William C. Spohn, *What Are They Saying About Scripture and Ethics?* Chapter 5 (Paulist, 1995), pp. 94-126.

5
Scripture as Basis for Responding Love

This chapter presents a constructive argument for a different approach for using Scripture in ethics which should supplement the previous models. It builds on the work of the narrative theologians but broadens the selection beyond story to include biblical symbols, mandates, and terms of address for God. It answers the moral question, "What ought I to do?" by replying, "Love others as God has loved you in Jesus Christ." Christian moral life has the character of *response* because God's love comes to us first and our actions correspond to the character of that love. Christian love finds the motive and norm for loving others in the story of Jesus which defines the way God continues to love each of us. Christian moral reflection moves from patterns that are central to biblical narrative by analogy to discern appropriate ways of being and acting in the present situation. The love which is the central norm for the Christian life is not an abstract principle but an experience that has a definite shape or *pattern.* That pattern is specified in the story of Jesus and other biblical symbols which enable us to interpret our own experience to recognize the same Lord who is described in the biblical material. Christians experience God's distinctive way of loving as manifested in the history of Jesus Christ and continued through his Spirit in the believing community. Even though God's love is usually mediated through human encounters, faith discerns in those interactions the creative and redemptive presence of God. Scripture is not primarily a record of past experiences of God's love but the means through which we discern how God loves us now in Christ Jesus.

This model of responding love rests on a confessional position: present-day persons can and do experience a love akin to what the original disciples did because Jesus of Nazareth is now the risen Christ. Empowered by this contemporary love of Christ present through the Spirit, they are called to respond by loving others in ways that are analogous to the love they have and continue to receive. As I understand Christian faith, Jesus is believed to be the definitive but not the exclusive revelation of God. As the Epistle to the Hebrew 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). Theologically, this confession means that for Christians Jesus Christ is the one to whom the revelations of other traditions point. Morally, it means that Jesus Christ plays a normative role in Christians' moral reflection through the "analogy of experience." There are elements in the contemporary experience of individuals and the Christian community which are sufficiently like the original to enable us to identify with that reality and also elements sufficiently different that we can appropriate it creatively. The biblical 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. We will investigate each of these modes in the discussion that follows.

How can an individual history be normative for a way of life? The major challenge here is to describe conceptually how the person of Jesus Christ can serve as the guiding norm for Christian experience and moral practice. That challenge is set for us by the New Testament, most directly

in the new commandment of Jesus in John 13:34 where Jesus tells his disciples in the context of their final meal together, "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." Although no single verse can capture the rich diversity of the moral teachings of Scripture, this principle is perhaps the most comprehensive statement of NT ethics. Not only the original disciples, but all subsequent Christians are commanded to love one another as Jesus has loved us. Paul makes a similar appeal to the basic pattern of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus when he exhorts the Philippians to mutual respect and service in Phil 2:1-11: "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus" (2:5).

These commandments would make no sense unless there were some basic continuity between the experience of the first disciples and Christians today. Contemporary Christians certainly share the same humanity and thereby stand in continuity with the first generation. They also believe that they stand in the same covenanted community which draws from its memory a sense of identification with the first generation. This sense of historical identification is similar to that of the people of Israel who were exhorted that they too were included in the original covenant event. ("But it is not with you alone that I am making this covenant ...it is just as much with those who are not here among us today as it is with those of us who are now here present before the Lord, or God" (Dt 29:13-14). Although the connection based on dynamic community memory is important, however, it is not the central link. More significant is the continuity of experience made possible by the resurrection. Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth now lives as the Risen Christ and that each generation experiences the same One who continues to reveal God, proclaim the breaking in of God's Reign, heal, forgive and save in the same ways that the gospels relate. NT scholar John P Meier expresses this central presupposition: "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 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."[1] The basic pattern of Christian love, therefore, is derived from the person of Jesus Christ who continues to shape the lives of his disciples through their imagination, deepest emotions (affections), and rationality, all of which play a role in discerning ways of acting and living that are analogous to the love of Christ. In briefer form, this model of responding love considers how to obey the command Jesus frequently used to close a parable: "Go and do likewise."

The New Commandment of Jesus

Let us first turn to the specific context of the new commandment of Jesus to examine how Jesus exemplifies it in John's account. The narrative of the foot-washing acts out parabolically the meaning of this distinctive new command. It is the Gospel in cameo since it succinctly expresses the meaning of Jesus' mission in a concrete action set against the backdrop of the Reign of God. The new commandment has a distinctive reference to the person of Jesus that is not found in the two great commandments to love God and neighbor. It reads in the New American Bible translation, "I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another" (13:34-35). The pattern of Jesus' love for them should guide and empower them to love others in analogous ways. Their love continues the mission of Jesus' life because it will extend his love into the world through word and deed so that others will come into the

[1] John P. Meier, "The Historical Jesus: Rethinking Some Concepts," *Theological Studies* 51/1 (1990), p. 22.

saving relation of faith and friendship with God. The specific history of Jesus is central since the disciples' memory harkens back to it and their mission extends it into the future.

Jesus' statement of the new commandment explains his action of washing the disciples' feet like a slave. This paradoxical action, which confounds the disciples, reveals the significance of the tragic events that were about to unfold. Placed at this pivotal position in the structure of John's gospel, the washing of the feet interprets both the public ministry and the impending passion. Jesus seems to be pulling the reluctant disciples into the drama. They must allow Jesus to perform this service; Peter's protests cannot exempt him from it. Once they have been served in this way by Jesus their own lives are irrevocably implicated. "But if I washed your feet—I who am Teacher and Lord—then you must wash each other's feet. What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do. I solemnly assure you, no slave is greater than his master..." (13:14-16). Once the master has become a servant for them, they must be servants to others or else they lose connection with him. That service of Jesus, summed up in the act of foot-washing, must become the norm of their lives.

The eucharistic meal and the washing of feet become paradigms for Christian life. They set patterns which will be applied analogously in countless new situations. The pattern is what becomes normative rather than any lesson about humility or equality which might be distilled from the memory of foot-washing and the image of Jesus who came not to be served but to serve. Certainly the disciples did not understand the mandate as a demand for external copying. Eucharist, not foot-washing, became the central commemorative ritual of the post-resurrection community.

The new commandment goes *beyond imitation to participation* in two interrelated ways, a union of life and mission. In the first place, Christians' service evolves out of participation in the life of Christ as they enter into the same humiliation and exaltation he underwent. They are called to embody a particular life which now vivifies them through the gift of the Spirit, organically connecting them to Jesus as branches to a vine (Jn 15). They are not called to embody an abstract principle or a set of values, but a distinctive existence. If there is conscious imitation, it will stem from this participation and emerge from within, from the Spirit that conforms the disciples' lives to that of the Master. They are empowered to live a new way of life by the Spirit which dwells within them and their community. Secondly, they take part in the *mission* of Jesus. Their response is not primarily directed back in memory to an historical event. In John's gospel, Jesus does not say, "As I have loved you, so you should love me in return." Gratitude leads the disciples forward into the same mission of Jesus, not backward into nostalgia. They will participate in the life of Jesus if they participate in his mission. The new commandment leads to a mission, as the following verse makes clear: "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (13:35). The words of the risen Jesus to the disciples on Easter eve connects the gift of life with the responsibility for mission because the Spirit which sent Jesus forth now sends them forth: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, `Receive the Holy Spirit'" (Jn 20:21-22). The sending of the disciples to bring all into unity with God parallels their mission in the Synoptics to proclaim the Reign of God. The "abundant life" Jesus brings in John's gospel is the eschatological existence heralded by the breaking in of the Reign of God.

Jesus the Concrete Universal for Christian Moral Life

How is Jesus normative for Christian moral living? Whenever Christians seek to understand the fullness of Jesus Christ, they go back to Jesus of Nazareth.[2] They 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 of how Jesus is morally significant for Christians today. I propose that the entire story of Jesus is normative for Christian ethics as its *concrete universal.* William 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."[3] Jesus is not the only norm of Christian ethics 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 must be compatible with the basic patterns inherent in the story of Jesus. In addition, Jesus as concrete universal may mandate certain actions and dispositions, like forgiveness of enemies, to which the other sources would not give 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 comprehend Jesus of Nazareth because his significance inheres in a particular life. The new commandment of John 13 refers back to the full life and ministry of Jesus. 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 those particulars. His meaning is inseparable from his story; it resides in the full range of encounters, personalities, and deeds which the gospels relate.[4]

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 conforms to, corresponds to, or embodies aspects of his life.[5] All these verbs express the activity of *patterning,* of extending to new material the shape which was inherent in an original. The response is guided by the 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 biblical patterns

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[2] See Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), p. 130.

[3] William Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), p. 71.

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

[5] For examples: 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, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza).

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.[6] 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 the exodus and the exile, the gospel events and teachings are *historical prototypes* rather than *mythical archetypes,* as Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza has written.[7] The new response 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, open-ended dimension.[8] Michael Walzer, for example, argues that the pattern of Exodus has been prototypical for Western political experience. Even groups which did not believe in God found that the liberation from Egypt disclosed the pattern of their own struggles. 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;
— 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.[9]

The paradigm is an image, a selective but partial aspect; it is not a "mythical archetype" or an exhaustive picture to be replicated in every detail. As Walzer explains, "It isn't only the case that events fall, almost naturally, into an Exodus shape; we work actively to give them that shape. We complain about oppression; we hope (against all the odds of human history) for deliverance; we join in covenants and constitutions; we aim at a new and better social order."[10]

Perhaps this open ended aspect of paradigms 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), the dispositions and values of Jesus, as it

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[6] Some 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, 1993), pp. 53-61.

[7] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 14.

[8] Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 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." Ibid.

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

[10] Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution, p.* 134.

animates the communal body of Christ. Since Jesus participates in the Reign of God and Spirit, Christians should avoid using him as an icon to be reproduced.

If moral knowing is universal and necessary, how can a particular pattern or story be morally normative? Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin's study of casuistry argues persuasively that moral knowledge is essentially particular. 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. Practical reasoning actually emulates the practice of good 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.[11]

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,** because his particular story embodies a paradigmatic pattern which has universal moral applicability. (Similarly, the exodus event is the concrete universal which is normative for ethics in the Jewish tradition.) Christians move imaginatively from his story to their 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;
3. who we are to become as a people and as individuals.

I. Discerning the Patterns in Experience

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 focused so intensely on the poor of Israel? The prophets made treatment of the poor the measure of Israel's moral performance. The difference between the Athenian philosophers and the prophets of Israel does not stem from intelligence but from their imaginations and vision. The paradigms of an insistent tradition sharpened the vision of the prophets. They paid attention to the 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

[11] Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 41.

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 philosophers 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."[12] 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.

Religious experience is selective insofar as it relies on communal paradigms to notice which features are significant. As Green describes it, "The Scriptures are not something we look *at* but rather look *through,* lenses that focus what we see into an intelligible pattern."[13] Biblical patterns, however, are paradigms, not icons. Analogical reflection helps Christians spot the rhyme between Jesus' 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. 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.

Protestants tend to prefer the language of "following Christ" to "imitating Christ" in order to make the distance between master and disciple clear. James Gustafson writes that when the proper qualifications are observed, biblical ethics can be described formally as "the imitation of God." In Old Testament language this is expressed "Be holy as I am, says the Lord"; "Your attitude must be that of Christ" captures it in the New (Phil 2:5). Love responds to a free initiative of God that instructs and empowers a response that is "in the shape of the engendering deed." As Gustafson explains, "The form is more like: 'God has done *a, b,* and *c* for the well-being of the human community and the whole of creation; those who have experienced the reality of God's *a, b,* and *c* are moved and required to do similar things for others.'"[14] This formulation points the individual back to the tradition that has revealed the distinctive ways of

[12] Green, *Imagining God*, p. 72.
[13] Ibid., p. 107
[14] Gustafson, *Can Ethics Be Christian?* p. 115.

God. These become both motive and norm for a distinctive moral response from those who have been so loved and forgiven. "Go and do likewise" is therefore the most succinct summary of biblical morality.

Test Case: H. Richard Niebuhr's Discernment of God's Action

H. Richard Niebuhr described how biblical symbols can be used to discern which features of experience point to God's present action and our appropriate response. He pointed out the dangers of a Christ-centered piety which made him an exclusive, completely determinate icon.[15] Instead he proposed a form of theological discernment which applies the interpretive powers of the imagination. In objective reasoning our ideas help order the confusing swarm of sense data into intelligible patterns. "By means of ideas we interpret as we sense, and sense as we interpret."[16] Through the imagination we use pertinent symbols and images to decipher the conflicting possibilities presented by our senses. These images are usually mechanical or mathematical when we are thinking about objects. In the personal realm, however, we use images of persons to order the raw data of our affections. "We meet each one," wrote Niebuhr, "with an imagination whereby we supply what is lacking in the immediate datum and are enabled to respond, rightly or wrongly, to a whole of reality of which this affection is for us a symbol and a part."[17] Christians use the life of Jesus Christ as a key image or symbolic form to interpret their experience in light of the framework of God's action and character.

Niebuhr begins from the presupposition that God acts in and through the intentions of finite agents. The believer is called to discern and respond to the creating, judging and redeeming of God. Therefore, before asking, "What ought I to do?" believers should ask, "What is God doing in this situation?" The answer will not come from any direct command of God or from a reasonable assessment of what is normatively human, but from a process of discernment guided by key biblical symbols and perspectives. *Discernment is* an exploratory way of knowing in the concrete which employs imaginative and affective criteria to discover what the appropriate response should be to God's action.

The best known example of Niebuhr's discernment is his series of articles in *The Christian Century* in 1942 and 1943. He asked a question that upset many of the journal's readers: "What is God doing in the war?" The two biblical themes that guided his discernment are indicated in the titles "War as the Judgment of God" and "War as Crucifixion."[18] The biblical symbols of judgment and the cross help to set the point of view for discerning how to respond to God's action, even in such a confusing time as the middle of World War II. Niebuhr turned to the precedent of the prophet Isaiah who tried to make religious sense out of Assyria's invasion of Israel in 701 B.C.E. Even with the army of Sennacherib besieging Jerusalem, the prophet detected a different meaning in the invasion than did the boasting tyrant. The prophet saw that the Lord had a different design. He discounted Sennacherib's arrogance which takes credit for all his success; in truth, the conqueror is merely a tool in the Lord's hands: "Will the axe boast against him who hews with it? . . . As if a rod could sway him who lifts it, or a staff him who is not wood!" (Is 10:15).

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[15] See Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation,* pp. 107-110.
[16] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation,* p. 70.
[17] Ibid., p. 72.
[18] H. Richard Niebuhr, "War as the Judgment of God," *Christian Century* 59 (1942), pp. 630-33; "Is God in the War?" ibid., pp. 953 955; "War as Crucifixion;" ibid. 60 (1943), pp. 513-515.

Every event has multiple meanings because it is interpreted from different angles of vision. From the conqueror's standpoint, he is the cause of his own victories; from the cowering Israelites' point of view, he is a threat to national survival; to the prophet, he is the instrument of God's saving judgment on faithless Israel. The prophet has a privileged standpoint because he is committed to pay attention to the action of the one universal Lord in every event of life. Isaiah called for a constructive response to this national emergency because he interpreted the events in a context of faith and saw them as Yahweh's call to Israel to repent and return to the covenant. Niebuhr then moves by analogy to the present crisis of World War II to discover God's healing judgment at work which calls all to repentance rather than self-righteousness. Many Americans and the Allies took the standpoint of retributive justice and saw themselves as punishing unjust and brutal aggressors. Niebuhr pointed out that this crusading mentality rested in part on the illusion that the Allies were doing God's work to punish the guilty. Divine justice, however, "is never merely punishment for sins," he wrote, "as though God were concerned simply to restore the balance between men by making those suffer who have inflicted suffering, but . . . it is primarily punishment of sinners who are to be chastised and changed in the character which produced the sinful acts."[19]

Viewing the conflict through the symbol of biblical judgment rather than retributive justice, Niebuhr concluded that God was on neither side because the relative culpability of various nations ought not to be judged by humans. If the war were fought under the assumption that the Allies were God's agents of retribution, it would lead to vindictive actions. No wonder his readers objected so strenuously! Instead of citing specific rules to dictate behavior, Niebuhr probed the attitudes of both pacifists and "coercionists" and found them both inadequate. He limited himself to suggesting a theological context for interpreting the war which would lead to a new spirit of prosecuting it. From the perspective of the cross, the fitting response to the suffering of the innocent may well be continuing struggle to defeat the enemy, but tempered by repentance that acknowledged the Allies' complicity in permitting injustice and hope in the renewing action of God who brings possibilities where humans would despair.

II. Scripture Guides How Christians Ought To Act

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. The biblical paradigms become scenarios by motivating believers to act in certain ways that correspond to the paradigms. The paradigms provide motivation in definite directions: they generate *dispositions,* that is, dynamic attitudes that are "disposed" or lean toward acting in certain ways. The affective salience, the emotional energy, engendered through the paradigm translate it into a scenario for corresponding action. Although egotism and sin may cloud or distort the response, the story of the Good Samaritan, for example, disposes those who hear it to notice and act compassionately to those in dire need.

It is obvious that many of the problems we face today have no precedent in biblical literature: global inequity, racism, complex structures of economic exploitation, AIDS, etc. People often question the ethical relevance of Scripture because it does not tell us what to do in these modern dilemmas (even though they are not always willing to accept the explicit mandates of Scripture which do apply today). This is a classic example of "begging the question;" that is, it assumes

[19] Niebuhr, "Judgment of God," p. 631.

what it intends to demonstrate. The questionable assumption is that the moral life consists in finding and applying specific rules. We must acknowledge that Jesus commands or forbids certain types of actions; he does more than recommend certain attitudes and dispositions. Moral principles, however, do only part of the work of ethics. We rely more on mature character and virtuous habits to recognize what is going on, to appreciate the values involved; the interactions with others, and discern an appropriate response. Accordingly, the formation of character is the most important issue in moral maturation. If we adopt the perspective of virtue and character ethics, Scripture has extensive moral authority but on a different level of experience than the rational application of principles.

Virtue ethics focuses on a pattern of dispositions anchored in the Gospel that guide the moral agent to recognize action which is consonant with the biblical exemplar. Those same dispositions provide the motivation to carry the discernment into action. Biblical paradigms became 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."[20] As mentioned above, 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.[21]

The largely Roman Catholic 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.* The debate got muddled by asking what principles or values obligated Christians that obligated no one else. Since the autonomy school sharply distinguished motive from moral content, 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 primarily exerts its normative function by setting a pattern of dispositions rather than dictating directly the content of action.[22] These dispositions (the *how* of morality) then guide the agent to discern *what* to do or forego.

Terry Anderson, the American journalist, illustrates how dispositions engage 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 kidnappers 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

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

[21] For a discussion of controls on the use of imagination and appeal to affections, see below pp. 120-121; also, William C. Spohn, "The Reasoning Heart: An American Approach to Christian Discernment," *Theological Studies* 44/1 (1983), p. 43.

[22] In the second chapter we 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, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1985), pp. 103-110.

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, 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.

The *appropriate response* is the goal of moral reflection. While a virtuous response must be good and right, it should also be appropriate because it is done in the right way to the right person in the right manner and at the right time. Appropriateness indicates that the action is affectively correct, considerate, sensitive, and fitting. A 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. Ronald de Souza writes, "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."[23] As noted in our discussion of Hauerwas in the previous chapter, the ritual of the Eucharist has moral implications for the congregation: hospitality, fundamental equality, and peace-making—points made graphically by Paul in chapters eight to eleven of First Corinthians. A single paradigm scenario cannot usually indicate the appropriate response.

We need a variety of perspectives, images, and metaphors to bring out the potential relevance of the objective conditions because they have diverse potentials for interest and value. 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 shouted religious slogans at him since they could not deny the obvious 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. The early twentieth century labor organizer, Mother Jones, supposedly said, "Until justice is established, there is no time for mercy!" Pitting justice against mercy violates the paradigm scenarios of Jesus's parables and his treatment of persons.

Biblical paradigms provide Christians with scenarios for their emotions and actions. They should meet their adversaries with distinctive perspectives and dispositions that make forgiveness appropriate. As gospel perspectives and ideals become internalized as 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 he or 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 should become clearer.

Scripture, through a gradual process of reflection and assimilation in faith, can engender a distinctive set of affections correlative to its story, which disposes the agent to act in distinctive

[23] R. de Souza, *Rationality of Emotion,* p. 323.

ways. In *Can Ethics Be Christian?* James M. Gustafson describes how the affections link religious convictions and appropriate moral actions: "Basic is the affirmation that the experience of the reality of God evokes, sustains, and renews certain `sensibilities' or `senses,' certain sorts of awareness, certain qualities of the human spirit. These in turn evoke, sustain, and renew moral seriousness and thus provide reasons of the mind and heart for moral life, indeed for a moral life of a qualitatively distinctive sort: "[24] Certain moral dispositions correlate with the experiences of God which are named by the images of Scripture; this specific set of affections bridges religious experiences and moral action. Gustafson cites some of the principal affections that Scripture as a whole should engender: a sense of radical dependence, of gratitude, repentance, obligation, possibility and direction. Like a mobile, they are interdependent and reciprocally defining. For example, repentance without a sense of hope and possibility would not be a fitting response to the reality of God as witnessed in the biblical tradition.

Virtuous dispositions must also be appropriate to the particular situation of action as well as to the paradigm scenarios. They 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? Do the symbols of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, for example, reveal in some way the significance of human suffering? This significance will not be grasped theoretically but in recognizing the obscure presence of God who suffers with us. The cross and resurrection will help disclose what is going on at the most ultimate level. When Jeremiah and Isaiah saw the poor *as* the special people of God, they were not seeing them *as if* they were. The memories and images imparted by their tradition enabled them to grasp 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.

Gratitude and Hope: The Path from Memory to Action

Gratitude and hope are the central affections that move us from faith memory to corresponding action. They make the memory of God's gift an empowering source of moral generosity by recognizing that the gift of God requires us to act generously toward others. The new commandment does not turn gratitude back to God or to Jesus, but points to others who should be the beneficiaries of that gratitude. Gratitude stretches forward to advance the Reign of God, motivated by the hope that all will be reconciled in God. The Reformers inveighed against a morality based on expectation of reward, and rightly so: self-interested calculation destroys gratitude and undermines the basis of Christian morality. Just as earning your own keep is the exact opposite of responding to a freely given gift, so too the moral lives based on these two approaches are simply incompatible. We do not move from the indicative of God's gift to the imperative by a logical consistency that follows the Golden Rule. Rather, the link comes by gratitude that turns into active hope and compassion. The love God has shown us in Christ was a merciful attitude directed toward those who were alienated. Gratitude for unexpected gifts evokes a corresponding merciful love toward others and hope of reconciliation with those most distant from us through the work of justice. We come to appreciate "the stranger" in a new way, as the liberation theologians predict will happen when we make an option for the poor based on God's concern for them.

[24] James M. Gustafson, *Can Ethics Be Christian?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 92.

The parable of the unjust steward in Matthew 18:21-35 illustrates how gratitude is the link between grace received and service extended to others. The parable empowers forgiveness of our neighbors by appealing to memory and imagination and not merely to moral logic. The steward does not make the transition from receiving mercy to showing it in the treatment of his fellow servant. Even though he has been forgiven a staggering amount he embezzled, which would have been impossible to repay, he turns around and abuses another servant who owes him a minor sum. The king is outraged not at the steward's inconsistency but at his monstrous ingratitude. There is no comparison between the two debts, and such a great gift of forgiveness should have inspired life-altering gratitude. Love should have engendered love and forgiveness should have led to more forgiveness out of gratitude. If I enter the world of the parable imaginatively and honestly, it discloses much more than the general truth that Christians are called to endless forgiveness because they have been forgiven so much by God. It should also reveal where the logic of vengeance operates in my own relationships and how my resentment is completely out of place with the experience of God's unlimited mercy.

All of the moral imperatives of the Bible are authorized and energized by gratitude for undeserved mercy and love. Gratitude and hope are the obvious expressions of grace received. James Gustafson comments on the biblical maxim, "Freely you have received, freely give." He writes, "The comma, in a sense, covers the fulcrum of a way of life. In its affective dimensions, the sense of gratitude moves the will to act . . . . It is out of a sense of gratitude that both moral volition and an imperative arise. God has freely given life to us; we, in thankfulness to him, are to be concerned for others' well-being as he has been concerned for ours."[25] The memory of grace does not leave one self-satisfied or complacent. It becomes a source of hope through the empowerment which it gives us. Hope is likewise born of compassion for the poor and oppressed when our imagination is guided by the promise of the Reign of God. It is coming, but it requires our wholehearted efforts to alleviate the effects of sin and oppression. Like the promised Kingdom, hope does not amount to a blueprint. Nevertheless, Christian hope is guided by the source of Christian gratitude in remembering the one who announced it. The life and death of Jesus of Nazareth give a historical shape to the breaking Reign of God.

Test Case: Salvadoran Identification with the Cross and Resurrection

Biblical paradigms derive their disclosive power from the belief that God continues to act in the present in the characteristic ways narrated in Scripture. "Paradigms" and "scenario" are terms that may imply that believers resort to the stories and symbols of Scripture as repositories of folk wisdom. In Latin America and other situations of struggle the symbols of faith show a much more profound significance: they enable people to find God and Jesus Christ in the present. The chapel of the Universidad Centro Americana in San Salvador is named for Archbishop Romero. On the outside of the chapel are inscribed his words which were broadcast days before his assassination. "If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people." The verb used is *resucitar,* which explicitly means "to resurrect." On the inside of the same wall are the traditional series of fourteen "stations of the cross." However, instead of the customary pictures of the passion of Jesus there are fourteen ink drawings of Salvadoran victims of torture: men, women and children who have been stripped, beaten, mangled and executed. The message of identification is direct: the cross and resurrection of Jesus continue today in the passion and victory of the people of El Salvador. They identify their sufferings with the ongoing Cross and

[25] Ibid., p. 101.

Resurrection, the present action of God in the world as God defeats sin and injustice through the travail of the Body of Christ. They see themselves as making up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ by extending his trials and triumph into new times and places.

Jon Sobrino, who teaches at that university, 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.."[26] 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. 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.[27]

Liberation theologians and the artists who constructed the chapel at the UCA are using the "paradigm scenario" of the crucifixion to urge Christians to identify with Jesus as the religious link between the biblical text and today's crises. The power of the scenario comes from their belief that Jesus continues to work in the world in ways similar to the gospel story.

This line of argument echoes the theological discernment of H. Richard Niebuhr. Although his 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. He appealed to the dispositions of Jesus *(how* he acted and related) as a norm for discerning the moral qualities which are operative in a contemporary situation. Jesus is "the symbolic figure" which the Christian uses to test "the spirits to see if among all the forces that move within him, his societies, the human mind itself, there be a uniting, healing, a knowing, a whole-making spirit, a Holy Spirit. And he can do so only with the aid of the image, the symbol of Christ. Is there a Christlike spirit there?"[28] I interpret Niebuhr to mean that the values of Jesus Christ are linked together by the gospel narratives into a set or constellation which can function as a complex affective norm. The maturing Christian gradually incorporates this set of values into his or her affectivity in such a way that it can function as a "sounding board" for discerning the values in a particular course of action. Does it resonate with those qualities which together constitute what we call the "spirit" of Jesus? Or does the basic affective tone of a situation or action clash with those values so that one concludes, "No, a Christ-like spirit is not present here."

Worship, Contemplation, and Moral Dispositions

How do these virtuous dispositions get incorporated into the character of believers? One of the main ways is through the language of prayer and praise. Doxology, the language of praise,

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[26] Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical Theological View* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis,1993), p. 171.
[27] Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation, p.* 40.
[28] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self. An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 155.

locates the believer in the rhythm of the history of salvation and evokes the affective dispositions to support a life that will witness to the Lord of that history. Scripture "schools" the affections by presenting the various names which the believer uses to address God and the narrative that orders those images into a remembered whole. In our developing life of faith we address God long before we speculate about God. By revealing the appropriate names of God, Scripture instructs our hearts in new ways of relating to God. When we address God using a specific image we are led to assume the affective stance connoted in that image. Whether we address God in direct, second person speech or speak about God in third person predication, a specific affection is usually invoked which invites the speaker to take a definite stance before the Lord.

Psalm 23 shows how the affections are schooled. The invocation "The Lord is my shepherd" should *evoke* the very trust expressed in the rest of the doublet: "there is nothing I shall want" (23:1). This image for God can be authentically spoken only by someone who is willing to stand before God in confident surrender, which may at times be either a rich experience or only a dry, deliberate turning to God. "The Lord is my shepherd" may not stir up particular feelings of trust, but it should always evoke a particular way of standing before the Lord, a disposition and attitude of the heart and will. Scripture, therefore, is normative for the affections of Christian life as they are formed through liturgical prayer and doxology. The names of God and the narrative that holds them together present a distinctive picture of God, the world, and our fellow creatures which enables us to see them in a new light and respond appropriately. Praying "The Lord is my shepherd" will not tell us what to do when we "walk through the valley of darkness," but it can orient us to the One who has promised to accompany us and away from actions that would alienate us from that companionship.

The affections are schooled not only by a biblical vocabulary that liturgical prayer uses to address God, but also by biblical scenes that contemplative prayer savors and relishes. *Contemplation* is the imaginative entry into a particular scene. Every story can become my story through the musing of faith and identification with the characters of the narrative. I identify in mind and heart with the adulterous and repentant David, the irrepressible Bartimaeus who insists on being cured, the swagger and fear of Peter hearing of the impending passion of Jesus. By identifying with their experience based on similar ones of my own, I am also able to identify with their reactions to the words of the Lord—they are spoken to me, too. This is the opposite of play-acting; their cries, prayers and laments turn out to be the most authentic words to voice my own experience. Without this imaginative identification we are but distant spectators on the events of Scripture, and no revelation occurs in our own lives. Being an affectively detached observer promises a false objectivity in studying Scripture. By not acknowledging the gift of grace, it is unlikely that I can appreciate the call which that grace entails. The most thorough study of biblical hermeneutics will come to very little without this imaginative re-entry into the world of the text and engagement with the One it discloses. The critical distance of exegesis can become an unbridgeable gulf between the scholar and the Word of God. Contemplation encourages the "second naïveté" described by Paul Ricoeur; it enables us to return to the text to participate in it, enhanced but not crippled by critical thought.[29]

Liturgical rituals, as well as 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

[29] See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 19-24.

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 paradigm 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.

III. Scripture Shapes Christian Identity

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.

A mature person is not a bundle of dispositions but possesses a degree of integration which we usually call character. An integrated character is the result of an integrated narrative insofar as the person's identity correlates with a way of life appropriated in his or her own unique way. Biblically informed affections are like elements on a delicately balanced mobile; the framework that keeps them in balanced tension is the overall structure of the story of Israel and Jesus. As Hauerwas and MacIntyre put it, virtues are "narrative-dependent." Specific narrative units help define a given affection or hold together two or more affections in a distinctive configuration. For example, the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8 shows how Jesus upholds justice and mercy without compromising either; it is doubtful whether any theoretical discussion of the relation of justice and mercy could relate them so well. Anyone who enters into that story imaginatively will discover that in Christ there is no mercy without repentance and no justice without compassion and hope. The specific history of Israel and Jesus taken as a whole provides the dramatic unity for the various qualities of Christian affectivity. Don Saliers, a contemporary American Methodist theologian, writes, "The essential feature of the order among Christian emotions is that they take God and God's acts as their object and their ground."[30] Remembering and confessing these saving acts "schools" the affections by training them to be the qualities which are displayed in the overall biblical narrative.

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. Although culture and traditions supply us with a considerable range of models, metaphors, scenarios and roles, these resources do not hang together without narrative structures, which supply "the most comprehensive synthetic unity that we can achieve."[32] The

[30] Don E. Saliers, *The Soul in Paraphrase* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), p. 13.
[31] See Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 150-184. See also Mark Johnson and George Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
[32] Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination*, p. 170.

self emerges through commitment and interpretation made possible by socially derived narratives, and in turn lives out a unique version of them. There are other factors in personal identity as well: principles which can structure a life, commitment to a cause which involves one in a community formed around the same cause, friendship over time, and rituals are just a few of these factors. Nevertheless, narrative seems to be indispensable for a time-filled, coherent self.

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 a personal identity around a creed or a set of doctrines. Christian salvation comes through a particular human story which offers a framework extending from birth to death that enables individuals to accept the healing of their fragmentation and betrayals. New Testament moral instruction revolves around this central event where the disciples are to identify with Christ. For example, "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 Pet 4:13; see also Phil 2:1-1 1; Heb 12:1-4). Unfortunately, Christian theology too often 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.

Although the end of the story provides the definitive vantage point on the life of Jesus, his entire life has normative significance. The new commandment's norm, "as I have loved you," covers the full story. It 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 overdetermined 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.[33] The four elements of the hermeneutical process we identified in the introduction are 1) the communities that authored Scripture in relation to 2) the challenges they faced which sets the pattern for the discernment of 3) contemporary communities of faith reflecting on 4) the issues that challenge them today. The central question, therefore, is: 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?

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., reinforces this communal hermeneutic by locating in it the internal religious principle of faithful interpretation, namely, the Spirit of Jesus. The transformation and sanctification of individuals occurs through their incorporation into the local instance of the Body of Christ. Ephesians 4 stresses that the "new humanity" being formed in the world is identical with the communal Christ. While individuals are given different gifts of the Spirit to serve, it is the community as a whole that is called to image forth the contemporary reality of Christ. Murphy-O'Connor writes, "As the community deepens its commitment to the ideal, the existential attitude of Christ (cf. Phil 2:5) becomes progressively more manifest, primarily in the community and derivatively in the individuals who constitute it. To the extent

[33] See 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.

that the community exemplifies the authentic humanity manifested by Christ, it judges from the standpoint of Christ. It is in this sense that it can be said to possess 'the mind of Christ.'"[34] The community internalizes the values of Christ through the Spirit of Jesus so that, as it matures, it comes closer to following the fundamental norm of Christian morality, the person of Jesus Christ. To the extent that the community is faithful to the Spirit, it mediates to its members this "mind of Christ" as normative for their own formation of character and moral decisions. Conversely, to the extent that the community is unfaithful, it mediates to its members the false stories it has uncritically absorbed from the culture at large or perpetuated through its self-absorbed "traditions."

The biblical narrative prototype itself is open to revision, as Paul's ministry to the Gentiles proves. Those revisions are often interpreted as unwelcome innovations, a reaction reminiscent of the first great Christian innovation when the apostle James and the Jerusalem community resisted Paul's baptism of gentiles (see Galatians 2; Acts 15). Prototypes undergo development when they are applied to new situations, and these new applications bring out aspects that were latent in the original or even at variance with its presuppositions. This holds for both moral and religious prototypes.[35] Radically new situations can lead to significant revision of biblical exemplars. For example, 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 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.

Controls on Using the Images, Affections, and Stories of Scripture

How do we select the right biblical images, affections and stories for moral guidance? Any appeal to analogy has to observe certain standards so that the original or "prime analogate" controls the application in contemporary practice. Otherwise, the biblical material will not be a prototype but only a decoration to the author's presentations. Scripture then would have no genuine authority but be used dishonestly to give the impression that it endorses whatever the author is advocating. Some current writers seem to have abandoned proof-texting for "proof-theming," that is, selecting biblical images that support moral conclusions which they have reached on other grounds. History has shown that fanatics often cloak their delusions in the mantle of inspiration by appealing to convenient biblical precedents. Michael Walzer relates how the Exodus account has inspired "messianic politics" which tries to bring history to a climax by

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[34] Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., *Becoming Human Together* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1982), p. 214.

[35] See Jonsen and Toulmin, *Abuse of Casuistry, p.* 318.

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

[37] Anne 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); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 150-169.

"forcing the End." People are tempted to create their own deliverance from evil. "They claim divine authority for their politics and effectively rule out the requirements of both morality and prudence."[38] Why not imitate Samson's destruction of the Philistines by terrorist tactics rather than Moses' deliverance of the people from slavery, since both are found in the canonical Scripture? What criteria can prevent the all too familiar corruptions of biblical discernment?

There are several criteria, though none are foolproof:

1. *Centrality of the Image or Story*. The appropriate biblical images should be central to the canon of Scripture. Did they function as continuing sources of revelation for the tradition or are they at least consistent with its central images? The exodus, for example, continued to shape Israel's consciousness, while on the other hand the holy war of total annihilation related in Judges did not play this role.
2. *Theological Soundness*. The guiding images should convey or be coordinate with a theologically sound image of God. The exodus implies the character of God as Redeemer and Deliverer of captives; the holy war alludes to a vindictive deity of nationalism.
3. *Consistent with Christ*. The images and affections should be consistent with God's definitive revelation in Jesus Christ. For Christians, the theological center of reference must be the saving event of Christ. Therefore, images from both Testaments must be gauged against the story of Jesus. He is the New Moses who leads God's people from slavery through his own Passover from death to life; the crusading warrior of the holy war is inconsistent with the character of Jesus presented in the New Testament.
4. *Fittingness*. The images and affections should be appropriate to the situation and shed light upon it. As Niebuhr argued, the image of God's healing judgment illumines the Allies' own responsibility for letting the world slide toward war. The image of retributive justice, of "setting the scales right," leads to self-deception and denial of any responsibility.
5. *Moral Rightness*. Finally, these images should indicate courses of action that concur with the standards of ordinary human morality. Christians may well be called to a way of life that is more demanding than ordinary morality, but they most assuredly are not called by God to behavior that is patently harmful to themselves or others. There is a public test on religious inspiration: it cannot violate the standards of human morality.[39]

Recall the various sources of Christian ethics: Scripture, tradition, moral philosophy and empirical data. Any coherent argument will draw on all these sources in an integrated way. Our selection of biblical material must be justified by the other sources we use: theological validity in the tradition, consistency with the normative portrait of the human person found in ethics, and relevance to the factual situation as determined by the best empirical analyses available. Niebuhr warns against "evil imaginations of the heart," symbols that send us down false ways and evoke self-centered affections. They obscure the truth of who we are and what we are doing. Evil imaginations of the heart are detected by the consequences they lead to, just as concepts are invalidated by their erroneous results.[40]

[38] Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution, p.* 139.
[39] This set of criteria is indebted to James M. Gustafson: see his *Can Ethics Be Christian? pp.* 130-143.
[40] Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation, p.* 73.

Test Case: The Maleness of Jesus and Contemporary Feminism

I have argued that the story of Jesus is normative for the identity of the Christian community and its members. This raises one of the most difficult issues for contemporary Christianity. Is maleness so central to the identity of Jesus that he cannot serve as the Christian prototype? 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 which can be understood analogically. Some rejectionist feminists flatly declare that a male figure cannot save women. More mainstream feminists argue that concentrating on the maleness of Jesus blinds one to his saving and liberating potential.[41] 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. Schüssler Fiorenza points to an original community of disciples as the prototype of Christian equality and liberation.[42] 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*.[43]

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 European or Americans. While more generic terms can bring out virtualities obscured by traditional Christologies, they can be problematic. If the argument in this chapter is correct, 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.

Conclusion

Each of the five models of using Scripture has a distinctive contribution to make to Christian ethics; they make use of different portions of the Word of God and highlight different dimensions of the moral life. The model of responding love is not presented as the definitive approach but as a constructive account which spells out the implications of character and virtue ethics, which is emerging as an important way of doing ethics today. It also brings some more systematic attention to bear on the appeal to spirituality as the bridge between theory and action. Some of the liberation theologians who have the richest spirituality unfortunately have a relatively thin account of ethics. And some of those with the most developed systematic ethics, the natural law thinkers, have the least developed spirituality. When the resources of character and virtue ethics are brought to bear on biblical material, it can yield a more ethically

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[41] Rosemary Radford Ruether asks whether a male savior can help women in her *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 45-56. See Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Redeeming the Name of Christ," in Catherine Mowry LaCugna, ed., *Freeing Theology*, pp. 115-137.

[42] Elisabeth 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).

[43] Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

sophisticated account of Christian experience than spirituality can offer by itself. Virtue ethics can raise the imaginative and affective dimensions of moral experience to critical reflection to show how rich the moral life is and how pervasive the guidance of Scripture can be in the mature Christian and the authentic Christian community.

In the introduction, I remarked that hermeneutics tends to bring us to the edge of ethics but then draws back. The task of *interpreting* Scripture is complicated and morally challenging since it demands virtues of honesty, self-critical awareness, and sensitivity to contemporary issues. The task of *responding* to the One revealed in Scripture calls forth a more extensive range of virtues, from compassion to justice, to the forgiveness that enables one to remain part of an actual community of faith, to the courage to endure what inevitably comes to those who live as if the Reign of God were coming into their world.

The position we called "responsive love" concentrates on the moral agent more than on the moral act. Or better, it holds that the wise and loving action comes from an agent who is becoming wise and loving. From the gradual transformation of the agent's affections we can expect Christian conduct to flow "naturally." Yet this is not only an internal reorganization of the person's moral psychology. The goodness of the friend, the needs of the neighbor, the cry of the poor, the plight of God's creation, and the lives of those to whom we are especially committed, all evoke the dispositions which give shape to the Christian character. Ethics draws its demand from the near and far neighbor because that is where God's invitation to service and self-gift calls out. The love of Christ impels us and the beauty of Christ draws us, which is the same as saying that the Reign of God is already and not yet here. Christian duty is grounded in beauty and need, gratitude and hope.

What role do moral rules play in this ethics of Christian agency? They are definitely not the source of moral conduct, because imperatives on their own cannot produce affections. The deep commitments of the heart are evoked by their objects, the needs and goodness of the neighbor and the qualities of God revealed in history. Virtuous affections can guide the moral agent to interpret rules and apply them with that sensitivity we call discernment. In sum, the following of Christ comes out of participation in God's love and in compassionate identification with the neighbor rather than by inference from norms, even though norms may be indispensable in guiding compassion to act wisely.

Most contemporary Christian ethics does not use the Bible as a sourcebook of moral norms. Most of the authors we investigated propose an illuminative rather than a prescriptive use of Scripture. Decisions should be made in light of the central concerns and commitments of the canonical text, but decisions are not directly derived from biblical prescriptions. The Christian draws direction and a basic orientation from biblical faith. Other sources of moral wisdom, including moral philosophy and appropriate empirical data, are needed to determine the proper course of action. The role of rules in morality received the least attention in the authors surveyed. In part, this was due to the theoretical nature of their projects: they were not primarily addressing specific moral problems. A more fundamental issue lies in translating biblical imperatives for the Church today.

Most theologians who employ the Bible today consider it to be the normative statement of Christian identity. Whatever additional moral insight we derive from ethics or the social sciences must be tested against the portrait of God and of Christ found in Scripture. Jesus did not, however, proclaim simply a moral message; rather, he announced an event, the breaking in of the

reign of God. Most theologians would agree with James Gustafson that Scripture does not present a revealed morality but a revealed reality.[44] The theologian must find ways of describing that reality so that moral insight can be gained for responding to God's action.

The problem of cultural distance between our era and biblical times has stimulated theologians to seek the underlying concerns and commitments of the Word of God that still apply. They have turned to a wider range of literature in the canon to find elements that express these enduring challenges—to story and symbol, to prophetic rhetoric and apocalyptic, to parable and doctrinal exposition. New attention needs to be given to biblical imperatives because moral imperatives play an indispensable part in reflective living. We need to practice most forms of behavior in order to appreciate their value. Humane behavior is not only the expression of virtues; it is usually also their foundation. The merciful will obtain mercy because they know what it looks like; the arrogant and vengeful will be blind to the mercy that God offers them. In addition, the imperatives of the Gospel have a radical quality that forces us to consider the distance between our ordinary motives and the revolutionary novelty of the Reign of God. The prohibition on divorce, the admonition to turn the other cheek, the mandate to invite the homeless to our dinner parties call us to acknowledge the gap between our ways and God's ways. They have an eminently practical religious impact which can be diluted if they are rephrased in more abstract terms. These practical mandates are radical because the gift of God in Christ is radical. They connect the Christian with the historical person of Jesus Christ and the specific way of life that remains a surprise and a scandal. David Tracy describes the effect on Christian moral reflection that this challenge of the historical Jesus produces:

> The memory of Jesus confronts all sentimentalized notions of love with the intensified extremity of the actual thing in the remembered life of Jesus of Nazareth: compassion and conflict; preference for the outcasts, the poor, the oppressed; love of the enemy; love as hard other-regard that looks to the strength of the kind of love present in Jesus' ministry, expressed in his cross, vindicated by God in his resurrection; love as a freedom for the other that comes as gift and command from the strength of God to disallow the resentful weakness of the too-familiar caricatures of that love as mere "niceness."[45]

As more attention is given to the practical imperatives of Scripture, the unique call contained in the particular gift of Jesus of Nazareth may better school our hearts and deeds. This call to a distinctive way of life, these scandalous requirements, reveal the depth of God's empowerment in the gift of his love. Foundational theological truths and the moral understanding of the agent provide the context to interpret these practical requirements, but to grasp the gift we finally have to hear and act upon the gracious call contained in the gift of God.

[44] James M. Gustafson, "The Place of Scripture in Ethics: A Methodological Study," in *Theology and Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1974), p. 121.
[45] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 330.