ability to know God as the beginning and end of all things and the ability to know human morality. One is thus employing reason to propose the content of human morality and at the same time admitting that human beings in this world will experience great difficulty in arriving at a knowledge of human morality. Likewise, one could bring an argument against the position proposed by Fuchs analogous to the argument brought against a natural knowledge of the existence of God.

The way in which these theorists have dealt with the questions of Christian love, the Sermon on the Mount and the law of the cross indicates a weakness in the approach itself. They assert the abstract content of human morality itself as calling for love of God and of neighbor and working together for the good of society. This nucleus then becomes present in different historical situations. The historical situations referred to here are not just the changing cultural and historical relativities of human history but also involve the changes in the so-called history of salvation.⁴¹

The condition of fallen man will somewhat change the materiality of human ethics. Love of neighbor for fallen man will now involve renunciation, sacrifice and the cross. Because of egoism, sin and selfishness, love of neighbor will be experienced as the cross and a self-emptying. Fuchs asserts that the non-Christian or the atheist experiencing his own egoism is able to recognize that in this situation renunciation, sacrifice and the cross are able to be part of the realization of humanity.⁴² It seems difficult to assert that human reason, considered in the abstract even though it is present in human beings in the midst of a sinful world, can understand that in this situation humanity calls for sacrifice, renunciation and the cross.

There is another very possible alternative. Human beings might

⁴¹Fuchs, *Esiste una morale cristiana?* p. 26.

⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 26, 27.

come to the conclusion that such a world is not rational and does not seem to make any sense on these grounds alone. At least many human beings historically have come to that conclusion and not the one proposed by Fuchs and others. I have grave doubts that suffering, sacrifice and the cross are historically verifiable as rational. Such an approach does not seem to give enough importance to the reality of sin and what effect it has on man and reality. There is such a thing as the mystery of evil and the mystery of iniquity which is so strong that in the midst of it rationality does not shine through. In the midst of suffering and unrequited love one could very easily conclude to the irrationality of the whole human enterprise. I do not want to say that sin totally does away with some aspects of the rational, but I do think sin has more effect than the proponents of this position are willing to admit. This approach to the question seems too abstract, ahistorical and overly rational to be fully satisfying.

One further point can be made. Aubert maintains that the material cause of Christian morality is the same as human morality, but the final and formal causes are different. Fuchs writes of a specific Christian intentionality and Christian motivation but this is expressed in the medium of human morality. In the light of the Thomist reasoning explicitly employed by Aubert one can ask if the formal element should not have some effect on the material element. Is there not a reciprocal causality between them so that the form in some way does effect the matter? The thrust of my critical remarks is that the second approach does not seem able conclusively to prove the thesis that human morality understood in the metaphysical sense has the same content as Christian morality.

Another approach. My own approach to this question begins with the actual historical order in which we live and not with an abstract concept of the metaphysical notion of the human. The Christian knows only one historical order—man created, fallen and redeemed. The human beings that we know are under all these influences. Roman Catholic theology has consistently acknowledged the universal salvific will of God by which a loving Father calls all men to salvation. Redemption and saving grace are offered to all men and exist outside the pale of the Catholic and the Christian.⁴³ Theologians have developed

⁴³Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 22.

various theories to explain precisely how the reality of God's saving gift occurs, but it is not necessary for us to mention these at the present time. One theory, for example, maintains that in moral choice man is ultimately confronted with the absolute and in this way the saving gift of God can come to him.⁴⁴

By understanding the human in this historical sense of man existing as created, fallen and redeemed, the specifically Christian aspect of morality is going to be even less than that proposed by the second approach to the question. The human can also share in the intentionality and motivation corresponding to the redeeming gift of God's love even though these are not present in a thematic way or in an explicitly Christian manner. The specific aspect of Christian morality is the explicitly Christian way in which this is known and manifested. But what the Christian knows with an explicit Christian dimension is and can be known by all others. The difference lies in the fact that for the Christian his ethics is thematically and explicitly Christian. Earlier I stated my conclusion in this way. "Obviously a personal acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord affects at least the consciousness of the individual and his thematic reflection on his consciousness, but the Christian and the explicitly non-Christian can and do arrive at the same ethical conclusions and can and do share the same general ethical attitudes, dispositions and goals. Thus, explicit Christians do not have a monopoly on such proximate ethical attitudes, goals and dispositions 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."⁴⁵

Again, it should be pointed out that this position is not in total opposition with, and in some ways might even be reconciled with, the other two approaches to this question. For example, Dionigi Tettamanzi admits that if human ethics refers to the metaphysical concept of man as such, then Christian ethics does have a distinctive content; but if human ethics refers to man historically existing in the one given order, then the human and the Christian coincide.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Compagnoni (*La specificità della morale cristiana*, pp. 121, 122) criticizes Fuchs, with whom he is in fundamental agreement, for basing his argument on theological hypotheses when it is not necessary.

⁴⁵*Catholic Moral Theology in Dialogue* (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, 1972), p. 20.

Joseph Fuchs has also insisted upon the fact that grace and salvation are offered to all men even those outside the pale of explicit Christianity. Fuchs' latest article on the question is entitled: "Is there a Non-Christian Morality?" Just as in the case of the question about Christian morality, his answer is both yes and no. Fuchs maintains that in the last analysis there is only one historical moral order and the ultimate meaning of the human is Christian.⁴⁷

Norbert Rigali has pointed out that the above approach is true of "essential" ethics but not of existential ethics. Existential, personal or individual ethics has to be taken into account. The Christian as an individual belongs to the Christian community (the Church) and recognizes moral obligations existing within this particular framework. Such an example illustrates that individuals precisely because of their individuality will experience different moral calls and obligations.⁴⁸ Certainly one must accept the existence of such a personal and individual aspect of morality. I merely want to recall that the non-Christian too can perceive personal obligations of self-sacrificing love and service which are to be carried out in accord with his own individuality and circumstances.

Although this study has outlined three different approaches to the question of the specific content of Christian morality, it must always be recalled that there is general agreement within the Roman Catholic tradition that the human plays a large role in Christian morality. The practical differences between the second and third approach are not that great, and they result primarily from the different concept of the human. In the second opinion the human is understood in a metaphysical way as referring to humanity as such apart from the realities of the history of salvation, whereas in the third opinion the human is understood as that which is historically existing here and now in terms of human beings created, fallen and redeemed. When speaking of the content of Christian ethics being the same as human ethics, I have

⁴⁶Tettamanzi, *La Scuola Cattolica* 99 (1971), 193.

⁴⁷Fuchs, *Rassegna di teologia* 14 (1973), 361-73.

⁴⁸Norbert J. Rigali, "On Christian Ethics," *Chicago Studies* 10 (1971), 227-47. For a similar emphasis see Richard Roach, "Christian and Human," *The Way* 13 (1973), 112-25.

frequently used the terminology fully, truly or authentically human so that the sinful element does not enter in.

The moral theology of the manuals of theology also gave very great importance to the role of the human in Christian ethics. Even those who assert that there is a specifically different Christian content to ethics will also recognize and accept the fact that there is much content which the Christian shares with the human. As pointed out before, the teaching of the hierarchical magisterium on social matters was explained almost exclusively in terms of the natural law which is common to all mankind. In addition, those teachings which can be looked upon as most distinctively Catholic, such as the condemnation of contraception, sterilization, abortion, euthanasia, as well as the principle of the double effect, have all been based on natural law which is available to all mankind. Even the Catholic teaching on divorce has been proposed in the name of the natural law. Thus within the Roman Catholic tradition all would have to admit that a very large place in Christian morality has been granted to a human morality. Translated into other terms this means that Christian morality must always be open to and learn from the true insights of a human morality. Christian morality in no way can ignore the meaning of the human but must work together with all other sciences and human experiences in trying to discern what precisely is the human.

There is one final point which must be mentioned. The reasoning as developed in this section has talked in theory about the fact that truly human ethics and Christian ethics are the same with the Christian just adding the explicitly Christian understanding of ethical reality. However, in practice it must be admitted that Christians and all others fall far short of the fullness of the ethical ideal. Without in any way claiming superiority, the Christian emphasis must make explicit those aspects of the ethical teaching which can so easily be obscured and forgotten by Christians and non-Christians alike. Christian ethics must continually recall the reality of sin and the call to conversion on the part of all individuals and societies. Likewise the paschal mystery must be uppermost in the explicit understanding of ethics for one who is trying to follow Jesus. A proper understanding of the paschal mystery in the life of the Christian will show forth the need for the ethical realities of self-sacrificing love, suffering and hope in the Christian life.

One must also be careful not to understand the paschal mystery in a one-sided way. It is true that in Jesus the paschal mystery involves the triumph of life in the midst of death, of power in the midst of weakness, of joy in the midst of sorrow and of light in the midst of darkness. The Christian, however, already shares in the first fruits of redemption so that one already knows the joy, the happiness and the peace that come from the redemption itself.

I propose a transformationist interpretation of the paschal mystery and not merely a paradoxical or dialectical interpretation. Since we live between the two comings of Jesus, his life, his victory, and his love are already present but not yet fully. Sometimes God's love is made known in human love; God's joy in human joy; but at other times the paradoxical element predominates so that his power is made known in weakness and his joy in sorrow. The paradoxical motif cannot be the ultimate explanation of the paschal mystery, but a transformationist interpretation properly understands that there will be some paradoxical aspects as brought out especially in the Christian realities of suffering and hope. This in no way denies that the non-Christian can also come to a realization of these same aspects of the ethical life, but it is necessary for the Christian to emphasize them because both the Christian and the non-Christian often tend to forget these important but by no means only aspects of the ethical life.

A DISTINCTIVELY CATHOLIC ETHIC?

Is Catholic ethics different from Christian and human ethics; and if so, what are the specifically different characteristics? An adequate response to this question must distinguish between Catholic ethics in practice as lived and proclaimed by the Church and reflective ethics which as a theologian discipline takes place in the Catholic tradition.

On the practical level of the ethics as taught by the Catholic Church one can point to certain specific teachings proposed by the hierarchical teaching office in the Church and at times denied by many other people in contemporary society. In discussing the question of a specifically Catholic ethics, G. B. Guzzetti proposes some of these ethical teachings as what specifies and distinguishes Catholic ethics from all others—the indissolubility of every true marriage, the purity of marriage

against all onanism, the inviolability of any human life from direct attack, especially the condemnation of abortion and euthanasia.⁴⁹ One could add to this list other specific moral teachings that have been proposed by the hierarchical teaching office in the Catholic Church, but Guzzetti does mention those which are well known and in the popular mind represent what is specific and distinctive about Catholic ethics.

A further investigation of these distinctive moral teachings in the Roman Catholic Church reveals two other distinctive aspects of Catholic ethics. These teachings are proposed by the authoritative, hierarchical teaching office in the Church. They have their force, therefore, not only on the basis of ethical arguments but also because they are proposed authoritatively by the Church. In addition, the hierarchical magisterium proposed all these specific teachings as being based on the natural law. It is true that in the case of divorce references are also made to the scriptural teaching,⁵⁰ but the specific and distinctive teachings proposed in Catholic ethics are based on the natural law.

At the present time, however, these three aspects—the specific teachings themselves, the natural law basis and the authoritative teaching role of the Church are being questioned within Roman Catholicism. In terms of the specific teachings mentioned by Guzzetti and popularly understood as what specifies Catholic moral teachings, many Catholic theologians are expressing their disagreement with the official teaching of the Church. Responsible Roman Catholic theologians have called for changes in the teaching of the Church on artificial contraception, sterilization, divorce, abortion, euthanasia, the principle of the double effect with its prohibition of direct killing, and even in other matters of sexuality. In addition samplings of public opinion indicate that many individual Catholics disagree with the official teaching of the Church on these positions.⁵¹ These specific teachings can no longer be regarded as what is distinctive about Catholic ethics.

⁴⁹G. B. Guzzetti, "C'è una moral cristiana?" *Seminarium* 11 (1971), 549.

⁵⁰For documentation of the comparatively late (nineteenth and twentieth centuries) emphasis on natural law as the basis for the prohibition of divorce, see John T. Noonan, Jr., "Indissolubility of Marriage and Natural Law," *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 14 (1969), 79-88.

⁵¹See footnote 13.

The natural law invoked by the hierarchical teaching office in arriving at these conclusions has in theory always occasioned some question and uneasiness on the part of Catholics. On the one hand the natural law is said to be available to all men because all share human nature and human reason, but on the other hand on the basis of such a natural law the hierarchical teaching office in the Church has arrived at ethical conclusions which many people in our society do not accept.

The key to the understanding of this apparent dilemma lies in the ambiguous concept of natural law. Natural law in the broad sense of the term refers to the humanity and reason which all men share in common. Natural law in the more restricted sense of the term refers to a particular understanding of humanity based on nature as a principle of operation in every living thing including human beings. Man's nature thus determines how he should act. The official teaching office used the more restricted concept of natural law to arrive at its ethical conclusions. Such an understanding of natural law resulted in a moral methodology which was primarily deductive, somewhat ahistorical and tending toward the possibility of absolute certitude in moral matters. The problem was intensified by the fact that such a restricted notion of natural law was authoritatively imposed as the methodology to be followed in Catholic moral theology and thus did constitute a distinctive characteristic of Catholic ethics.⁵²

Today Catholic theologians are rejecting this very restricted notion of natural law so that it no longer is the characteristic and distinctive aspect of Catholic ethics. In the place of a monolithic ethical theory there now exists a plurality of ethical methodologies within Roman Catholicism with a greater emphasis on induction, *a posteriori* argumentation, experience and a recognition of the lack of absolute certitude on specific moral issues. Thus what at one time, especially from the end of the nineteenth century, was distinctive about Roman Catholic ethical teaching no longer holds today.

The third distinctive aspect which characterized Catholic moral teaching in the recent past was the authoritative teaching of the hierarchical teaching office on these matters. The post *Humanae vitae* Church

⁵²For a somewhat typical overview of the question of natural law with a bibliography, see Jean-Marie Aubert, "Pour une herméneutique du droit naturel," *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 59 (1971), 449-92.

now realizes that the possibility of dissent from specific moral teachings was present even in the manualistic understanding of the role of the hierarchical teaching office although it was not popularly known by the vast majority of Roman Catholics.⁵³ It is important to understand the ultimate reason for the possibility of dissent so that the ramifications of such dissent on the future developments of ethics in the Catholic Church can be properly judged. The ultimate theological reason for the possibility of dissent on specific moral teachings comes from the impossibility of achieving absolute certitude in the light of the complex elements involved in any specific moral judgment or teaching. The older and restricted natural law approach characteristic of past Roman Catholic theology added weight to the argument that absolute certitude could be achieved on such issues.

It is no coincidence that the three elements which were distinctive characteristics of Catholic ethical teaching in the past are breaking down today and no longer true. Newer ethical methodologies only underline the reasons supporting the possibilities of dissent from authoritative Church teaching and at the same time argue against the specific teachings that have often been proposed by the hierarchical magisterium in the name of a restricted concept of natural law in the past. Even at the present time one can no longer say that any or all of these three characteristics are distinctive of Roman Catholic ethics.⁵⁴ In the future it will be even more evident that these three characteristics do not distinguish Roman Catholic ethics from other Christian ethics.

Such an understanding with its heavy ecclesiological overtones calls for a marked change in the way in which the Catholic Church understands and carries out its teaching function in the area of morality. At the present time the hierarchical Church still appears to cling to the older understanding. The American mentality and the experience of the Catholic Church in this country have tended to emphasize Catholic

⁵³For a summary of much of the literature which appeared on the occasion of *Humanae vitae*, see Richard A. McCormick, "Notes on Moral Theology," *Theological Studies* 30 (1969), 645-68.

⁵⁴A more detailed development on these three points is found in my article, "Moral Theology: The Present State of the Discipline," *Theological Studies* 34 (1973), 446-67.

identity primarily in terms of the observance of the moral teachings which have been proposed by the Church and thought to be the distinctive sign of being Catholic. If one insists on seeing the unity of the Catholic Church in terms of specific moral teachings, that unity will quickly be shattered. This is not the place to find either the unity of the Catholic Church or the distinctive aspect of Roman Catholicism. This same warning applies to those who want the Church to give absolutely certain answers on specific social and political questions facing society. In all these matters I think that the Church at times should teach on specific moral questions but in so doing cannot exclude the possibility that other members of the Church might come to different conclusions. From an ecclesiological perspective it is necessary to recognize that the hierarchical magisterium is only one part of the total teaching function of the Church and in some way all members of the Church do participate in that teaching function. Unfortunate consequences have arisen from associating the teaching function with the juridical aspect of the Church and from restricting the teaching office to giving authoritative answers to particular problems. In this connection it is necessary to recognize the need for the personal responsibility of the individual but also the limitations and sinfulness that can affect every individual. Within the community of the Church the individual can find help and guidance in conscience formation. This is not the place to develop in detail how the Church should carry out its teaching function in the area of morality, but what has been said here and elsewhere sketches some possible approaches.⁵⁵

This section has been content to prove that those aspects most often proposed as distinctive of Roman Catholic ethics—the specific teaching on certain questions, natural law methodology and the authoritative teaching of the hierarchical Church—are no longer the distinguishing characteristics of Catholic ethics. In fact, on the level of Catho-

⁵⁵Daniel C. Maguire, "Moral Absolutes and the Magisterium," in *Absolutes in Moral Theology?* ed. by Charles E. Curran (Washington: Corpus Books, 1968), pp. 57-107; Maguire, "Moral Inquiry and Religious Assent," in *Contraception: Authority and Dissent*, ed. by Charles E. Curran (New York: Herder, 1969), pp. 127-48; Maguire, "Teaching, Authority and Authenticity," *Living Light* 6 (1969), 6-18. For helpful insights on the same question from a Protestant perspective, see James M. Gustafson, *The Church as Moral Decision Maker* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970).

lic ethics as lived in the Catholic community I do not see any distinctive aspects. Perhaps a Catholic gives more weight to the teaching function of the Church, but the fact that dissent on specific moral teachings is a possibility means that this aspect is no longer absolutized.

From the perspective of moral theology or Christian ethics as a thematic and reflexive discipline, I believe there is one characteristic which has consistently been a part of the Roman Catholic theological tradition. This distinctive characteristic can best be described as an acceptance of mediation. Christian ethics like any theological or religious ethics ultimately sees man's ethical behavior in terms of his relation to God, and more specifically at times, to the will of God. Catholic ethics has generally seen God's will as mediated through other things; for example, the older concept of natural law as the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is an excellent illustration of such mediation. The anthropological basis which has been a traditional starting point for Roman Catholic ethics likewise illustrates the reality of mediation. The generic emphasis on the human in Catholic moral theology illustrates the practical consequences of mediation.

In an analogous manner the role of the Church in moral matters again exemplifies mediation. The Church mediates the presence of the risen Lord to all mankind. The same basic concept of mediation can be found in the traditional Catholic emphasis on Scripture *and* tradition. Such a concept of mediation is opposed to a direct and immediate approach to God and the will of God. Even in the transcendental approaches in which there is no reflexively conscious knowledge of an object as such, the presence of God is still mediated through the consciousness of the subject. One can legitimately affirm that in general the Roman Catholic theological tradition in the area of morality has been characterized by its insistence on mediation.⁵⁶

In conclusion, this paper has maintained that there is a Christian ethic in so far as Christians are called to act and Christian ethicists reflect on action in the light of their explicitly Christian understanding of moral data, but Christians and non-Christians can and do share the

⁵⁶As an illustration of this point, see Eric D'Arcy, "'Worthy of Worship': A Catholic Contribution," in *Religion and Morality: A Collection of Essays*, ed. by Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 173-203.

same general goals and intentions, attitudes and dispositions, as well as norms and concrete actions. The difference is in terms of the explicitly Christian aspect as such. Likewise there is a Catholic ethic in so far as Catholics act and Catholic theology reflects on action in the light of a Catholic self-understanding, but this results in no different moral data although more importance might be given to certain aspects such as the ecclesial element. From the theoretical viewpoint of moral theology as a theological discipline, an emphasis on mediation has characterized the Roman Catholic approach.

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