

## SCRIPTURE AND THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC

Within the scope of this convention, called as it is to consider the question "Is there a Catholic theology?" it is imperative that we ethicists and moral theologians raise the question "Is there a Catholic moral theology?" A general response to this question will be the subject of Charles Curran's communication to this convention tomorrow. Consequently I have chosen to restrict the scope of my presentation to a consideration of a narrower issue, namely that of the use of the Scriptures in the formulation of a Catholic and/or Christian ethic.

The question that lies before us for our general consideration is, in fact, a double question. On the one hand, we might well ask, "Is there a Catholic moral theology?" and thereby raise the issue of pluralism in moral theology. On the other hand, we can ask "Is there a Catholic moral theology?" and thereby inquire whether or not there is a specifically religious (i.e. Catholic or Christian) dimension which can be brought to bear upon ethical questions. It is obvious to all of us that there is a factual pluralism in Catholic moral theology.<sup>1</sup> There is not now nor has there ever been a single Catholic moral theology. Not even during those centuries when natural law methodology was enjoying its heyday nor during those more recent times when Catholic moral thinking was largely influenced by magisterial statements and the formulations of Canon Law was there a single Catholic answer to any but the most obvious ethical questions, and even then we were confronted by more moderate opinions, pastoral judgments, the limitation of human freedom, and the subjectivity of the human conscience as the consensus opinion was brought to bear upon a specific case. The recognition of the factual pluralism in Catholic moral theology over the centuries means that a question such as the one I have cited, "Is there a Catholic moral theology?" can yield fruitful dialogue not on the issue of fact,

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Charles E. Curran, "The Present State of Catholic Moral Theology," in *Transcendence and Immanence. Reconstruction in the Light of Process Thinking; Festschrift in Honour of Joseph Papin*, ed. by Joseph Armenti, vol. 1 (Saint Meinrad: The Abbey Press, 1972), pp. 13-20, esp. p. 13; Roderick Hindery, "Pluralism in Moral Theology," in *CTSA Proceedings* 28 (1973), 71-94.

but only on the issue of the value of this pluralism. We might then consider the utility of such pluralism or the relationship between the magisterium and Catholic moral theology.

It is likewise obvious to all of us that the inquiry as to the specifically religious dimension attaching to a Catholic moral theology is one of the most vigorously debated questions in fundamental ethics today. Even a general discussion of this question necessarily involves some consideration of the use to be made of the Scriptures, and more particularly the use to be made of the New Testament Scriptures, by Catholic and other Christians in the formulation of their ethical positions.

For those of us who belong to the Roman Catholic tradition, it is but recently that the issue of the use of the Scriptures in moral theology has become particularly important. For years, the Scriptures—more specifically the decalogue—were used to provide categories within which it was possible to elaborate a moral theology. Alternatively the Scriptures were used to provide proof texts of ethical positions developed on the basis of a natural law methodology. In more recent times, however, we have come to recognize the importance of the Scriptures. Thus, Bernard Haring's *The Law of Christ*, standing at the end of the line of the manual presentation of moral theology, took the cue for its title from Rom 8:2 and attempted to utilize the Scriptures more thoroughly in its presentation of moral theology than did the generations of authors who preceded him. It was, in fact, this turning towards the Scriptures which largely contributed to the renewal of moral theology in the past two decades.

Vatican II's *Optatum totius* drew from the developing renewal to urge that those who teach moral theology should more thoroughly nourish the scientific exposition of their subject matter by scriptural teaching.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, *Gaudium et spes* has reminded us that morality must keep pace with scientific knowledge and an ever-increasing technology.<sup>3</sup> That ethicists, Christian and non-Christian alike, have done so has made the study of ethics something of a challenge in so far as the ethicist is confronted by and must deal with the knowledge explosion in the behavioral sciences, economics, political

<sup>2</sup>*Optatum totius*, 16.

<sup>3</sup>*Gaudium et spes*, 62.

science, medicine, law, and ever so many other scientific disciplines whose data must necessarily provide some of the information to be weighed by the ethicist as he attempts to do ethics in the modern world. The dialogue between ethics and the sciences is challenging and even difficult at times; nonetheless I think it is safe to say that most ethicists find it easier to incorporate the data furnished by the modern sciences into their ethical reflection than it is to use the insights of the Scriptures.

Those who attempt to use the Scriptures in the doing of Christian ethics inevitably encounter the difficulty that the Bible does not address itself to the great ethical questions of modern man. Even "the problem of war does not allow of a direct solution from the Bible."<sup>4</sup> Much less do the problems of abortion and polygamy, of genetic engineering in *in vitro* fertilization, and the ethical problems related to the establishment of multi-national corporations and world-wide political alliances admit of biblical solutions. The great ethical problems of modern man were unknown to the biblical author; indeed the major issues of social ethics were beyond his comprehension. By and large the vision of the biblical author looked to the rather narrow arena of the relationship between one man and his neighbor. Since, however, the complexity of contemporary society weighs heavily upon the Christian person in his relationships with others, can it be said that the moral norms contained in the Scriptures retain their validity as principles for the Christian person to use in his relationships with his fellows?

Despite this question and the limitations to which I have just pointed, it seems imperative that we raise the question of the relationship between the Scriptures and ethics if we are going to consider the issue of the possibility of a Christian ethic with the breadth which is its due. Indeed, for Catholic ethicists, it is imperative that the relationship between the Scriptures and ethics be considered. Theologians have long spoken of the Scriptures as the norm and source of theology. *Dei verbum* has proclaimed that the study of the Scriptures is the soul of sacred theology.<sup>5</sup> If little or no use of the Scriptures is made in the

<sup>4</sup>Karl H. Shelkle, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 3: *Morality* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1973), p. 235.

<sup>5</sup>*Dei verbum*, 23.

doing of moral theology, is it possible to speak of a Catholic moral theology? More generally, given the unique and normative role of the Bible in the Christian tradition, is it possible to speak of a Christian ethic without giving serious consideration to the relationship between the Scriptures and ethics?

Those who are inclined to opt against the possibility of a Christian ethic generally raise the issue of the relationship between the Bible and ethics. Two methodological questions are immediately raised. The first question concerns the way in which Christian ethicists should employ the Scriptures. The second question focuses upon the relationship obtaining between the content of the ethical teaching in the Scriptures and the content of non-biblical ethical teaching. Not finding an answer to the first question which will satisfy Christian ethicists as a group and finding little specific content which is proper to the Judeo-Christian tradition, some ethicists give a negative answer to the question, "Is there a Christian ethic?"

On the other hand, those ethicists who give a positive answer to this question inevitably do so on the basis of a Christology and/or the teachings of Jesus. Such is the point of view adopted by James M. Gustafson<sup>6</sup> and Karl Rahner,<sup>7</sup> among others. These authors, too, must confront the methodological question. Still maintaining that there is indeed a Christian ethic, Professor Gustafson has again raised the issue of the scriptural contribution to the Christian ethic in a recent article by asking a series of questions. He writes: "Is Scripture primarily a resource for theological reflection, and its consequences for ethics through its consequences for theology? Or are there ways in which Scripture has more immediate and direct authority for ethics? How does one choose within the richness of Scripture? Are there themes which are more persistent, and thus have more authority in Christian ethical thinking? What principles govern the use of Scripture by the moral theologian (or theological moralist)?"<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Cf. James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).

<sup>7</sup>Cf. James F. Bresnehan, "Rahner's Christian Ethics," *America* 123 (1970), 351-4; as well as the study by Jeremy Miller, O.P., which will appear in the Fall, 1974 issue of *Louvain Studies*.

<sup>8</sup>James M. Gustafson, "Toward Ecumenical Christian Ethics: Some Brief Suggestions," in *Festschrift in Honour of Joseph Papin*, p. 36.

These questions are questions which the moralist legitimately addresses to the biblicist. Unfortunately most of the studies on ethics in the Bible do not give an answer to these questions. Rather these studies, many of which are excellent, give a systematic presentation of the content of the Bible's moral teaching. Thus even Karl Hermann Schelkle systematically presents the basic concepts, basic attitudes, objectives and various areas for consideration in the third volume of his *Theology of the New Testament*. Rather than give such a survey or comment on the methodological questions which ethicists raise, I would rather reverse the question and consider how the biblical authors treat ethical issues. Such a consideration should not only shed some light on the factual pluralism of Catholic moral theology, but should also serve as a contribution to the ongoing dialogue centering around the issue "Is there a Catholic and/or Christian ethic?" How, then, do the scriptural authors respond to ethical questions?

#### THE SYNOPTICS

A brief consideration of three aspects of the Synoptic problem will help us to discern something of the way in which the Synoptists or the tradition which lies behind them responded to ethical questions. Thus we will treat the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1-8:1), the parables of Jesus, and the great commandment (Mt 22:23-33; Mk 12:18-27; Lk 10:25-28).

Matthew's Sermon on the Mount constitutes the Magna Carta of the Christian Life. Matthew's sermon is roughly parallel to Luke's Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6:20-49), although substantial portions of Matthew's Sermon find their closest parallel in the other sections of Luke's Gospel, notably in chapters 11 and 12. On the other hand, Matthew's sermon does not appear in Mark on whom the Matthean text is dependent. Matthew has, in effect, added to the Markan Gospel "teachings of Jesus" which have come to him from another source. Thus he is able to constitute a lengthy and principally ethical exhortation for the Christian community to which his Gospel is addressed. An analysis of the context of the sermon reveals that it partially replaces the Markan pericope of Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum (Mk 1:21-28).<sup>9</sup> Mk 1:21-22 simply states that "on the Sabbath he entered

the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes." Matthew has taken over the passage as the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 7:28b-29), but whereas Mark had failed to give the content of Jesus' teaching, Matthew offers us three chapters of teaching. This teaching is clearly presented as the scribal teaching of Jesus, since Mt 7:29 contrasts Jesus and "their scribes." This scribal teaching is apparently addressed to the crowds,<sup>10</sup> a group whom Matthew distinguishes from the disciples as well as from the Jewish authorities. Demonstrating a favorable attitude towards them, Matthew gives the crowds a prominent place within the universal missionary mandate of the Church.

Thus, when dealing with the extension of the gospel message beyond those to whom Jesus preached during his historical ministry, Matthew is able to offer what he considers to be a Christian ethic, yet he is not restrained by the paradigm of Mark's Gospel which serves as his principal source. For the instruction of his Church, a divided community,<sup>11</sup> he freely adds material that comes to him from another source. This material is presented on the authority of Jesus, the teacher, who has an authority which can be compared to that of the scribes, but which is, in fact, greater than that of the scribes and even greater than that of Moses himself.<sup>12</sup>

But isn't Matthew's additional source the famous "Q" (*Quelle*), which has as much claim to reflect the authentic tradition about Jesus as the Gospel of Mark itself?<sup>13</sup> A quick look at the antithesis of Mt

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Frans Neiryneck, *Duality in Mark. Contributions to the Study of the Markan Redaction*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium XXV (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1972), pp. 41-2.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Mt 8:28 but compare with Mt 5:1. For a reflection on the significance of the crowds in Matthew, cf. J. D. Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13* (London: SPCK, 1969), p. 27.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. William G. Thompson, *Matthew's Advice to a Divided Community*, *Analecta Biblica*, vol. 44 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970).

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Mt 5:21ff.

<sup>13</sup>A paper of this length does not permit an adequate consideration of the use of Q in Mt 5-7, nor of the authenticity of the Q tradition. Some pertinent remarks are given by Vincent Taylor, "The Order of Q," in *New Testament Essays*

5:21-48 offers some valuable insights. Considerations relative to the form, content, and source of these antitheses lead us to divide them into two groups.<sup>14</sup> The first (vv. 21-25), second (vv. 27-30) and fourth antitheses (vv. 33-37) seem to radicalize the demand of the Law; whereas the third (vv. 31-32), fifth (vv. 38-42) and sixth (vv. 43-48) antitheses seem to imply that the Law is no longer valid. Each of the antitheses in the second group have a parallel in Luke, namely, Lk 16:18, 6:29-30, and 6:27-28, 32-36. This is an indication that they have come to Matthew from the Q source. Indeed on the basis of the principle of dissimilarity they have some claim to being authentic sayings of Jesus. On the other hand, the antitheses of the first group have no parallel in Luke<sup>15</sup> which leads us to suspect that they have not come to Matthew from his Q source. The catechetical material which they contain bears the imprint of material found in the Jewish catechism<sup>16</sup> and thus are of questionable authenticity. For our purposes, it is important to note that Matthew of the Jewish Christian catechetical tradition from which he draws has developed a context for this first group of antitheses in which Jesus is featured as the lawgiver, superior to Moses himself. As far as their pertinence for the Christian ethic is concerned, it is not their distinctive content which makes them appropriate to the Sermon on the Mount, but rather the fact that they are cited by Matthew who calls upon Jesus as the one in whose name this catechetical material is promulgated. Material from the Jewish catechetical tradition, taught within that tradition on the basis of its proper authority has been assimilated

(London: Epworth Press, 1970), pp. 90-7, esp. pp. 92-3; and "The Original Order of Q," in *ibid.*, pp. 95-126, esp. pp. 98-104. Cf. also T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1950), pp. 15-26.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. D. M. Albertz, *Die synoptischen Streitgespräche* (Berlin, 1931).

<sup>15</sup>I.e. with the exception of Mt 5:23b-26 for which a parallel can be found in Lk 12:57-59.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Krister Standahl, *The School of St. Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), p. 137. It may well be that the material contained in the first antithesis and parallel to Lk 23:57-59 was added by Matthew to the material which he had taken over from his source. Thus T. W. Manson is led to conclude that the original form of the first antithesis probably consisted of vv. 21-22a. The Matthean expansion of v. 22a is in keeping with Matthew's style, which often groups material by threes. Cf. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, p. 155.

into Matthew's Christian tradition and been promulgated on the authority of Jesus, the Supreme Lawgiver, who urges radical obedience to the demands of the Law. In a word, what is otherwise ethical for Matthew's Church has become a norm for the life of the disciple of Jesus.

The second group of antitheses has come to Matthew from the tradition of Jesus' sayings contained in Q. Nonetheless the presentation of these sayings in Matthew bears traces of Matthean redaction in so far as each of the sayings is preceded by the introductory *lemma*, "You have heard that it was said," a formula not found in the parallel version of the sayings found in Luke. Thus Matthew has taken over a traditional group of Jesus' logia and inserted them into his own catechetical framework. At the very least this is a change in format; at the most it is a change in form which underscores the authority with which Jesus uttered the ethical statements attributed to him, a point dear to Matthew, the redactor, as Mt 7:28b-29 clearly indicates.

It is within this second group of antitheses that we find the statement of Jesus' logion on divorce (Mt 5:31-32). Matthew's version of the logion differs notably from the Q version of the saying (Lk 16:18), in that Matthew has inserted the famous exception clause: "except on the ground of unchastity" (Mt 5:32a). There is no doubt that the presence of this clause results from Matthew's redactional activity. On the one hand, the exception is not found in the parallel text of Luke nor is it found in the indirect reference to Jesus' logion found in 1 Cor 7:10. On the other hand, a similar exception is found in Matthew's version (Mt 19:3-9) of Mark's conflict story on divorce (Mk 10:2-12). Moreover the literary form of the logion in the Sermon on the Mount, as well as its context, and the literary form of the conflict story militate against the presence of an exception in the tradition lying behind Mt 5:31-32 and 19:3-9. Finally we would note that although there is a difference in the phraseology of the exception clause in 5:32a and 19:9 a similar exception is made in both instances and both focus upon the presence of unchastity (*porneia*) in the wife. Exegetes have long discussed the significance of the exception and this is not the occasion to further extend the debate on the matter. For the purposes of this presentation, it is sufficient to note that Matthew has introduced a "pastoral adaptation" into the tradition of Jesus' logion on divorce. By so doing, Matthew has maintained the common tradition, based on

Jesus' authority, according to which fidelity in marriage is an expression of the will of God, but also renders his judgment that in a particular instance some exception to the ideal can be deemed legitimate. Unlike Paul, he does not attribute the exception to his own authority, albeit based in that of the Spirit (1 Cor 7:15, 40b), but to the authority of Jesus. In ethical terms, Matthew has maintained as a formal norm the ideal of fidelity in marriage, but has developed a concrete norm which is in apparent opposition to that otherwise held by the Christian communities of his generation.

Before turning from the divorce pericopes, we should again turn our attention to the Markan conflict story. The Matthean version of the story has no parallel to Mk 10:12, "and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." The absence of this clause from Matthew and the fact that it is not present in the Q version of Jesus' logion on divorce give us every reason to suspect that it did not originally belong to the tradition which Mark has used. In fact, the divorce of a Jew by his wife was unknown to first-century Palestinians. Since, however, the divorce of a husband by his wife was known to the Greco-Roman world, Mark or the tradition which he was following developed the logion of Jesus so that it would be more fully relevant to the Hellenistic world in which the Gospel was preached. In other words, sensitivity to the formal norm of fidelity in marriage to which the concrete norm of Mk 10:11 bears witness led to the development of a new concrete norm (Mk 10:12) so that the formal norm might not lose any of its binding character.

When we turn our attention to the parables of Jesus, we are reminded of the words of Charles Dodd who wrote: "the Church, looking for guidance in the teachings of the Lord, would naturally tend to re-apply and re-interpret His sayings according to the needs of the new situation; and that in two ways (i) they would tend to give a general and permanent application to sayings originally directed towards an immediate and particular situation; and (ii) they would tend to give to sayings which were originally associated with the historical crisis of the past an application to the expected crisis of the future."<sup>17</sup> For our purposes, it is the first type of re-application of the parables which gives

<sup>17</sup>C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Fontana, 1961), p. 100.

some indication as to how the biblical authors approached ethical issues. The parables of Jesus are the segment of Jesus' teaching which is most widely accepted as authentic by today's scholars.<sup>18</sup> Yet we might note that the axiology of the early Church has had its influence on the fashion in which the parables appear in the written gospels. Thus many writers would speak of the hortatory use of the parables by the Church in so far as the parable tradition was used to inculcate moral values. Among the moral values to which the Synoptic tradition of the parables bears witness are fidelity to commitment and authenticity. It is in terms such as these that contemporary axiologists might speak, but the appreciation of these values and their relevance for the life of the Christian was already sensed by the biblical authors. They taught these values by expanding the tradition of Jesus' parables. A couple of examples will suffice to make the point clear.

One of the few parables which stands in all three of the Synoptic gospels is the parable of the sower (Mt 13:1-9; Mk 4:1-9; Lk 8:4-8) which is accompanied by an interpretation in each of the three Synoptic accounts (Mt 13:18-23; Mk 4:13-20; Lk 8:11-15). Scholars such as Jeremias and Linnemann<sup>19</sup> have clearly shown that the interpretation did not belong to the original strand of the parable tradition. Among the several arguments which can be cited are the inconsistency of the interpretation itself—does the seed represent the word (Mk 4:14) or those who hear the word (Mk 4:15ff.)? Moreover, the language of the parable itself bears the characteristics of translation Greek from an earlier Aramaic version, whereas the interpretation is written in ordinary Koine Greek. Finally, the language and interest of the interpretation is largely that of the primitive Church.

The point made by the appended interpretation is fidelity to the word of God which has been received. As such it is a religious value which is expressed by the explanation of the parable. However this

<sup>18</sup>Cf. James M. Robinson, "Jesus' Parables as God Happening," in *Jesus and the Historian (Colwell Festschrift)*, ed. by F. T. Trotter (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), p. 134; Gunther Bornhamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 69.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, rev. ed. (New York: Scribner, 1963), pp. 77-9; Eta Linnemann, *Jesus of the Parables* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 117-9.

religious value is a specification of the moral value of fidelity to commitment. In its somewhat allegorical interpretation of the parable, ecclesial tradition also alluded to some of the counter-values which can militate against fidelity to commitment, e.g. riches (Mk 4:19). Moreover an appreciation of the value of fidelity to commitment and the necessity of patient perseverance as a quality of fidelity has apparently even led to a change in the parable narrative itself. Mk 4:5b, 6b, and 8b are apparently redactional insertions made to facilitate the hortatory use of the parable preserved in Mark's Gospel.<sup>20</sup> The few additional words are somewhat redundant in the narrative, but point to the importance of perseverance in fidelity, the point explicitly made in the interpretation which follows.

To cite another example of ethical sensitivity impinging on the tradition of the parables, we can refer to the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. This parable is almost as well known as that of the sower even though it stands only in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 18:9-14). The parable shows every evidence of having been conveyed through a period of oral transmission. Its claim to authenticity is very strong in so far as the setting of the parable is clearly Palestinian and the point of the story is at odds with the position generally accepted in the Judaism of the times. The point of the story is that it is the publican rather than the law-abiding Pharisee who is justified. The original conclusion is found in Lk 18:14a, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." The tradition of the Church added to the original conclusion a moralizing exhortation, "for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 18:14b). "Thereby the parable received a commonplace ethical meaning which is far removed from its wording,"<sup>21</sup> writes Martin Dibelius. In fact the moralizing conclusion is inconsistent with the parable and those who interpret the parable on the basis of the final conclusion present in Luke's text invariably miss the very point of Jesus' parable itself.

The moralizing conclusion ultimately expresses the value of human

<sup>20</sup>Cf. John D. Crossan, "The Seed Parables of Jesus," *JBL* 92, No. 2 (1973), 244-66, esp. 244-51.

<sup>21</sup>Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, rev. ed. (New York: Scribners, n.d.), p. 253.

authenticity. What is most significant to our purposes is that, in both the case of the parable of the sower and the case of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican tradition has added to a parable of Jesus a moral exhortation which is foreign to the point of the parable itself. In this way the axiology of the early Church receives expression. In this way, too, the values held by the early Church are endowed with a new authority in so far as they are proclaimed as the teaching of Jesus himself.

The third passage to which we must turn our attention is the pericope on the great commandment (Mt 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-34; Lk 10:25-28). According to the Markan schema, this is the fourth of the Jerusalem conflict stories. According to its literary form, it is a classical example of the conflict story in that (1) the occasion of the story is presented; (2) a question is asked by the opponent(s); and (3) the response of Jesus is given.<sup>22</sup> The question put to Jesus, "Which commandment is the first of all?" must be understood according to its Palestinian setting. Rabbinic tradition sets the number of commandments at 613.<sup>23</sup> Within this context it was not unusual for Jews to ask about the chief commandment. Nor was it unusual for rabbis to summarize the commandments, even if the summary offered varied from rabbi to rabbi.

The Markan version of the story is somewhat longer than its parallels in Matthew and Luke. Moreover it tends to make a point somewhat different<sup>24</sup> from that underscored by each of the other evangelists. Its length is due, on the one hand, to Mark's citation of the *Shema* (Dt 6:4) as the first element of Jesus' response (Mk 12:29), and, on the other hand, to the scribe's acceptance of Jesus' response—an acceptance

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Albertz, *Die synoptischen Streitgespräche*, p. 6, who cites the characteristics of the conflict story. According to Rudolf Bultmann, the Markan version belongs more properly to the genre of (rabbinic) scholastic dialogue. Bultmann willingly admits, however, that the Matthian and Lukan versions are conflict stories. Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 22.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Abraham H. Rabinowitz, "The 613 Commandments," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 759-83.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Victor P. Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (Ashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 29.

which merits Jesus' praise (Mk 12:32-34). The emphasis on the oneness of God, recapitulated in the scribe's response, is an indication that the Markan version of this pericope has particular significance within the context of the Christian mission to the Gentile world. The present formulation is directed against Hellenistic polytheism and thus has acquired an apologetic character. The general point of the Markan text, as this is underscored by the scribe's response, is that what is essential to true religion and salvation is the worship of the one true God and obedience to the moral law. That obedience to the moral law is essential to the worship of the one true God and that such obedience is related to the kingdom of God is the key point of Mark's narrative. Thus the moral life is qualified by Mark as having a religious dimension.

However, it should be noted that, strictly speaking, Jesus does not answer the scribe's question. The scribe has asked about the first commandment. In reply Jesus offers both a first and second commandment. In effect the scribe is told that there is no single commandment that can be ranked above the others. The two commandments (Dt 6:5 and Lev 19:18) together are greater than the other commandments. Although Mark tends to separate the two commandments by listing them as first and second, Jesus' response (vv. 30-31) and that of the scribe (v. 33) indicate that the one cannot be placed before the other in the religio-salvific order.

The Matthean and Lukan versions of this pericope are obviously derived from the Markan version. By deleting from and adding to the Markan tradition, each of the other evangelists has somewhat modified the point of the Markan story. Matthew's version reflects Matthew's concern with the law (Mt 22:36, 40). Among the Pharisaic rabbis it was commonly understood that the written and oral Torah together constituted the content of divine revelation and that the individual precepts of both the written and the oral Torah were of equal obligation.<sup>25</sup> Thus for Matthew, the lawyer's question was ultimately concerned with whether Jesus accepted this unitary vision of the Torah. By choosing but two precepts of the Torah, Jesus sets his opinion over against the common interpretation of the Law. Thus we find that in

<sup>25</sup>Cf. George F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), pp. 5-6.

Matthew, unlike Mark and Luke, no agreement of the lawyer with Jesus is reported. While contrasting Jesus with the other interpreters of the Law, Matthew is able to affirm that there is a similarity between the first great commandment and the second great commandment. The double commandment of love is the hermeneutical key to the interpretation of the many precepts of the Law. Matthew does not intend to imply that all moral precepts can be derived from the twofold commandment of love; but that the twofold command of love must serve as the interpretative key of all the norms formulated in the twofold Torah. In a sense, Matthew's Jesus rejects here, as in the Sermon on the Mount, a legalistic approach to the concrete moral norms set down in the Torah.

Luke's version of this incident differs sharply from that of Mark and Matthew in that the focus of the story has been shifted away from the precepts themselves to the person who is confronted by moral demand. This is apparent from the beginning of Luke's account when the question put to Jesus is, "Teacher, what must I *do* to inherit eternal life?" The emphasis on doing rather than on speculating continues through v. 28 and receives illustrative confirmation in the parable of the Good Samaritan with its forceful conclusion, "Go and do likewise" (Lk 10:37). In fact, Luke has taken the Markan tradition and reinterpreted it in a father personalistic sense. According to Luke's version, the questioning lawyer is already aware of the twofold commandment of love, which is conflated by Luke into a single precept (Lk 10:27). His question then becomes, "And who is my neighbor?" (v. 29), a formulation which calls for a determination (i.e., limitation) of the concept of neighbor. By offering a parable instead of a legal answer to this question, Luke's Jesus engages the inquisitive lawyer in a concrete situation. As the parable develops, the emphasis seems to lie on the concrete acts of compassion extended to the man who had fallen among robbers. It is his personal needs that must be attended to if the single commandment of love (v. 27) is to receive a faithful response. The legalism implicit in the lawyer's question is broken through still further in the counter-question which concludes the parable, "Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" (v. 35). The Lukan response shows that the moral question does not ultimately resolve itself in the formulation of norms to be

rigorously adhered to, but to the adoption of a personal attitude in which each man sees himself as a neighbor to others. The focus is no longer upon the law itself but upon the person in relation to another person.

Despite the shift in emphasis which the parable entails, its force is somewhat lost if the religious and Christian context of the entire discussion is overlooked. The introduction to the parable has raised the eschatological question (v. 25), and thus the urgency of the discussion which follows is underscored. The statement of the lawyer (v. 27) prefaces the discussion with the presupposition that the moral life is part of the fabric of the religious life. In a word, there is a religious quality to the ethical quest. When we shift our attention from the introduction to the conclusion of the parable, it becomes quite clear that Luke's Jesus is not simply a teacher who interprets the Law but is one who authoritatively commands that the Law be kept: "Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'" Luke's vision of Jesus is that of a "sovereign commander"<sup>26</sup> who authoritatively demands of his followers that they live the ethical life in its fullness.

Before moving on to some of the other books of the New Testament, in an attempt to appreciate something of their approach to ethical questions, we might briefly summarize some of the key features of the Synoptists' treatment of ethical questions. First, it appears that each of these evangelists sees the moral life as integral to the Christian life. To follow Jesus is to live ethically. This is so true that the evangelists, particularly Matthew and Luke, present Jesus as the one who commands his followers to live the ethical life. For the disciple of Jesus there is a note of urgency that attaches to the ethical life in that it is related to the kingdom of God and/or eternal life. Secondly, the content of Jesus' ethical teaching, as proposed by each of the Synoptists, does not derive exclusively from Jesus himself. The greater part of that teaching is taken over from the precepts of the Law and Jewish catechetical material. Even the twofold commandment of love derives from the Old Testament, even though it is promulgated anew on the authority of Jesus. Thirdly, formal moral norms seem to be much more significant for the evangelists than concrete norms. It is not that con-

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament*, p. 39.

crete norms are unimportant, but that the evangelists add to or delete from concrete norms as the circumstances warrant. Thus the evangelists attest to a certain pluralism in the solution of concrete moral problems. Finally, there is a decided shift in the solution of ethical problems from reliance upon traditional norms to a more personal response to personal needs. Ultimately this can be seen as true discipleship, i.e., the following of Jesus who ministered to the needs of men rather than limit his actions to those explicitly required according to traditional norms.

### PAUL

Again it might prove useful to study the ethical approach of Paul from several different points of view. We can, as Victor Furnish<sup>27</sup> does, begin with a survey of the sources of Paul's ethical thinking. His review of the Jewish, Hellenistic, and "Christian" sources used by Paul has led to the conclusion that Paul does not hesitate to borrow his material from secular sources, the Old Testament and the tradition of Jesus' sayings. Beyond that Paul's ethical teaching contains material similar to that offered by the rabbis, Jewish apocalyptists and Hellenistic popular philosophers. Indeed, in his paraenesis, Paul constantly showed himself to be an eclectic. It is the tradition of Jesus' words which he proclaims in 1 Cor 7:10. It is the decalogue which he cites in Rom 13:9. Yet much more frequently he borrows his ethical material from "secular" sources. This is most notable in Phil 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." None of these terms is specifically Christian and some of them do not appear in any other part of the Pauline corpus, nor even in any other book of the New Testament. It is as if Paul had taken a list of virtues from some philosopher and incorporated it into his text.<sup>28</sup> In any event Paul exhorted the Philippian Christians to pursue those moral values which were counted honorable by men at large.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Victor P. Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968).

<sup>28</sup>Cf. F. W. Beare, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1959), p. 148.

Even more clearly indicative of the fact that Paul borrowed his ethical material from secular sources is the presence in his letters of the so-called catalogues of vices and virtues. Among the former we can note Rom 1:29-31; 13:13; 1 Cor 5:10-11; 6:9-10; 2 Cor 12:20-21; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 4:31; 5:3-5; and Col 3:5-8. Among the latter we find Gal 5:22-23; Eph 4:2-3; Col 3:12-14. These catalogues are similar to those found in Stoicism and first-century philosophy and may well have their origin in the Stoic-cynic diatribe.<sup>29</sup> In the form in which they are found in Paul, however, these catalogues show lexicographical similarities with similar catalogues found at Qumran and among the other writings of late Judaism. Thus it is quite legitimate to enter into a debate on the issue of whether Paul borrowed these catalogues directly from the Hellenistic world in which he preached or whether they came to him via the route of Hellenistic Judaism. In either event, Paul essentially incorporated secular ethical materials into his letters. We should take particular note of the fact that catalogues of this type are not limited to one or another of Paul's letters but are found in each of the major Pauline letters.

The use of these secular materials implies that Paul has adopted essentially secular standards as the material out of which his paraenesis is formed. Man's common moral estimation is that which Paul adopts and proposes to his essentially Gentile Christian audience. On occasion Paul cites the judgment of other Christian communities (1 Cor 11:16), but more frequently he cites the moral standards of men at large as a source of reflection for his churches. Thus he chides the Church at Corinth for tolerating the presence of evil whose presence would not be tolerated by non-Christians (1 Cor 5:1). The post-Pauline Church followed the example of the master by citing the estimation of men as a standard for the Christian. Thus 1 Tim 3:1 writes of the qualities of the man who aspires to the office of bishop that "he must be well thought of by outsiders."

If Paul employs secular categories as the content of his paraenesis, further attention ought to be paid to the manner in which he uses this

<sup>29</sup>Cf. S. Wibling, *Die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament und ihre Traditionsgeschichte unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Qumran-Texte, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, vol. 25 (Berlin: Topelmann, 1959).

material. First of all, we might note that there is a wide diversity in the virtues and vices cited in the different catalogues. Thus the catalogues of vices in the major letters cite some thirty-nine different vices. Moreover, Paul adds an *et cetera* to the catalogues of vices found in Gal 5:19-21 and Rom 1:29-31. A similar phenomenon is found in Rom 13:9 where the reference to the decalogue concludes with "and any other commandment." It is as if Paul is implying that the moral demand cannot be limited to predetermined categories, no matter how traditional or authoritative they may be. This implies a certain openness in his ethical sensitivity. A similar openness is implicit in his frequent reference to *agape*. The Christian is exhorted to walk in love (Eph 5:2). Love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:10). Love, with its many qualities, should be the moral aim of the Christian (1 Cor 13:1-14:1). Thus, Paul presents *agape* as the norm of the Christian life but does not define its content.

Another characteristic of Paul's use of his "borrowed" ethical material is that it places a heavy emphasis on the community and its needs. The community orientation of the Pauline ethic appears very clearly in those chapters of the first letter to the Corinthians which deal with the Eucharistic celebration and charismatic gifts (1 Cor 11-14). However this community orientation is also present in Paul's presentation of secular ethical material. For example, the lists of vices which appear in his letters contain a heavy preponderance of those social vices which disrupt the life of the community. Thus Rom 1:29-30 cites envy, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, and slander among the vices present in those who do not acknowledge God.

Furthermore, although the letters of Paul occasionally contain a concrete moral norm—e.g., "Pay taxes to whom taxes are due" (Rom 13:7) or "Let the thief no longer steal" (Eph 3:18)—the emphasis of his paraenesis lies on the proclamation of moral value and the presentation of formal norms. Inversely, his tendency is to cite the vices which should have no place in the lives of Christians rather than to cite and condemn specific immoral actions. It is to be granted that this is a matter of emphasis, but it is an interesting emphasis. To some extent the phenomenon is to be explained by the simple fact that Paul is a founder, builder, and leader of congregations. He is an apostle who evangelizes and exhorts his congregation in a general sort of way. How-

ever, the Pauline letters are of an occasional nature. They generally respond to the problems of the communities which Paul has evangelized. Yet, whereas he tends to be more specific in dealing with ecclesial problems and the interpretation of his *kerygma*, he tends to speak of ethical matters in a more general and formal manner.

Finally we must turn to a brief consideration of the trait which most sharply distinguishes Paul's use of ethical material from that of his non-Christian contemporaries. This trait is the Christological and soteriological character of Pauline ethics. This characteristic is clearly manifest in Paul's use of a catalogue of vices and a catalogue of virtues in Gal 5:16-25. The entire passage lies within the scope of the great Pauline antithesis between *sarx* and *pneuma*. As is well known the Pauline *sarx* does not so much describe man in his corporality, as it describes man in his creatureliness and proneness to sin. The sarkic man is one who has not yet come under the power of the Spirit of God. Subsequently Paul is able to use a catalogue of vices (vv. 19-21) to describe the condition of man who is still alienated from the power of God's spirit. Idolatry, selfishness, envy and the like are not characteristic of those who are heirs to the kingdom of God. On the other hand, Paul is able to use a catalogue of virtues (vv. 22-23) to describe the condition of those who have received the Spirit. These virtues are so many charisms, or gifts of the Spirit, to those who belong to Christ Jesus. Broadly considered, it is not only ecclesial ministry which is charismatic by nature, but it is also the moral life which is essentially charismatic. For Paul, the gift of the Spirit is the ground of the moral life. This Spirit is, of course, the Spirit of Christ.

Thus far we have not made mention of the household codes found in the late Pauline and post-Pauline literature. Such a code appears in Col 3:18-4:1, which has more developed parallel in Eph 5:21-6:9. Even in the simpler version of this code in Colossians it is service of the Lord which is cited as the principle motivation for the faithful fulfillment of one's duties as a member of a household. "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. . . . Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. . . . Slaves, obey in everything . . . in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord." In the middle of this household code, Paul inserts a statement which summarizes to some extent his approach to human responsibility in ethical matters: "What-

ever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ" (Col 3:23-24). As Paul consistently makes use of the title Lord (*kurios*) in this context, it is clear that he understands the moral life to be not so much a response to a traditional mandate coming from the earthly Jesus, but that he would rather understand the moral life as a response in service to the risen Lord.

A variation on this theme appears in Eph 5:2, "And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and service to God." This concludes the paraenesis found in Eph 4:25-5:1. It indicates that Christ is the exemplar of the moral life or more precisely it indicates that Christ's loving sacrifice is the exemplar, ground, authority and norm for the love which should characterize the life of the Christian.<sup>30</sup> Despite the secularity of its content, Paul's ethics are decidedly Christian precisely in so far as Christ can be cited as exemplar, ground, authority and norm of the moral life.<sup>31</sup> This notion receives striking expression in Phil 2:5-11. Few passages in the New Testament have received as much study as the Christological hymn of vv. 6-11. The specific exegesis of the hymn cannot be our concern here. What is of concern to us is that Paul has made use of a pre-Pauline soteriological hymn to ground his ethical appeal.<sup>32</sup> For Paul it is not the human personality of Jesus which is the ground of his ethical appeal. It is not even the mere fact that Jesus is Lord, with the concomitant notions that the Lord is one to whom service is due and that Jesus as Lord is one who will return at the Parousia in his capacity as judge, which ultimately grounds the Pauline ethic. Rather it is the Christos-salvific mystery in its entirety that grounds Paul's ethical appeal to the churches. Within this context it should not be overlooked that it is precisely as risen Lord that Jesus the Christ is able to give the vital Spirit who is the enabler of the moral life.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (Dusseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1957), p. 232.

<sup>31</sup>In this regard it is interesting to note that it is only in Phil 4:8 that Paul speaks of virtue (*aretè*). It is not the notion of virtue which grounds his ethics, but the notion of the Christian's existence in Christ.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Beare, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, p. 75.

Admittedly this survey of Pauline ethics is all too brief. I have not considered in any detail the content of Paul's ethics,<sup>33</sup> the issue of natural motivation in ethical matters,<sup>34</sup> the question of conscience,<sup>35</sup> the relationship between the sacraments (Baptism and Eucharist) and the ethical life,<sup>36</sup> Pauline mysticism and the significance of the "In Christ" formula,<sup>37</sup> the rich Pauline notion of love,<sup>38</sup> and so very many other significant aspects of Paul's ethics.<sup>39</sup> Each of these justly requires a presentation in themselves and such a presentation would, I suggest, be of value to Catholic ethicists. What I have rather chosen to do is to dwell on those features of the Pauline ethic which indicate that Paul has essentially adopted secular standards—standards that in some instances prove a scandal for the men of our times, particularly when we consider Paul's reflections on the responsibilities "in the Lord" of women and of slaves.<sup>40</sup> He has taken these secular standards and inserted them in a theological context which in fact gives new meaning to the ethical life. That context is the Christ event in its fullness. Finally, we should note that Paul is less inclined to stress the growth of the individual than he is to stress the growth of the community and that he is more inclined to stress moral value (or disvalue) than he is to propose concrete norms.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), pp. 261-306; etc.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Robert C. Augusten, *Natural Motivation in the Pauline Epistles* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966); etc.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. C. A. Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament*, SBT, vol. 15 (London: SCM Press, 1955); M. E. Thrall, "The Pauline Use of Synidesis," *New Testament Studies* 14, No. 1 (1967), 118-28; etc.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Baptism in the Thought of Saint Paul* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), pp. 187-96.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (London: A & C Black, 1931); Alfred Wikenhauser, *Pauline Mysticism. Christ in the Mystical Teaching of St. Paul* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969); etc.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Ceslaus Spicq, *Agape in the New Testament*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1965); etc.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Otto Merk, *Handeln aus Glauben, Die Motivierung der Paulinischen Ethik* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1968); etc.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. W. J. Richardson, "Principle and Context in the Ethics of the Epistle to Philemon," *Interpretation* 22, No. 3 (1968), 301-16.

## JAMES AND JOHN

Before bringing this presentation to a conclusion, it would seem that I ought to address myself to the approach to ethics found in the Letter of James and the Johannine corpus. I do so not only because the names of James and John are linked together by the gospel tradition, but also because they stand at opposite ends of the spectrum when we consider the books of the New Testament. The Gospel of John, in particular, has traditionally been considered the most theological of all the gospels. Christology is its touchstone; and its Christology is certainly among the most sophisticated Christologies of the entire New Testament. Because of its theological character and its Christological emphasis, John is among the least of the books of the New Testament as far as the *quantity* of its ethical content is concerned. On the other hand, the letter of James is among the least theological of the books of the New Testament. Its Christology is so little in evidence that some would doubt its right to belong to the canon and others would doubt its Christian origin. What it does contain is a great quantity of ethical material.

Among the New Testament books James is, in fact, unique precisely by reason of the quantity of ethical material which it contains. It is clearly not a letter, even though the opening verse gives the appearance of a letter. What it reminds us of is not the letters of Paul, but the sermons of Hellenistic literature and the exhortations of some of the Hellenistic Jewish writings. It belongs to the literary genre of paraenesis.<sup>41</sup> As such it is characterized by a thorough-going eclectism, drawing its materials from many diverse sources. In a sense, the letter of James is almost the *Poor Richard's Almanac* of the first Christian century. Yet to a large degree its content is similar to that of the Sermon on the Mount. It draws from the Old Testament, the Stoics, and the traditions of the sages. Drawing from these different traditions, it contains what Dibelius has rightly called "a conventional ethic."<sup>42</sup> It contains no program for world reform nor does it offer any radically new

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Martin Dibelius, *Der Brief des Jakobus*, KEK, vol. 15, 11th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), p. 19.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

approach to morality. Its Christian character comes not so much from the fact that the name of Jesus is cited in 1:1 and 2:1 nor from the fact that it is a document which attests to the presence in the early Church of a dispute deriving from a misunderstood Paulinism (Jas 2:18-26), but from the fact that the expectation of the Parousia is cited as a basic motivation for the practical Christian life (Jas 1:2-5; 12; 5:7-11). As is the case with most Christian ethics of the New Testament period, eschatology<sup>43</sup> is a significant factor in shaping the form of concrete norms and providing a motivation for the moral life.

If the letter of James can be compared with the other ethical sections of the New Testament by reason of its eclectic content and its theological context, it nonetheless is distinct from other New Testament writings by reason of the quantity of the former and the paucity of the latter. Hence it appears somewhat out of place in the New Testament. From the standpoint of the canon of Scripture, the letter of James stands in a relationship to the rest of the New Testament somewhat analogous to the relationship that exists between the Canticle of Canticles and the Old Testament. The presence of each of these books is somewhat anomalous in the Canon. Yet it is this very fact that should hearten moralists. The presence of a book such as that of James in the New Testament attests in a most striking fashion that the moral life is indeed integral to the Christian life. In its singularity the canonical letter of James indicates that the study of ethics is to be ranked as a theological enterprise, despite the particularity of its object and the distinctive quality of its methodology.

As we now turn our attention from the most ethical to the most theological book of the New Testament, the Gospel of John, we are confronted by the fact that the keeping of Jesus' commandments is presented as the means by which Jesus is loved (Jn 14:15). Yet the Gospel of John does not long dwell with explicit attention on the commandments of Jesus. The Gospel speaks to us of moral values, truth, fidelity, friendship, etc.<sup>44</sup>—all of which must be understood in their specifically Johannine sense. Nonetheless, the sole commandment

<sup>43</sup>Cf. C. H. Dodd, *Gospel and Law. The Relation of Faith and Ethics in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), pp. 25-32.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. Noel Lazure, *Les Valeurs Morales de la Théologie Johannique, Études Bibliques* (Paris: Gabalda, 1965).

presented *expressis verbis* is the new commandment of Jn 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." The commandment receives a slightly different qualification in Jn 15:12 where it is described as "my commandment": "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." The presence in the Johannine text of two versions of what is essentially the same commandment is part of the great problem of the multiplicity of Johannine sources, and, more specifically, the problem of the two farewell discourses in John (Jn 14; Jn 15-17). Each formulation of the commandment must be interpreted within its own context. Thus the new commandment of Jn 13:34 must be related to the footwashing of Jn 13:1-20 and the commandment of 15:12 must be related to the vine and the branches of Jn 15:1-11.

There are four points upon which our attention should rest for a moment as we consider the new commandment of John's Gospel. First of all, it is a matter of a commandment (*entole*). The term reflects the authority of the one who commands. In the circles within which the Johannine tradition was developed the commandment of Jesus recalled the commandments of Deuteronomy, when Yahweh commanded his people. In keeping with the high Christology of the Fourth Gospel it is now Jesus, about to be glorified, who commands his disciples. That Jesus is the one who commands is fully emphasized in Jn 15:12, where the Johannine Jesus speaks of *my* commandment.

Secondly, the commandment of Jesus is a *new* commandment. The commandment which Jesus gives is qualitatively different from those commandments with which it is compared. As a new commandment, it is a commandment that is proper to the eschatological era and is radically different from the commandments of the old dispensation. Thus the Johannine commandment of love cannot be equated with the Synoptic love command. The perspective of the Synoptics is that of the Old Dispensation and the manifold prescriptions of the Torah, from among which Jesus chose the principal commandments. Now we have a new perspective, the reality of the eschaton which has dawned with the ministry of Jesus.

Thirdly, the commandment of Jesus is that his disciples should love one another. Love of those belonging to the Christian brotherhood is

the hallmark of the Johannine love command. Indeed the love which the disciples bear for one another should serve as a witness to those who do not belong to the brotherhood: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 14:35). The content of the love command is not further spelled out except to the extent that the footwashing pericope gives an indication that this love is a love which manifests itself in service. This fact and the indication that the disciples of Jesus should *love one another* is an indication that the Johannine tradition does not view love as a vague disposition of heart, but that it presents love in its concrete reality. The love which Jesus commands takes the form of service to those who are in close relationship with the disciple of Jesus.

Finally, and most distinctively, the Johannine love command offers Jesus himself as the *exemplar* of love. Thus the Christology which characterizes the entire Gospel also characterizes the Johannine ethic. Christian love as the norm of discipleship (friendship) is a love which is to be patterned after Jesus' own love. His was a love of service; his was a love unto the end. Yet it is not a matter of simply following the example of the historical Jesus, not even to the extent that some glimpse of the historical Jesus can be obtained from the Fourth Gospel. Rather Jesus' love for his disciples is a response to and manifestation of his Father's love for men (Jn 15:9). The contextual relevance of the parable of the vine and the branches is thus clear. The Christian loves because he abides in Jesus and is thereby enabled to love with the very love of the Father himself, for Jesus and the Father are one. In a word, Christian love is a participatory love, of which the human love of Jesus for his disciples is a model and exemplar.

#### CONCLUSION

The literature on ethics in the New Testament is quite vast and it has not been my intention to make a summary of this literature in this presentation. Indeed, it would have been both foolhardy and impossible to do so. Nor have I intended to resolve the methodological questions which ethicists raise when they deal with the Scripture and ethics. Just as certainly I have not attempted to give an overview of the content or general characteristics of New Testament ethics. Such overviews are

readily available in a much more comprehensive fashion than these few brief pages allow. What I have presented is simply a brief essay on the way that some of the authors of the New Testament books addressed themselves to the ethical issue. Hopefully such an essay can make some small contribution to the ongoing question about the existence or non-existence of a Christian ethic.

From this rapid survey, it appears that each of the New Testament authors considers ethical teaching as an *integral part of the gospel message*. Each in his own way incorporates ethical content into his work. In a very unique way the presence of the letter of James in the New Testament canon attests to the belief of the patristic Church that ethics is a part of the Christian message considered in its totality.

Secondly, there is an eclecticism that characterizes the New Testament ethic. The sayings of the sages, the ethics of the Stoic philosophers, contemporary ethical standards, the teaching of the rabbis, the Jewish catechism, the texts of the Bible, and the good sense of the New Testament authors each contribute to the content of New Testament ethics. The result is that there is both an *openness* and a *pluralism* in New Testament ethics. Consequently it is not easy to, nor is it legitimate to, reduce the ethical teachings of the New Testament to a single ethical view.

Thirdly, *formal norms* seem to predominate over concrete norms in the ethical teaching of the New Testament authors. The axiology of the different New Testament authors is readily manifest. Nonetheless the New Testament authors are well aware that formal norms can only be implemented by *concrete action*. Thus an occasional concrete norm is introduced into the biblical text. A solution is given to a concrete problem. Concrete examples are given to "flesh out" the formal teaching of the biblical writings. Even the catalogues of vices and virtues which appear in Paul's letters are a literary device used to concretize the ethical demand for the Christian.

Fourthly, "*agapeic love*" is the single thread that links together the ethical teaching of the various New Testament authors. But each of the New Testament authors approaches the matter of love in a different way. The ones show that it must be expressed in action. Others show that it can sum up all ethical norms. Still others propose that it is the gift of the Spirit of God. Love is related to the personal needs of those

with whom the Christian comes into contact; thus, love is concretized and personal. Ultimately John will present Jesus himself as the exemplar, and more than exemplar, of love as the norm of the Christian life.

Finally, the New Testament authors present their eclectic and somewhat divergent views in a *theological context*. It is this context which makes the ethic of the New Testament a Christian ethic. In summary fashion, it can be said that this context is *Trinitarian*. Ethics are Christian in so far as the living of the ethical life is a way of being a disciple of Jesus. Love is a Christian virtue in so far as it is a matter of loving as Jesus loved. Ethics are Christian in so far as to love as Jesus loved is to respond to the command of the Father and to love with the love of the Father himself. The ethical life is a necessary response to the presence of the kingdom of God among us. This quality underscores the *urgency of the ethical demand* as it relates to the Christian. Moreover it explains why the ethical demand of the New Testament is open-ended. Man's response to the kingdom of God can be no more limited to *a priori* categories than can the kingdom of God itself be characterized. Finally there is a pneumatic dimension to Christian ethics in so far as the Spirit of God, given to the children of God, is the power wherewith they are enabled to respond to the ethical demand. The Spirit is himself both the gift of power and the source of demand. The command of the Lord Jesus, the presence of the kingdom and the gift of the Spirit are so many ways of saying that there is a Christian motivation for living the ethical life.

In a word, it is this theological context that makes of the New Testament ethic a Christian ethic. Its content is essentially secular, but could we expect more of a God who has chosen to enter into our history and who sent his Son to be one of us.

RAYMOND COLLINS  
*The Catholic University of Louvain*  
*Belgium*