

JESUS AND ETHICS

What does Jesus have to do with ethics? Whenever Christians seek to understand the fullness of Jesus Christ, we go back to Jesus of Nazareth.¹ We discover in the particular story of this historical figure the one whom the abstractions of Christology often obscure. Contemporary Christologies from below have grounded their investigations in the specific stories of the Gospels. Recently, moral theologians are taking a similar turn to answer the question, What moral significance does Jesus have for Christians today?

Many theologians respond that Jesus is irrelevant, peripheral, or too concrete to have any direct import for ethics. The natural law manualists made little or no reference to the historical founder of the community which they served. Revisionist moral theologians insert chapters on Christian discipleship in their treatises but relegate the influence of religious experience and symbols to the general background of morality.² At best, faith commitments provide motivational support to human obligations and values while leaving their contents untouched. Those who find their inspiration in Immanuel Kant are even more restrictive about the moral significance of the person and message of Jesus. Those varieties of autonomy ethics influenced by Kant find it virtually impossible to qualify the noun "ethics" with the adjective "Christian."

Finally, there are others today who consider the figure of Jesus too narrowly particular to function in ethics. For some feminist theologians the maleness of Jesus so validates patriarchal oppression that he could never serve as a source of liberating practice. Others who seek a universal religious morality object that the figure of Jesus is too Western, too dualistic, too historically concrete. I will propose an alternative view in which Jesus plays a normative role as the concrete universal of Christian ethics.³ Through the imagination his story is paradigmatic

¹See Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1988) 130. When referring to Jesus, I intend what John P. Meier does: "The object of Christian faith is a living person, Jesus Christ, who fully entered into a true human existence on earth in the first century A.D., but who now lives risen and glorified, forever in the Father's presence. Primarily, Christian faith affirms and adheres to this person—indeed incarnate, crucified, and risen—and only secondarily to ideas and affirmations about him." Meier, "The Historical Jesus: Rethinking Some Concepts," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990) 22.

²See Franz Böckle, *Fundamental Moral Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1977) 119.

³William Wimsatt describes "the concrete universal" as a work of art or literature which presents "an object which in a mysterious and special way is both highly general and highly particular." Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*

for moral perception, motivation and identity. Christian moral reflection cannot work adequately if Jesus is replaced by a generic abstraction which is imaginatively vacuous.

As I understand Christian faith, Jesus Christ is confessed to be the definitive but not the exclusive revelation of God.⁴ Theologically, this confession means that for Christians Jesus Christ is the one to whom the revelations of other traditions point. Morally, this confession means that Jesus Christ plays a normative role in Christians' moral reflection. His story enables us to recognize *which* features of experience are significant, guides *how* we act, and forms *who* we are in the community of faith.

I. THE COMMAND TO DISCIPLESHIP

What does Jesus have to do with Christian ethics? I want to consider two important recent approaches before launching my own proposal. The first is Pope John Paul II's new encyclical "The Splendor of Truth" (*Veritatis Splendor*) which asserts the religious foundations of Christian morality more than any previous papal teaching.⁵ The second response comes from liberation theology, the most important new vision of Christian life in our time. Both of these positions move Jesus of Nazareth into center stage for moral theology, but in a limited manner.

Although the encyclical discusses the importance of discipleship to Jesus, it concentrates on his commandments and ignores the more complex role of imagination and emotion in forming Christian character. The Pope asserts that Christian morality gets its distinctive content from following Christ in loving service and obedience. He begins with the dialogue between Jesus and the rich young man in Matthew 19. This encounter locates morality in the more fundamental response to God and the neighbor, a response of love and gratitude. Whenever we wrestle with the deepest meaning of our lives, we are seeking for God. Our longing for the good is radically longing for God, who is the transcendent, personal source of truth and goodness.

Taking the Christian moral path means not only obeying the commandments, but "holding fast to the very person of Jesus, partaking of his life and his destiny, sharing in his free and loving obedience to the will of the Father" (19). The central commandment of the Christian life is the new commandment of John

(Lexington KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1954) 71.

⁴As the epistle to the Hebrews states, "In times past, God spoke in fragmentary and varied ways to [us] through the prophets; in this, the final age, God has spoken to us through his son. . . . This Son is the reflection of the Father's glory, the exact representation of the Father's being." (Heb 1:1-3)

⁵John Paul II, "The Splendor of Truth," *Origins* 23/18 (October 14, 1993) 298-334. [Hereafter referred to as *VS*, and references in text are to the section numbers of the encyclical.]

13:34-5: "Love one another, just as I have loved you." The life of Jesus as a whole charts a distinctive way of loving that is normative for his disciples. The Pope writes, "Jesus' way of acting and his words, his deeds and his precepts constitute the moral rule of Christian life" (20). The basic moral imperative for Christians, therefore, is not "Be human," as some of the proponents of an autonomous ethics would have it, rather it is "Be human in the way that Jesus was human."

Jesus tells the young man that to seek God he must obey the commandments, specifically the second table of the Decalogue. Matthew's Jesus is the new Moses who reaffirms the commandments given on Mount Sinai through the original Moses. Those commandments spelled out Israel's response to God who had delivered them from the slavery of Egypt. "Jesus himself definitively confirms [the commandments of the Decalogue] and proposes them to us as the way and condition of salvation" (12).

The young man realizes that there could be more to life than following the commandments. He is so attracted by Jesus that he wants to take the next step, whatever it might be. Jesus invites him into the costly freedom of discipleship which carries morality to its perfection in love. "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, then you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (Matt 19:21). The commandments are the indispensable first step on the road that leads to companionship with Jesus, but not the whole journey. The next step would mean leaving his wealth in order to join Jesus on the road that leads to the cross.

Unfortunately, the encyclical fails to describe the full normative function of Jesus. Do his "way of acting, his words, [and] his deeds" count as much as his precepts? Or do they only furnish examples of the precepts? The encyclical concentrates on commandments because of its pastoral intention and the deontological method which it assumes.⁶ In order to demonstrate that the magisterium can authoritatively teach universal moral prohibitions, *Veritatis Splendor* portrays Jesus as a teacher who endorsed certain universal commandments and founded a teaching Church which continues to do so.⁷ Although deontological arguments may help establish the outer limits of morality, this approach makes it impossible to describe Christian discipleship as much more than obedience to authoritatively delivered commandments.

⁶Deontological ethics defines the good in terms of the right, often in reference to a priori principles or necessary truths which obtain irrespective of consequences. It contrasts with teleological ethics which defines the right in terms of the good and often takes certain consequences as central for the morality of an action or the justification of a rule.

⁷"Because the Church has been sent by Jesus to preach the Gospel and to 'make disciples of all nations . . . , teaching them to observe all' that he has commanded (cf. Matt 28:19-20), she today once more puts forward the Master's reply, a reply that possesses a light and power capable of answering even the most controversial and complex questions" (VS 30; see also 25-27 and 110).

A deontological interpretation sharply narrows the contribution that Scripture can make to morality. When you look at the Gospels through the lens of deontology, what you discover, not surprisingly, are rules and principles. The dialogue with the rich young man underwrites a deontological approach by explicitly linking the following of Christ to obeying the commandments. In fact, this passage is one of the few places in the Gospels where Jesus refers to the Decalogue. Jesus was not primarily a rabbi who spent his time elaborating and applying the law's ordinances.

Other moral lenses would allow you to see different aspects of Jesus' moral teaching. The Gospels portray Jesus challenging those who obeyed all the commandments of the Law and still missed the revelation of God. Liberation and character ethics pay attention to the parables which challenge the usual moral presuppositions of his audience, to the healings and table-fellowship with the outcasts of his society which become paradigmatic for the compassionate practice of his disciples, and finally, to the cross and resurrection which define the disciples' destiny.

This fuller range of his moral teaching indicates that Jesus charts the way of discipleship by doing more than establishing a teaching Church which would reinforce universal moral standards. The Christian way of life is rooted in a transformation of character which requires a community shaped by the love and justice of God. Since the community instructs its members by example and spirit more than by issuing authoritative directives, the key Gospel directive for applying the moral message of Jesus is "Go and do likewise" rather than "The one who hears you hears me."⁸

II. LIBERATION OF THE OPPRESSED

The second approach to Christian ethics comes from third world Christians who are struggling against enormous poverty and oppression. Like "The Splendor of Truth," liberation theology locates Jesus of Nazareth at the center of ethics, but in a different way. The central virtue of this ethics is not obedience to law but solidarity with the poor. They are the concrete universal through which we accurately read the story of Jesus. Because he came especially for them, his liberating attitudes and actions give content to the Reign of God in history.⁹

⁸The bishops at Vatican II cautioned that the magisterium cannot be expected to have all the answers; unfortunately, this point is not mentioned in "The Splendor of Truth." "Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role." Second Vatican Council, "Gaudium et Spes," *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbot, S.J. (New York: America Press, 1966) 244.

⁹See Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical Theological View* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1993) 67-104.

The poor are also the historical location through which Christians can discover Jesus. When we identify with their struggle for life, we recognize that Jesus came first of all to liberate the poor. We come to know Jesus through his embodiment in the crucified people of history and, conversely, we learn from Jesus the true worth of those crucified for the sake of justice. Since the way to God in our time runs through their struggle, we come to know Jesus in solidarity with the poor.

Last March I went to El Salvador with a group from Santa Clara University, and we got some experience of this logic of identification. We stood at the altar of the chapel where Archbishop Romero was assassinated while celebrating the Eucharist in 1980. We spoke with women who had been tortured by the Salvadoran military for working with the poor. We visited communities that had been driven into exile for years and had returned to claim their land from the rich who had stolen it. We saw the faith and hope which enabled the people to forgive their enemies and heal the memory of the thousands murdered by the military.

The most overwhelming moment happened when we visited the Jesuit university in San Salvador, Universidad Centramericana (UCA), where the six Jesuits and two women were murdered in 1989. The chapel of the UCA is named for Archbishop Romero. As we walked up to it, we saw his prophetic words on the outside walls, "If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people." The verb used is *resucitar*, which explicitly means "to resurrect." We went inside to pray and saw the stations of the Cross on the inside of the same wall. They were not pictures of the passion of Jesus but fourteen ink drawings of Salvadoran victims of torture: men, women and children stripped, beaten, mangled and dead. The message was direct: the cross and resurrection of Jesus continue today in the passion and victory of the people of El Salvador. I had never seen such a stark expression of faith in the presence of Christ, a statement of hope in the face of despair. They identified their sufferings with the ongoing cross and resurrection, the present action of God in the world as God defeats sin and injustice through the travail of the Body of Christ. They saw themselves as making up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ by extending his trials and triumph into new times and places. We stood in the garden where the Salvadoran military shot the six Jesuits as they lay on the ground. We saw a book that had been in the room of Juan Moreno, Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*, which describes the passion of Christ as the compassionate identification of God with human suffering. The book was spattered with Moreno's blood which fell on it when he was gunned down. The identification comes full circle: Christ shed his blood out of compassion for the broken; Moreno and the others shed their blood in the same way because they found solidarity with the poor in the struggle for freedom and justice. And out of this solidarity unto death, hope enters history once again in the paradox of crucifixion.

Jon Sobrino, from that same community at the UCA, describes the dynamics of Christian solidarity: "It is in virtue of this proximity of Jesus to his own world that he is felt by the poor of Latin America today to be someone who is close

to themselves."¹⁰ Notice how the logic of identification operates: as they become aware that Jesus drew close to the poor of his day, the poor of today recognize that He is present to them. They do not merely adopt his story as their own in order to bring meaning to their experience. When they discover that they are part of the continuing story of Jesus the Liberator, that he suffers and dies with them so that they share his new life, that story becomes normative good news for them.¹¹ When others join this struggle in an act of solidarity, that also brings them into solidarity with God who continues to act in history through the liberating event of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Sobrino writes:

God incarnate, incredibly close to the poor, and oppressed in the scandal of the cross, is approached through kinship with God in incarnation among the oppressed of history—in persecution, in the surrender of our very lives with them. The God of hope . . . of resurrection . . . is approached by a kinship with God in the stubbornness of hope in, through and against history.¹²

Liberation theology and the encyclical urge Christians to identify with Jesus as the religious link between the biblical text and today's crises. They believe that he continues to work in the world in ways similar to the Gospel story. For the Pope, Jesus continues to speak as he did to the rich young man; now he commands through the voice of the hierarchical Church. For Sobrino, the cry of the poor is the demanding invitation of Jesus to solidarity, to join God's preferential option for the poor. However, we must ask the same question of Sobrino as we did of the encyclical: does this account appreciate the full range of Jesus' story? Important as both accounts are, they may truncate the story of Jesus and equate discipleship with a single aspect of his life. Not all the parables are about the struggle for justice nor are all the friends of Jesus poor. Does liberation ethics call for a heroic Christian life which skirts close to moral rigorism? Do either heroic obedience to God's law or heroic solidarity with the persecuted shed sufficient light on the ordinary realms of family, work and friendship where we spend our daily energies?¹³

¹⁰Ibid., 171.

¹¹The different normative function of Jesus stands out in their respective treatments of martyrdom, which is the most potent human testimony to the One who laid down his life for his friends. In "The Splendor of Truth," martyrdom displays obedience to God's will and "the exaltation of the inviolable holiness of God's law" (90). The Pope identifies these as the central motivations behind Jesus' journey to and through death. Latin American theologians interpret martyrdom differently: it is done *for others*, the ultimate act of *solidarity with the poor persecuted for justice's sake*, not primarily obedience to an inviolable commandment. The thousands of contemporary martyrs in Latin America bring to high relief what many more of the poor are doing: they are giving their lives so that others may live. "They are reproducing what Jesus did. . . . They are corresponding to the loving reality of God." Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation*, 168.

¹²Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation*, 40.

¹³Stephen J. Pope writes: "Christian preference for the poor should not disregard the

III. JESUS THE CONCRETE UNIVERSAL FOR CHRISTIAN MORAL LIFE

How is Jesus normative for Christian moral living? The encyclical and liberation theology give partial answers because they take a limited aspect of this story as normative. I want to propose that the entire story of Jesus is normative for Christian ethics as its concrete universal. It is not the only norm, because human nature, practical effectiveness, accurate descriptions of data, and the accumulated wisdom of the tradition are also normative. Nevertheless, whatever actions and dispositions these other sources suggest at least must be compatible with the basic patterns inherent in the story of Jesus. In addition, Jesus as concrete universal may urge certain actions and dispositions, like forgiveness of enemies, to which the other sources might not attach the same importance. Jesus functions normatively in Christian ethics through the paradigmatic imagination and moral discernment, which are distinctive ways of exercising moral authority.

The greatest challenge to having Jesus function as a moral norm is epistemological: how can a particular life have universal significance? We tend to associate universality with abstract terms and general propositions like the requirement of justice that equals should be treated equally. Because this norm is abstract and general, we expect it to be able to measure any particular situation where fairness is at issue. No abstract formula, however, can epitomize Jesus of Nazareth because his significance inheres in a particular life. The truth which he discloses has universal significance which comes not by way of theory or logical necessity but by plunging into the depths of the particulars. His meaning is inseparable from his story; it resides in the full range of encounters, personalities, and deeds which the Gospels relate.¹⁴

In recent decades theologians have selected literary categories to articulate the concrete meaning of the story of Jesus and Israel: metaphor, symbol, parable, biography, and narrative have all had their turn. Discussion recurs around certain descriptions of Jesus' moral impact: he shapes, or informs Christian action which

natural affective and moral preferences for kith and kin that are rooted in human nature—the closest bonds of the traditional *ordo caritatis*—nor need it generally obliterate the other forms of partiality, friendship, collegueship, etc. which form part of the ethos of our particular society and culture and which in their general form reflect the exigencies of human nature." From his "Proper and Improper Partiality and the Preferential Option for the Poor," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993) 269.

¹⁴Sandra M. Schneiders points out the dangers of selective use of the canon of Scripture, even of rejecting oppressive biblical texts, in her "The Bible and Feminism: Biblical Theology" in Catherine Mowrey LaCugna, ed., *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993) 31-57; my approach also is indebted to her *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).

conforms to, corresponds to, or embodies aspects of his life.¹⁵ They all express the activity of *patterning*, of extending to a new material the shape which was inherent in an original. The distinctive arrangement of elements in the religious original serves as paradigm, exemplar, prototype and precedent to guide the actions and dispositions of Christians in new situations. Because the Gospel patterns combine a stable core with an indeterminate, open-ended dimension, the moral response can be both creative and faithful. We extend a pattern by *analogy* since we move from the recognizable shape in the first instance to novel situations within certain limitations.¹⁶ Mark Twain remarked that history does not repeat itself but it does rhyme. Catching that rhyme is the business of analogical reflection, the process in which experience jells into usable patterns. This exercise of the imagination has two features:

1. A pattern in the original instance that is partly determinate and partly indeterminate.
2. Some process for extending it to novel situations.

Analogical imagination requires a creative transfer because, like Exodus and Exile, the Gospel events and parables are *historical prototypes* rather than *mythical archetypes*, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has written.¹⁷ The new response

¹⁵E.g., Jesus Christ is the symbolic form used to interpret experience (H. Richard Niebuhr); the qualities expressed in God's dealings with humans ought to shape and inform the dispositions of believers (James Gustafson); the moral response must conform to the shape of the engendering deed (Joseph Sittler); the Gospel narrative should render a community of character that embodies its concerns (Stanley Hauerwas); and the dangerous and repressed memories of Jesus evoke corresponding hopes and actions in the community of disciples (J. B. Metz, David Tracy, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza).

¹⁶Some authors prefer to characterize moral reflection as metaphorical rather than analogical to emphasize its patterned and figured nature: see Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 53-61. Sallie McFague cautions that theology which is analogical pretends to know too much about the transcendent. She prefers to speak of theological reflection as metaphorical or parabolic. See her *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 1-29.

¹⁷Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) 14. She gives normative priority to the experience arising from "the contemporary struggle of women against racism, sexism, and poverty as oppressive systems of patriarchy." This makes the experience of women's oppression the concrete universal for the interpretation and moral use of Scripture, as Jon Sobrino has done with the experience of the poor of Latin America.

Michael Walzer argues that the pattern of Exodus has been prototypical for Western political experience. The meaning and possibility of politics in the West has its proper form:

- first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt;
- second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land;

harmonizes with the prototype, but in order to be responsive to the actual needs of the day, it cannot copy the original as if it were a completely determined archetype. A paradigm is "a normative exemplar of constitutive structure" but it always has an indeterminate, openended dimension.¹⁸ The paradigm is an image, a selective but partial aspect; it is not an exhaustive picture to be replicated. Perhaps this explains why the Reign of God and the Spirit remain undefined in the Gospels: they are the dynamic, open dimensions of the action of God which shatter the established order. Nevertheless, they remain connected with the Jesus of the Gospels: his life both announces and exemplifies the Reign of God. The elusive Spirit instills in the disciples "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16), i.e., the dispositions and values of Jesus, as it animates the communal body of Christ. Since Jesus participates in the Reign of God and Spirit we should be wary of making him an icon to be reproduced.

Cognitive scientists and historians of ethics support an ethics grounded in paradigms rather than abstract principles. They argue that a deontological ethics which deduces obligations from universal, invariant principles does not do justice to the psychological processes of moral reflection or to the history of moral practice. Mark Johnson, George Lakoff, Sidney Callahan, and others turn the deductive model upside down.¹⁹ Particulars are the basis of ethics, not universals. Moral concepts derive from patterns in particular experiences; moral reflection moves analogically from paradigmatic cases to more problematic ones that contain novel elements; and moral wisdom rests more on discerning sensibility than deductive acumen.

Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin's study of casuistry argues persuasively that moral knowledge is essentially particular. Practical normative reflection proceeds analogically not deductively. It emulates the practice of good

—and third, that "the way to the land is through the wilderness." There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching.

Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985) 149 (quotation is from W. D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982] 60).

¹⁸Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989) 67: "Something serves as a paradigm by exhibiting a pattern, a coherent nexus of relations, in a simple and obvious way. Paradigms have a heuristic function, serving to reveal the larger patterns in broader areas of experience that might otherwise remain inaccessible because they appear incoherent or bewildering in their complexity." See Johnson, *Moral Imagination*, 78.

¹⁹Johnson, *Moral Imagination*, and *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987); Mark Johnson and George Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980); Sidney Callahan, *In Good Conscience: Reason and Emotion in Moral Decision Making* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).

physicians who know the central repository of typical medical conditions and use them as paradigms to diagnose and treat particular patients:

Medical students and interns in training are shown cases that exemplify the constellations of symptoms, or "syndromes," typical of these varied conditions. In this way they learn what to look for as indicative of any specific condition and so how to recognize it if it turns up again on a later occasion. The key element in diagnosis is thus "syndrome recognition": a capacity to *re-identify*, in fresh cases, a disability, disease, or injury one has encountered (or read about) in earlier instances.²⁰

Medicine and ethics move from paradigmatic cases to problematic ones by analogical reflection which detects familiar patterns in novel circumstances. Those who expect highly exact, universal and invariant judgments from either discipline forget that medical students learn to become physicians by making hospital rounds, not by performing laboratory analyses of chemical compounds.

I propose that Jesus of Nazareth functions normatively as a *concrete universal*, the central paradigm in Christian ethics. His particular story embodies a paradigmatic pattern which has universal moral applicability. We move imaginatively from his story to our new situation by analogical reasoning. The concrete universal guides three phases of moral experience: perception, motivation, and identity, since it indicates

1. *which* particular features of our situation are religiously and morally significant;
2. *how* we are to act even when *what* we should do is unclear; and
3. *who* we are to become as a people and as individuals.

First, let us consider how concrete universals guide us to perceive *which* features of experience are significant. Consider the role of vision and attention in morality: Why did Plato and Aristotle fail to notice the plight of the poor of Athens when Isaiah and Jeremiah so focused on them that they made treatment of the poor the measure of Israel's moral performance? The issue here lies not with intelligence, but in the well-tutored imagination. The paradigms of an insistent tradition sharpened the vision of the prophets. They paid attention to the

²⁰Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 41. Their definition of casuistry emphasizes the practical character of moral rules: "the analysis of moral issues, using procedures of reasoning based on paradigms and analogies, leading to the formulation of expert opinions about the existence and stringency of particular moral obligations, framed in terms of rules or maxims that are general but not universal or invariable, since they hold good with certainty only in the typical conditions of the agent and circumstances of action." *Ibid.*, 257. For the relation of casuistry to theory see Jonsen, "Of Balloons and Bicycles: or, The Relationship between Ethical Theory and Practical Judgment," *Hastings Center Report* 21/5 (September-October 1991) 14-16. See also John D. Arras, "Getting Down to Cases: The Revival of Casuistry in Bioethics," *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 16 (1991) 29-51.

widow, the orphan, and the immigrant workers out of Israel's central exemplary memory. They caught the rhyme between their liberation from Egypt and the need of the marginated in subsequent eras. Through the lens of the Exodus paradigm, its beneficiaries could recognize their obligation to "Go and do likewise" in turn. Note the illuminating power of the paradigmatic imagination: they *saw* the poor because they *saw* them *as* fellow sufferers who were likewise dear to the God of Israel. By contrast, because Plato and Aristotle did not *see* the poor *as* morally significant, they did not *see* them at all. The Homeric and tragic traditions of Greece contained no exemplary memories which would enable the them to recognize barbarians, slaves, women or the poor as worthy of moral consideration, let alone as moral agents.

Moral recognition is a special case of perception in general. We only *perceive* what we *perceive as* something. Garret Green calls the little word "as" "the copula of the imagination" because it defines the selective and interpretive role of imagination. "We always see something by recognizing that it is *like* something else; that is, we always see according to some paradigm."²¹ The paradigmatic imagination is precisely the ability to see one thing *as another*. Gestalt psychologists hold that all perception is patterned because we grasp sense data as arranged, as wholes before we distinguish the individual parts. Just as we read units of print as words and phrases, not as individual letters that then get composed into words, so we do not first apprehend sense data and then compose it interpretively into perceptual patterns. Perceptual wholes are not merely the sum of their parts but patterns set by language, memory, and custom which are the arrangements in which data is initially apprehended. If our initial take on perception proves inadequate, we have to modify these presumptive categories.

When the imagination is unfunded with exemplars, experience is aimless and blind. William James wrote, "*My experience is what I agree to attend to. Only those items which I notice shape my mind—without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos.*"²² Sense data rarely registers bluntly; when it does we are surprised, at a loss. They say that when a moment of silence occurs in mid-town Manhattan, people say, "What was that?" Sirens, horns, gunshots, the staccato of jackhammers, and the roar of traffic are familiar enough to ignore. Perceptual experience is not just an imprint; it follows interest, though James failed to appreciate how linguistic and symbolic paradigms focus attention by selecting some features as relevant and discounting others.

Religious experience is selective insofar as it relies on communal paradigms to notice which features are significant. These patterns, however, are paradigms not icons. Analogical reflection helps Christians spot the rhyme between Jesus'

²¹Green, *Imagining God*, 72.

²²William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1890) 380-81.

story and their own. To put it starkly, we are called to follow Jesus, not to imitate him. The danger of some "imitation of Christ" spiritualities is that they terminate in the person of Jesus, like worshipping an icon, whereas the Jesus of the Gospels was radically concerned about God and about the poor, the outcast, the sinner. To be a disciple of Jesus is to take seriously what he took seriously. What Jesus took seriously was not himself but the breaking in of the Reign of God and the people most in need of justice and reconciliation. Jesus in the Gospels does not draw attention to himself but to the action of God in their midst.²³ So to take Jesus seriously is not to imitate his actions and attitudes because he acted that way, but because these are the ways to heal the world, reconcile enemies, and transform oppression into justice. His authority, in other words, derives not only from his compelling goodness or his vindication by God, but also from the urgency of human needs. Christians should recognize these urgent needs through Jesus' compassionate response to them and begin to recognize him through solidarity with those in need.

2. Next, we move to the question of motivation. As the concrete universal, Jesus indicates *how* to act even when his story does not directly indicate *what* to do. A pattern of dispositions anchored in the Gospel guides recognition into action which is consonant with the experienced exemplar. Paradigms become scenarios for action by evoking affective energies in distinctive ways. Affectivity deteriorates into sentiment when it shuns action. As Oscar Wilde noted, "A sentimentalist is one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it."²⁴ Recall that paradigms become practical in two stages: they contain a discernible pattern which can be noticed elsewhere; second, there are procedures for extending the analogy to new situations. Analogical reflection extends biblical paradigms primarily through dispositions which are configured into a pattern by those original events. Other controls also come into play: ordinary standards of morality, consequences, and community practice among them.²⁵

The debate on the distinctiveness of Christian ethics reached a dead end because it concentrated on the *what* of morality to the exclusion of the *how*. Asking what principles or values obligated Christians, and no one else, proved unfruitful. Since the autonomy school sharply distinguished motive from moral con-

²³H. Richard Niebuhr pointed out the dangers of a Christ-centered piety which made him an exclusive, completely determinate archetype. See Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1960) 107-10. What Green says about Scripture applies also to Jesus: "The Scriptures are not something we look *at* but rather look *through*, lenses that focus what we see into an intelligible pattern." *Imagining God*, 107.

²⁴Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, 1897 in *The Annotated Oscar Wilde*, ed. H. Montgomery Hyde (London: Orbis, 1982), cited in Ronald de Sousa, *Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge MA: M.I.T. Press, 1990) 320.

²⁵See William C. Spohn, "The Reasoning Heart: An American Approach to Christian Discernment," *Theological Studies* 44 (1983) 43.

tent, it relegated Scripture to providing affective backing to common human values and obligations. Although I would argue that Scripture does mandate certain practices for members of the community of faith which are not necessarily mandatory for all persons, Scripture exerts its normative function primarily by setting a pattern of dispositions rather than dictating directly the content of action.²⁶

Terry Anderson illustrates this use of the Christian imagination. When he was released from seven years of captivity in Lebanon, reporters asked him whether he felt hatred for his captors. He replied "As a Christian, I am required to forgive my enemies. No, I don't hate them. I am trying to love them." The Hezbollah guerrillas had given him a single book, the Bible, in the first year and he read it cover to cover fifty times. His dormant Christian faith gradually revived and he began to consider his captors as objects of forgiveness rather than resentment. Surely, he read the commandment "love your enemies," but the commandment alone did not shape his response. Multiple metaphors and stories combined to interpret his captors as a special kind of enemy: the image of turning the other cheek, the reaction of Jesus to his enemies, the rebuke of Peter's violent defense, the story of the crucifixion against the background of Isaiah's Servant Songs, and Paul's description of the ministry of reconciliation, among others. Taken as a framework, these multiple scenarios converged on a strategy: the appropriately Christian response was forgiveness rather than vindictive retaliation.

An affective response is appropriate when it fits both underlying scenarios and the situation of action. The relation is triangular: the agent, the actual situation, and culturally learned scenarios of emotion.²⁷ Since objective conditions have diverse potentials for interest and value, we need a variety of perspectives, images, and metaphors to bring out the potential relevance of these conditions. They call for multiple metaphorical mappings to disclose their affective richness and help imagine a response that will harmonize with our basic convictions. On the other hand, this metaphorical inspection may disclose contradictions between our actions and basic convictions. When Anderson pointed out that the Koran does not allow people to be kidnapped or imprisoned without trial, he confounded and infuriated his Muslim fundamentalist captors. They had to deny the obvi-

²⁶It should be noted that denying the wall of separation between motive and content means affirming that why and how we act enters into the moral meaning of what we do. Vincent MacNamara has made the case for the connection of motive and content in *Faith and Ethics: Recent Roman Catholicism* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1985) 103-10. See also James Gaffney, "Parenthesis and Normative Morality," in his *Matters of Faith and Morals* (Kansas City MO: Sheed & Ward, 1987) 134-51.

²⁷"Paradigm scenarios are the original rituals that give meaning to our present responses, however private. And where there is no adequate original scenario to fall back on, the adult ritual plays much the same function of defining and framing." De Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion*, 323.

ous inconsistency between their actions and the paradigms of a just Allah who shows compassion to the defenseless. Similarly, Christian theologies which advocate justice without regard for compassion would be inconsistent with the normative paradigms of the Gospel.

Christians should meet their adversaries with distinctive perspectives and dispositions that make forgiveness appropriate. As Gospel perspectives and ideals become their habits of the heart, this discernment may occur almost unconsciously. According to many spiritualities, the more mature Christian will often realize what to do spontaneously, or at least she will screen out intentions that clash with her fundamental convictions. Certain virtues become connatural to the person growing in Christian holiness; they are internalized scenarios which convey a readiness to act in certain ways. They can tutor the imagination, making it possible to discern an appropriate response with ease and joy. When we know *how* to act, *what* to do may become clearer.

Following the triangular model of emotional appropriateness, these dispositions must also be appropriate to the particular situation of action. They have to enable us to navigate in a particular complex of conditions, intentions, persons, etc. If emotions are at variance with these actualities, we judge them to be inappropriate. How truthful are these dispositions? Are they projections onto experience or do they disclose its hidden depths? When Jeremiah and Isaiah saw the poor *as* the special people of God, they were not seeing them *as if* they were. Through the memories of tradition they grasped the true value of the poor. Biblical images can disclose obscure qualities of experience so that we have a more adequate evaluation of what is happening.

Several American thinkers have maintained that biblical images can unlock dimensions of experience and enable us to respond more adequately. The nineteenth century theologian Horace Bushnell wrote, "There is a Gethsemane hid in all love, and when the fit occasion comes, no matter how great and high the subject may be, its heavy groaning will be heard—even as it was in Christ."²⁸ For Josiah Royce, the Pauline symbol of atonement so captured the human process of betrayal and reconciliation that we would have had to invent it if the biblical tradition had not provided it.²⁹ Although H. Richard Niebuhr's ethics was radically theocentric and he condemned the use of Jesus as an icon, he recognized the indispensable role that Jesus plays for Christians in construing what was going on:

The God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ is now trusted and known as the contemporary God, revealing himself in every event; but we do not understand

²⁸Horace Bushnell, ed. H. Shelton Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) 144.

²⁹See Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 165.

how we could trace his working in these happenings if he did not make himself known to us through the memory of Jesus Christ; nor do we know how we should be able to interpret all the words we read as words of God save with the aid of this Rosetta stone.³⁰

Liturgy, sound preaching and prayerful contemplation on the incidents of the life of Jesus and the story of Israel will help evoke characteristically Christian dispositions. Fidelity to acting on them habitually will sharpen an intuitive discernment of actions that correspond to the mind of Christ. Obviously, this growth requires repentance and continuous conversion since bias and sin are never eradicated. Although praxis is the condition for moral insight into the scenarios, contemplative reflection imprints the scenarios in imagination and affect. The community of faith is the ordinary place where this schooling of the affections takes place.

3. Finally, the story of Jesus is normative for *who* we are to become as Christians, individually and communally. Here too we employ a pattern by analogous reflection. Just as paradigms highlight certain features for moral recognition and scenarios establish a distinctive set of dispositions, narrative forms the normative basis of personal identity. In the latter part of the twentieth century, the question of identity seems to have displaced the issue of purpose as the fundamental moral issue: *why* we do anything gains its meaning from *who* we are, have been and are becoming.

Contemporary cognitive psychology agrees with narrative theology that humans need a moving dramatic unity, a story with a beginning, middle and end to bring integrity into their personal histories. No other imaginative device can synthesize our diverse moments of experience into a coherent whole.³¹ Truthful narratives indicate that the self is at stake in moral choices. False narratives obscure vital areas of experience and lead to self-defensive scripts in which the self holds center stage. Culture and traditions supply us with a considerable range of models, metaphors, scenarios, and roles. They do not, however, hang together without narrative structures, which supply "the most comprehensive synthetic unity that we can achieve."³² The self emerges through commitment and interpretation made possible by socially derived narratives, and in turn lives a unique version of them.

Narrative theologians have made the case that the story form of revelation is no accident. The self-disclosure of a personal God in history comes through a story conveyed within communities of memory and hope. One cannot fashion an identity around a creed or a set of doctrines. Christian salvation comes through a particular human story which offers a framework extending from birth

³⁰Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation*, 113.

³¹See Johnson, *Moral Imagination*, 150-84; *The Body in the Mind*, 170-72; Callahan, *In Good Conscience*, 206-208.

³²Johnson, *Moral Imagination*, 170.

to death that enables individuals to accept the healing of their fragmentation and betrayals. Too often, however, Catholic theology has concentrated on the birth and death of Jesus for moral significance, as though what occurred between the Incarnation and the paschal mystery served only to fill up the interval. New Testament moral instruction revolves around this central event where the disciples are to identify with Christ.³³

Although the end of the story may provide the definitive vantage point on the life of Jesus, his entire life has normative significance. The full story can guide our response if we can enter imaginatively and faithfully into the scenes and encounters of that history. Recent Christology has unearthed the full humanity of Jesus who struggled with purpose, betrayal, opposition, doubt and failure all in relation to God and the arrival of God's reign. At the same time, the story of Jesus is not so determined that we cannot make it our own.

We identify with Jesus not only by taking seriously what he took seriously and acting in ways faithful to his story, but also by identifying with his social reality extended through time and space, the Body of Christ. Because Scripture addresses communities rather than individuals, the appropriate moral response is discerned within the community of faith.³⁴ How are we to respond to our challenges in ways analogous to the responses which the early Christian communities made to their own challenges as we strive to serve the same Lord? The Gospels themselves are products of such a process of communal reflection and response.

The biblical narrative prototype itself is open to revision, as Paul's ministry to the Gentiles proves. Subsequent application influences a prototype to bring out aspects latent in the original or even at variance with its presuppositions.³⁵ Radically new situations can lead to significant revision of biblical exemplars, including the central Christian one. Phyllis Trible and other feminist theologians have reinterpreted the Genesis accounts in light of the contemporary experience of women to bring out its message of equality to which patriarchal interpretations had been blind.³⁶ Reading the biblical stories through distorted lenses highlights

³³E.g., "Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed." (1 Peter 4:13)

³⁴See Stephen E. Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 29-44. Also Lisa Sowle Cahill, "The New Testament and Ethics: Communities of Social Change," *Interpretation* 44 (1990) and Richard B. Hays, "Scripture-Shaped Community: the Problem of Method on New Testament Ethics," *ibid.*, 42-55.

³⁵Jonsen and Toulmin show how "progressive clarifications of exceptions through history may allow rebuttal of the initial moral presumptions . . . [as well as] the occasional situation in which the very factual underpinnings of the presuppositions are challenged by technical or social changes." *Abuse of Casuistry*, 318.

³⁶Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

the wrong aspects of the pattern and invites deceptive construals of what is going on in the present. Feminist and womanist theologians have eloquently shown how sexism, racism, and classism have used the story of Jesus in oppressive ways. Some correct the prototype by retrieving other biblical patterns which counteract these distortions.³⁷ If Jesus acted against the unjust structures and exclusive practices of his day, then Christians must do so today.

The question of identity raises one of the thorniest issues for contemporary Christianity. Is maleness so central to the identity of Jesus that he cannot serve as the Christian prototype? Some rejectionist feminists flatly declare that a male figure cannot save women. Ironically, both post-Christian feminists and Vatican declarations on the ordination of women fall into the same trap: they make a peripheral aspect of Jesus central to the paradigm. They accept an iconic Jesus rather than one who can be understood analogically. More mainstream feminists argue that concentrating on the maleness of Jesus blinds one to his saving and liberating potential.³⁸ Jesus Christ is the prototype of liberation not because he is male but despite it. The multiple images from the story of Jesus are mutually corrective, restoring a paradigmatic rather than an iconic norm. Other theologians seem to suggest that contemporary Christians should shift from the concreteness of Jesus of Nazareth to more generic terms: the Christ, Spirit, Logos or Sophia. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza points to an original community of disciples as the prototype of Christian equality and liberation.³⁹ Womanist theologians object to this move away from concreteness, as shown in Jacquelyn Grant's recent work *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*.⁴⁰

³⁷Anne E. Carr cites "a pluralism of images of Christ that are mutually corrective when viewed in connection with women's experience." in *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) 168. See also Harriet Crabtree, *The Christian Life: Traditional Metaphors and Contemporary Theologies*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion Series no. 29 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), and Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 150-69.

³⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether asks whether a male saviour can help women in her *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 45-56. See Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Redeeming the Name of Christ," in *Freeing Theology*, 115-37. June O'Connor writes that feminist theology "sees no ultimate theological significance in the maleness of Jesus. Jesus' male identity is accepted as a feature of his person, not as a necessary condition of incarnation." O'Connor, "Feminism and Christology," *Newsletter of the Currents in Contemporary Christology Group of the AAR* (Fall 1986) 14, cited in Carr, *Transforming Grace*, 187.

³⁹Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) and *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

⁴⁰"In the experiences of Black people, Jesus was 'all things.' Chief among these however, was the belief in Jesus as the divine co-sufferer, who empowers them in situations

Womanist theologians seem to concur with Latin American liberationists: Jesus of Nazareth is indispensable for Christian identity and action. Jon Sobrino has said that the figure of Jesus is more accessible to Latin American Christians than to middle-class Europeans or Americans. While more generic terms can bring out virtualities obscured by traditional Christologies, they can be problematic. Substituting abstractions for Jesus can leave Christian moral reflection imaginatively impoverished and affectively confused. Wisdom is a quality, not a story that can shape an identity. Equality and inclusiveness are important values but they do not make disciples; they cannot convey the full range of affective guidance offered in the Gospels. For that we have to return to the concrete universal who is not the terminus of faith but who is the Way that has come to meet us.

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of oppression. For Christian Black women in the past, Jesus was their central frame of reference. They identified with Jesus because they believed that Jesus identified with them. As Jesus was persecuted and made to suffer undeservedly, so were they. His suffering culminated in the crucifixion. Their crucifixion included rape, and babies being sold. But Jesus' suffering was not the suffering of a mere human, for Jesus was understood to be God incarnate." Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: Scholars' Press, 1989) 212.