

MORAL THEOLOGY

Topic: Imagination and Narrative in the Transmission of Moral Values

Coconveners: Patrick T. McCormick, Gonzaga University

Brian F. Linnane, College of the Holy Cross

Presenter: Timothy E. O'Connell, Loyola University Chicago

Respondent: Russell B. Connors, Jr., College of Saint Catherine

Acknowledging that it is often easier to articulate moral values than it is to transmit them, the Moral Theology group dedicated its meeting to a discussion of the role of imagination in the formation and development of a Christian moral worldview. Drawing on his recently published book, *Making Disciples*, Timothy O'Connell presented a paper highlighting the role of experience, relationality, and narrative in generating moral values.

O'Connell argued that moral values are more the by-products of experience than of formal instruction, and that the imagination is the powerful second venue of human experience. Thus he suggested that if religious communities desire to affect moral values they must provide experiences which effectively stimulate the imagination. His paper referred to the two human languages, word and gesture, as the means for generating imaginative experiences which will serve to modify or transform moral values. O'Connell's discussion of word, or narrative, underscored the power of stories and storytelling. In this regard, he made reference to the work of Stephen Crites, Mark Tappan, Alasdair McIntyre, and others. Stories affect moral values insofar as they open persons to an appreciation for alternative experiences. O'Connell referred to the notion of "composition of place" in Ignatian spirituality as an example of the ways in which persons can be transformed by imaginatively entering into the story of another. In this light, he identified two distinct types of story—recountings and creations—and developed their capacity to shape and transmit moral values. O'Connell's discussion of gesture and touch suggested that this basic form of human communication is often more truthful than the written or spoken word. This suggests that body language and ritual must be consistent with the verbal message proclaimed by Church communities if the moral values of those communities are to be perceived as credible and persuasive.

In his response to Timothy O'Connell's paper, Russell Connors affirmed what he sees as the ministerial, synthetic, and accessible nature of O'Connell's work on imagination, narrative and character formation. He was particularly appreciative of the ways in which O'Connell attended to concrete moral experience in the formulation of his proposal. Further, Connors cited O'Connell's work in synthesizing the insights of social and developmental psychology with recent work in the ethics of character as a significant contribution.

With regard to O'Connell's emphasis on the ethical relevance of narrative, Connors questioned whether O'Connell provided adequate criteria for discerning

between helpful and harmful narratives. Related to this is the problem of the interpretation of stories, that is, of who tells the story and who hears it. Using the image of the imposition of hands in the Roman Catholic ordination ceremony as an example, Connors suggested that while some persons may view it as a powerful sign of solidarity, others may experience it as exclusionary and sexist. Further attention to the process by which a truly helpful story, image, or gesture can be discerned seems to be necessary. Connors also raised questions about the role of moral norms and their formulation in O'Connell's account. He specifically pointed to O'Connell's discussion of value inculcation in *Making Disciples*: "value inculcation, the making of disciples, misunderstands its mission if it views itself as the process of convincing people that what seems good is bad, and vice versa" (63). A more effective strategy than simply labeling actions good or evil is, in O'Connell's view, to acknowledge the plurality of moral values, as well as the potential for values to be in conflict, before asserting what agents ought to do. Connors argued that this dimension of O'Connell's pastoral strategy seems to imply that moral norms ought to be articulated in a nuanced, flexible manner which accounts for the complexity and sometime conflicting nature of moral values. Connors was generally sympathetic to normative implications of O'Connell's strategy but saw the need for a more explicit articulation of it.

Brian Linnane and Maura A. Ryan of the University of Notre Dame will serve as coconveners for the 1999 meeting.

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ECCLESIOLOGY

Topic: Questions of Ordained Identity Today

Convener: Catherine Michaud, The College of St. Catherine, St. Paul

Moderator: Shirley Jordan, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul

Presenters: Thomas P. Rausch, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles

Richard R. Gaillardetz, University of St. Thomas School
of Theology, Houston

Introducing the question of priestly identity from the traditional positions of priest as representing Christ (*in persona Christi*) and as resembling Christ (the "iconic argument"), Thomas Rausch recalled Avery Dulles's rather sweeping critique of CTSA speakers last year and the responses to it (*Commonweal* 125/6:13-17), and suggested that this question has really to do with the nature of the Church as an ordered community.

Recently, priest as representative *in persona Christi* at times, and *in persona ecclesiae* at others, has gained renewed theological interest. Whether the christic