

gravity of one's reason for acting must be proportionate. This is determined by studying the distance that separates cause and effect, the weight and nature of the precept obligating one to avoid the evil effect, the hoped-for good, and the right one has to pursue it.⁶² These dimensions of the proposed action must be weighed together (*simul*). Thus, one must consider the requirements of justice, charity, piety, the common good, etc. This means that both proportion and disproportion will be due to different characteristics depending on the circumstances.

Lanza concludes: "If, after all things are considered, the reason for acting seems reasonable, the effect is properly permitted and not imputed to the agent."⁶³ He expressly omits any material criterion for weighing and comparing,⁶⁴ and appeals to the judgment of the prudent person as the ultimate criterion.⁶⁵

Three things are clear in such statements: (1) Proportionate reason is a human (not mechanical) judgment.⁶⁶ (2) It must weigh many dimensions (*omnibus perpensis*). (3) Its best measure is the prudent person. This suggests that systematic analysis may be too much to expect in all instances.

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THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN MORAL THEOLOGY

Roman Catholic moral theologians are discovering what their Protestant counterparts have long acknowledged about using the Bible in ethics: it is a complex process. Several recent works by Catholic authors attest to a growing interest in unraveling the process so that Scripture can be integrated more critically into moral reflection. In a fine review article Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., suggests that the theologian faces four related tasks here. (1) Exegetical task: determine the meaning of the text as found in the Bible. (2) Hermeneutical task: determine the meaning of the text for today: the issue of interpretation. (3) Methodological task: how one employs Scripture within the various levels of moral reflection. (4) Theological task: explain the relationship of the Bible to other sources

⁶² Antonius Lanza, *Theologia moralis* 1 (Turin: Marietti, 1949) n. 177, pp. 208-9.

⁶³ Ibid. 208-9.

⁶⁴ "Dicimus 'si omnibus perpensis, causa agendi rationabilis apparet': quare abstinemus a quolibet materiali criterio comparationis et ponderationis" (n. 177).

⁶⁵ "Quare sufficit ut actio, omnibus perpensis, prudenti rerum aestimatori rationabilis apparet" (n. 177).

⁶⁶ In commenting on those authors who explain proportionately grave reason as involving "compensatio materialiter aequalis," Lanza states: "Quod mechanicum quodammodo sapit."

of ethical insight: the issue of authority accorded to the inspired text.⁶⁷ I will follow Hime's list of tasks in what follows.

Exegetical Task

The moral significance of Scripture emerges from the dialectical tension between the original meaning of the text and its current application. New methods of analyzing the text can expand its meaning for the Church today. In the past two decades the historical-critical method has been supplemented by literary criticism, which investigates the literary dynamics of the text, and socioeconomic criticism, which attempts to reconstruct the social world of the original audiences addressed by the biblical authors.

As we shall see below, literary criticism offers a more nuanced approach to the authority of Scripture. The different forms of biblical literature make their claim on our moral consciousness in distinctive ways and call for corresponding responses: e.g., parables challenge our moral presuppositions, while biblical narratives offer paradigms for faithful living.⁶⁸

Sociology, cultural anthropology, and economic history can delineate the values and mores, social structures and economic institutions that shaped the world of Paul's Corinth or Canaan during the conquest. Once we can detect some of the particular problems faced by the congregation at Corinth, for example, we can discern how Paul addressed issues unforeseen by the historical Jesus' teaching on marriage, which was confined to the Jewish institution. On the other hand, because socio-cultural analysis underlines the distance between those cultures and our own, it complicates the task of applying any biblical message to our own culture.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Kenneth R. Himes, O. F. M., "Scripture and Ethics: A Review Essay," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15, no. 2 (1985) 65–73. He concentrates on Thomas Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Robert J. Daly, S.J., et al., *Christian Biblical Ethics* (New York: Paulist, 1984); William C. Spohn, S.J., *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* (New York: Paulist, 1984); and Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, eds., *Readings in Moral Theology No. 4: The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1984).

⁶⁸ See Pheme Perkins, *Hearing the Parables of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1982); David L. Bartlett, *The Shape of Scriptural Authority* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

⁶⁹ For an example of the limits of anthropological criticism, see the use made of Victor Turner's categories in Donald B. Kraybill and Dennis M. Sweetland's "Possessions in Luke-Acts: A Sociological Perspective," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 10 (1983) 215–39. The authors explain the discrepancies in Luke's attitudes towards possessions by locating the different texts in various periods of the Lukan community as it moved from a spontaneous to a more institutionalized form. The biblical text seems to exemplify Turner's categories more than it is illuminated by them.

An excellent example of the use of social analysis is found in Leander E. Keck's treatment of the ethics of Matthew.⁷⁰ The problems addressed by the Jesus of Matthew are ones that faced the community of Matthew. Keck argues that the text shows "the tension between the absolutism of one strand of the Jesus tradition and the pressure to provide for some realities of life on the other."⁷¹ Drawing on the sociological work of Gerd Theissen, Keck describes the group of wandering charismatics who arrived in the settled urban community of Matthew with a rigorist attitude towards moral questions that were articulated in the anonymous biblical source designated as "Q." He writes:

Matthew affirms their uncompromising stand, but surrounds it with other material which has the effect of moderating it. By incorporating Q, Matthew incorporated this group into the diversified, institutionalized church in the city. Also, by subordinating Q to the Markan gospel framework, Matthew made it clear that this group is not to dominate the entire community. By emphasizing the whole tradition, including the Q tradition brought by the prophets, Matthew produced not only a truly catholic gospel but one in which the work of the Spirit is firmly anchored in the institutionalized church.⁷²

Keck also highlights how the bitter dispute of Matthew's community with the synagogue affected the portrayal of Jesus: "Matthew presents Jesus so bitterly at odds with the Pharisees because Jesus is the warrant for the community's own relation to the Jewish community." Hence "Matthew's report of Jesus' polemic against the Pharisees tells us far more about Matthew's church than it does about Jesus himself, and the ethics of this Gospel is shaped by the polemic at almost every point."⁷³

Finally, Keck addresses one of the most vexing questions of NT morality: the problem of eschatology. Are the hard sayings of the NT an "interim ethic" which could be demanding only because it was temporary, since the Lord was soon to return? Or do those demands make a claim

⁷⁰ Leander E. Keck, "Ethics in the Gospel according to Matthew," *Iliff Review* 41 (1984) 39–56. For an alternative view on the formation of the Matthean community, see Raymond E. Brown, S. S., and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (New York: Paulist, 1983) 45–72.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 42.

⁷² *Ibid.* 43. See Gerd Theissen, *The Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). For other socioeconomic interpretations, see John G. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975); Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981); N. K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250–1050 BCE* (London: SCM, 1980); Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1983).

⁷³ *Ibid.* 43–44.

on subsequent generations as well, even though they no longer expect an imminent eschaton? Keck denies that it is only an interim ethic: "Underneath Matthew's various statements lies an unstated assumption which he shares with much of Semitic antiquity, namely, the view that the End will be like the Beginning, that final time will be like primal time."⁷⁴

Jesus refers to the original intentions of God in creation as normative for marriage in Mt 19:3-8, in contrast to the arrangements for divorce permitted by Moses. Natural-law theologians might find some comfort here, since "Matthew does not regard Jesus' ethic (and thereby his own as well) as a new ethic at all, but as the recovery of what has been God's will all along, and which should have been recognized as such. . . . [His] teaching is so radically different because the distortion of God's will has been so pervasive."⁷⁵ The morality of the eschaton will be the original morality of creation.

Wolfgang Stegemann offers a second example of exegesis that arises from a concern for the socioeconomic conditions of the apostolic communities. He points out that the definition of who is "poor" depends on the specific socioeconomic context under consideration. Most of the early Christian communities were composed of the "little people" (*penētes*), "small farmers and artisans who depended upon their own labor and as a rule had to eke out a living."⁷⁶ With the exception of the community Luke addressed, they contained neither the utterly destitute (*ptōchoi*) nor the wealthy. The original Palestinian communities did contain many destitute members, particularly after the famine that devastated Palestine in the late 40s A.D. This crisis produced a large number of people who were desperately in need: "always close to starvation, often identified along with the disabled and the severely ill, poorly clothed, and dependent on the help of strangers."⁷⁷ When we read of the poor in the NT, the usual reference is to the destitute.

The urban, predominantly Gentile churches did not have many *ptōchoi* or destitute, although they contained "a broad spectrum of beneficiaries—widows, orphans, the sick, the needy, prisoners, even officials like missionaries and teachers." These groups within the community were the primary focus of charitable aid, while "the destitute (*ptōchoi*) are the focal point of Christian compassion for non-Christians."⁷⁸ These communities considered aid to the destitute a moral and religious obligation, in sharp contrast to their pagan contemporaries.

While the earliest Palestinian communities had given witness to soli-

⁷⁴ Ibid. 48.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 51.

⁷⁶ Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Gospel and the Poor* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 14.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 18.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 47.

darity among the poor, it was the communities outside Palestine that "transformed solidarity *among* the poor into solidarity *with* the poor."⁷⁹ Stegemann envisions a particular effort made by Paul and Luke to bridge the gap between rich and poor, where all would have at least enough for survival. He concludes that the "gospel of the poor" calls us beyond charity within our communities. "For us wealthy Christians, a 'theology of the poor' means that we must let our theological reflection be informed by the scandal of worldwide poverty, and that we not act any longer as if God has chosen the rich of this world."⁸⁰

Hermeneutical Task

For those whose interest in Scripture is more than antiquarian, issues of interpretation are unavoidable. Each generation brings new questions to the canonical text of Scripture as it attempts to read its moral dilemmas "in the light of the gospel." We move from the "then" meaning of a text to its pertinence for today, its "now" meaning. At the same time, the new questions of today can unearth dimensions of the text that had been ignored. For example, the scandal of world poverty combines with some confidence that oppressive social conditions can be altered to lead to further investigation of the socioeconomic conditions of the biblical settings. Feminist and Latin American liberation theologians read the canonical texts from perspectives which the original authors may not have held. Does this difference leave them open to the charge of "proof-texting" to suit their politics? Or do these new perspectives bring to light new resources for human transformation that are latent in the text?

The brisk discussion on hermeneutics today demonstrates the necessity of retaining both the "then" meaning and the "now" meaning. British scholar J. G. Davies notes that no student of a text can hope to attain an "objective" interpretation of its meaning. "Once something has been written, it attains a certain fixity and at the same time it escapes from the control of its author. . . . Released from the social and historical conditions of its production, it is no longer closed in and restricted."⁸¹ Although the historical-critical method attempts to situate the historical text in the context of its original addressees, it runs the danger of formulating a dead meaning by ignoring subsequent interpretations of

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 64. For further treatment of this issue, see David L. Mealand, *Poverty and Expectation in the Gospels* (London: S.P.C.K., 1980); Redmond Mullin, *The Wealth of Christians* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983); Luke T. Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

⁸¹ J. G. Davies, "Subjectivity and Objectivity in Biblical Exegesis," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 66, no. 1 (1983) 45.

the text down through the centuries. Against this attempt, Davies insists "a document means all that it can mean. In other words, the 'meaning' of a text is much wider than the historical-critical method can allow."⁸² Today's reader always brings a different horizon of meaning to the ancient text; therein lie the problems and the promise of interpretation. This new horizon makes it possible for the text to "say" something fresh. However, if the difference between the horizon of today's reader and the text is ignored, the text will not dialog with the reader but only echo the reader's presuppositions. Davies does not believe that biblical scholarship can achieve the neutral objectivity so prized in the natural sciences, but it can bring new meaning out of past events and literary expressions by means of the "fusion of horizons" H. G. Gadamer has described.⁸³ Does this leave us with a thoroughly subjective "hermeneutical circle"? (We are not impressed by a magician who pulls the rabbit out of his hat when we have first seen him stuff it in.)

Davies advocates a corrective dialog with the text: "To guard against projection it is essential to be fully conscious of one's own pre-understanding and to be prepared to change it if it can be shown to be inappropriate for discerning the meaning of the text." The new understanding that emerges from dialog with a text is "the reception of an enlarged self when differing horizons or worlds are brought together."⁸⁴ The hermeneutical task may inevitably be circular, but it need not by that fact be viciously circular.

Krister Stendahl, author of the classic article on biblical theology, reminds us of the limits of such literary interpretation. Scripture may have the fertile suggestive power of a literary classic, but it is a special form of "classic" because it makes a unique normative claim on the believer. The Bible became a classic in Western culture precisely as being "Holy Writ" or "Holy Scripture," that is, as the canonical collection which has guided church and synagogue through the centuries. "For it is as Bible that the biblical material has become a classic of the western world, and whatever part of the Bible is in focus . . . it functions as classic by being part of the Bible."⁸⁵ Unlike Shakespeare or Homer, Scripture raises for members of the Church or synagogue the issue of normativeness because it claims the authority to guide their lives.

Stendahl complains that the current attention to the Bible as "story"

⁸² Ibid. 46.

⁸³ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury, 1975) 263 and passim.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 52.

⁸⁵ Krister Stendahl, "The Bible As Classic and the Bible As Holy Scripture," *JBL* 103 (1984) 6. See his "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 1, ed. George A. Buttrick et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) 418-37.

tends to obscure this normative dimension. Excessive reliance on the contemporary meaning of Scripture can miss its unique claim. "The normative nature of the Bible requires, however, a serious attention to original intentions of texts. The intention of the original sayings, or stories, or commandments can hardly be irrelevant, as they might well be in other genres of literature." He cites the *lex talionis* of "an eye for an eye" (Exod 21:22-25; Lev 24:20) as "words that must strike most contemporary readers as ferocious. . . . But attention to 'what it meant,' to the intention of the legislation, to descriptive historical exegesis, all make it abundantly clear that . . . it was a critique of vengeance, not a sanction for vengeance."⁸⁶ Stendahl underscores the original intentions of Scripture as "the baseline of any interpretation," even approaches that seek to make "available those options which got lost in the process. For true criticism is also the starting point for new possibilities, hidden by the glories and by the shame of a long history under the sway of the Bible."⁸⁷

Liberation theology must count as one of those efforts at retrieving lost options in our history. Both Latin American and feminist liberation theologians insist that the "objectivity" of most historical-critical accounts is not value-neutral but represents the perspective of its creators, namely, white, male, First World scholars. Liberation hermeneutics stands over against oppressive perspectives, and feminist hermeneutics over against patriarchal ones in particular. Mary Ann Tolbert, NT scholar at Vanderbilt, explains patriarchal hermeneutics in a recent special issue of *Semeia* as "an advocacy position for the male-oriented, hierarchically established present cultural power system."⁸⁸ Biblical scholars who read Scripture from alternative perspectives are easily dismissed by those within the establishment. "Work that does not agree with those fundamental tenets, be it by feminist, black, third world, Marxist, or whatever group, is perceived as trivial, deviant, and subjective eisegesis."⁸⁹

Those employing a feminist hermeneutics read the biblical text in light of the oppressive structures of patriarchal society. Yet, the very impetus to struggle against these structures often stems from the Jewish and Christian traditions which are being criticized. "The Bible, then, is not only a book that has justified slavery, economic exploitation, and sexual oppression; it is also a book that has informed liberation, the infinite worth of the individual, and the call to fight against evil." Feminist hermeneutics has a paradoxical task: to "defeat the Bible as patriarchal authority by using the Bible as liberator."⁹⁰ Tolbert does not envision

⁸⁶ Ibid. 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 10.

⁸⁸ Mary Ann Tolbert, "Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 28 (1983) 118.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 119.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 120.

either withdrawal from the Christian tradition or optimism about rapid dismantling of patriarchal structures, but sees a gradual reform necessary.

Within the reformist feminist perspective, Tolbert distinguishes three distinct responses to the Bible, a useful pattern for ordering the discussion:

1. **Prophetic-liberation standpoint.** Feminist scholars such as Rosemary Ruether join other liberation theologians in selecting as normative that strand of the tradition which runs from the Exodus account through the prophets and into the teaching of Jesus. Other traditions are measured against this "canon within the canon" to determine their authority. Those who aim for reconciliation of the sexes in egalitarian structures find this position especially appealing. "Women and men together must recognize that the essence of Christianity (or Judaism) is the prophetic call for liberation of the oppressed."⁹¹

2. **Remnant standpoint.** Other feminists such as Phyllis Trible have retrieved texts overlooked by patriarchal interpretation in order "to uncover the counter-cultural impulses within the text. In accordance with this aim, the remnant position most often focuses its attention on texts involving women characters and explores their functions without the patriarchal presumption of marginality."⁹²

3. **Reconstruction-of-biblical-history standpoint.** This approach moves away from the present canon "in an attempt to show that the actual situations of the Israelite and Christian religions allowed a greater role for women than the codified writings suggest." Scholars such as Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza argue that the canon itself is the product of patriarchal hermeneutics and hence one must move behind the text to the history. "By arguing that the earliest Christian group, the Jesus movement, was in all ways egalitarian and that counter-cultural phase is glimpsed in some of the earliest New Testament writings and in the later 'heretical' movements, one establishes a ground for claiming the true Christian community as egalitarian."⁹³

⁹¹ Ibid. 122. Sharon H. Ringe's article in the same issue of *Semeia*, "Luke 9:28-36: The Beginning of an Exodus," is a fine example of this prophetic-liberation approach. Ringe writes: "Although as a woman I surely find myself addressed most directly and immediately by those portions of the biblical traditions having particularly to do with women, because of the tropic quality of biblical language I nevertheless find my story told elsewhere in the canon as well . . . in the powerful word addressed through those biblical traditions which speak of liberation" (97-98).

⁹² Ibid. 122. See Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). See also Rosalie Ryan, C.S.J., "The Women from Galilee and Discipleship in Luke," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15, no. 2 (1985) 56-59.

⁹³ Ibid. 123, 124. See Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroads/Continuum, 1983). See also William O. Walker, "The 'Theology of Woman's Place' and the 'Paulinist' Tradition," *Semeia* 28 (1983) 101-12.

Schüssler-Fiorenza's important work *In Memory of Her* stands as the most sustained argument of this type of hermeneutics yet to appear. Although it deserves a fuller treatment than is possible here, I must note one major issue the author has raised. Is it possible to succeed in describing the protoapostolic communities any more than in describing the "historical Jesus"? The problem of being dependent on the vagaries of historical data would seem to be as much an issue for feminist reconstruction hermeneutics as it was for the "new quest" hermeneutics. Even if one were able to reconstruct the values and practices of these communities, on what grounds should they become authoritative for us today?

While Tolbert has given a helpful typology of feminist hermeneutics, problems still remain. If all interpretations of the biblical text are partisan, are we left with any common text as "Scripture"? When each perspective selects its own canon within the canon, is any dialog possible where the respective "canons" do not overlap?⁹⁴ Hermeneutics does not seem to provide the answers to such questions. They are passed on to the next two tasks, the methodological and the theological.

Methodological Task

A theologian's estimate of the nature of ethics will significantly influence his or her use of Scripture, as well as provide some justification for that usage. If one holds that ethics concentrates on rules and principles, then the normative sections of Scripture will be scrutinized. If, however, one holds that the character of the moral agent is central to ethics, then material that forms moral dispositions and intentions, such as narratives or parables, will be selected. If ethics provides only the most fundamental justifications for action, then kerygmatic and doctrinal material from Scripture will command attention.

Evangelical Christians have traditionally concentrated on the normative material of the NT, since it provided the "New Law" of Christ.⁹⁵ The rules and principles of Scripture, however, pose the greatest challenge for moving from the "then" to the "now" meaning of Scripture, since they address different cultural contexts and have nothing to say directly about many 20th-century problems. Yet rules play an indispen-

⁹⁴ Himes inquires: "Schüssler-Fiorenza is asking what happens when a skillful exegesis reveals a text that reinforces oppressive patriarchal ideologies? Should such a text enter into a dialectic with our presuppositions or can it be dismissed as not revelation but false consciousness? On what basis is such an evaluation made?" ("Scripture and Ethics" 69). See also the fine evaluation of the use of Scripture in Luis Alonso Schökel, "Old Testament Typology and Liberation Theology," *Theology Digest* 32 (1985) 108-12.

⁹⁵ See James M. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1978) 15-18.

sable role in any system of ethics which intends to guide actual behavior, and both OT and NT contain extended normative sections.

Stephen Charles Mott discusses the function of biblical norms and provides a method for interpreting them in light of new conditions. He distinguishes two types of norms in the NT. "Some specific commands found in the New Testament lend themselves by their nature to a more general meaning." The mandate in the Sermon on the Mount to "turn the other cheek" is not concerned with "a literal slap on the face. It points to a much broader range of activity. It is paradigmatic. It is a model of behaviour which the hearer is expected to recognize and apply to other areas of life."⁹⁶ The hearer should discern some principle of nonretaliation in the saying and apply it in analogous situations. A difficulty arises with the variety of such principles that have been derived from the more symbolic or paradigmatic injunctions of Scripture: How do we adjudicate between adequate and inadequate discernment of these general inferences that arise from particular sayings or parables?

Mott holds that most of the specific commands of Jesus have this paradigmatic character, while many of the specific injunctions of the epistles are framed more literally. This second type of norm envisions a more limited range of activity and is more bound to a specific culture. In the course of time the tension between these norms and the fundamental values of the reign of God becomes obvious. "When the meaning of 'love your neighbour as yourself' and 'there is neither slave nor free' is more fully comprehended, the command for slaves to obey their masters becomes inapplicable, because slavery itself has been condemned before the Word of God and abolished."⁹⁷ Regrettably, the tension between those principles and the particular injunction did not become evident to most Christians and church leaders until nearly two millennia had passed. Nevertheless, Mott does indicate the symbolic and educational function of moral norms, which extends beyond their literal application, even though the process of discernment or inference needs further elaboration.

When we turn our attention to the motivations and intentions of the moral agent, a great deal more biblical material becomes significant for ethics than when the focus is on the moral act and its norms. Both Catholic and Protestant theologians have taken this turn in the past decade, and the result has been increasing ecumenical convergence on using Scripture. Virtually every literary form in the canon can have some moral impact on the hearer. Narratives offer paradigms for religious character; symbols aid in interpreting the signs of the times; parables

⁹⁶ Stephen Charles Mott, "The Use of the Bible in Social Ethics II: The Use of the New Testament: Part II," *Transformation* 1, no. 3 (1984) 21.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 23. For a similar view of Christian ethics, see Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

dismantle our customary expectations; lyric poetry nourishes the moral dispositions; wisdom literature shows the regularities and limits of creation.

David L. Bartlett, a NT scholar and pastor, has applied the fruits of literary criticism to four main biblical genres to "suggest the kinds of authority these forms of literature claim—explicitly or implicitly—for themselves, and to suggest how these authoritative claims might be acknowledged, tested, and affirmed in the lives of believers and of believing communities."⁹⁸ He examines *prophecy* in the OT and the preaching of Paul, *narrative* both historical and fictional, *wisdom literature* including its use in the Gospels, and *kerygmatic and personal witness*. He spells out with considerable skill the way in which each literary form works on the mind and heart, memory and imagination to engender moral transformation. His contribution should be especially welcome to the many proponents of narrative theology who insist that we must let the story of Jesus become our story but seldom investigate the actual dynamics by which narratives influence our lives.⁹⁹

A powerful example of the use of biblical narrative to condemn contemporary social exploitation comes from a Filipino theologian, Noriel C. Capulong.¹⁰⁰ He recounts the narrative of Naboth's vineyard and the machinations of Ahab, King of Samaria, and his queen Jezebel to dispossess him of his ancestral land (1 Kgs 21). Naboth refuses to sell the plot, so the queen insists that he be disposed of so that they can acquire his land. Naboth is slain, but Yahweh punishes Ahab and Jezebel for their murderous greed. Capulong then considers the situation of the Kalinga tribe in North Luzon, whose ancestral lands are being threatened by greedy developers backed by the Filipino government. With masterful restraint the author draws the parallels with the story of Naboth, but leaves it to the reader to discern the most telling connection: if we consider the exploitation of King Ahab and Jezebel on the surface, can President and Imelda Marcos be far behind? Biblical analogies can help us construe the meaning of contemporary events and discern an appropriate response; they can also be subversive.

Robert J. Daly, S.J., and the other members of the Catholic Biblical Association's task force on biblical ethics offer insight into the role that images play in transforming the moral perceptions of the agent. Their methodology "begins with the observation that most human decisions

⁹⁸ David L. Bartlett, *The Shape of Scriptural Authority* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 6.

⁹⁹ For a spirited presentation of the limits of narrative theology, see Richard Lischer, "The Limits of Story," *Interpretation* 38 (1984) 26–38. A more benign reading can be found in Paul Ricoeur, "From Proclamation to Narrative," *Journal of Religion* 64 (1984) 501–12.

¹⁰⁰ Noriel C. Capulong, "Land, Power and People's Rights in the Old Testament: From a Filipino Theological Perspective," *East Asian Journal of Theology* 2 (1984) 233–43.

are reached on the basis more of images than of reasoning."¹⁰¹ They locate the bridge between Scripture and present moral situations in "value-centered images which are the bearers of trans-temporal and trans-cultural meaning."¹⁰² These biblical images bring the conflicting self-images of the moral agent to the surface and lead to enhanced moral discernment and acting in faith. As with many theologians today, Daly et al. do not hold that Scripture offers primarily normative assistance. "In effect, the Bible is better at challenging the decisions one makes than at presenting a solution to problems."¹⁰³

One notices a common pattern of moral reasoning emerging in both Protestants and Catholics who focus on the moral agent. Rather than abstracting a general principle from biblical material and then applying the generalization to present-day problems, the believer reasons by analogy from biblical texts to similar issues faced today. Mark Twain once said that history doesn't repeat itself, but that it does rhyme; the literature of Scripture should help us detect that rhyme.

Theological Task

The most fundamental justification for the use of Scripture in ethics goes beyond ethical method to "metaethical" justifications. How should the Bible be combined with other sources of moral wisdom? Does the doctrine of creation or the doctrine of redemption ground our Christian ethics? What type of authority does the canonical text have in moral guidance? Often these theological presuppositions remain unexpressed, as in the Catholic preference for preserving the legitimacy of natural morality even in the life of grace.

Among Roman Catholics one locus of metaethical debate has been the question of the distinctiveness of Christian ethics. Moral theologians have heeded Vatican II's call to develop the biblical and Christological foundations of a discipline that had relied almost exclusively on natural-law thinking. Attempting to reconcile a common natural morality with the particular perspectives of Scripture, they moved in two directions that are familiar to readers of these "Notes." The first, ably and repeatedly expressed by Josef Fuchs, S.J., discounted any distinctive Christian

¹⁰¹ Robert J. Daly, S.J., James A. Fischer, C.M., Terence J. Keegan, O.P., Anthony J. Tambasco, et al., *Christian Biblical Ethics* (New York: Paulist, 1984) 257.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 175.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 258. For the most comprehensive treatment of the various forms of NT material relevant to ethics as found in the process of the text's formation and a sophisticated discussion on the use of biblical material at each level of moral discourse, see the excellent work by Allen Verhey, *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), in this writer's opinion the most adequate treatment to appear in several years.

content to morality at the level of norms and values, while acknowledging a profound transformation of the fundamental *intentionality* of the Christian.¹⁰⁴ Fuchs uses Karl Rahner's distinction between categorical norms (and values) and the transcendental orientation of the person towards God, locating the newness of Christian life at the latter dimension.

The second move was the distinction made by Bruno Schüller, S.J., between the moral norms of Scripture and the particular exhortations that give them motivation. This exhortative or "parenetic" material covers most of what might appear to be a distinctive contribution to Christian moral life.¹⁰⁵ Schüller's distinction between the exhortative and the normative has been widely accepted by Roman Catholic moralists. Scripture thereby offers additional motivation that may be distinctive. For example, Jesus' words "as I have loved you" add motivation to the general human obligation "love one another" in Jn 13:34. Scripture, however, adds no special moral obligations or values that are not already mandated by our common humanity. Fuchs and Schüller acknowledge that Christian moral living may be distinctive, but there is no distinctively Christian set of moral obligations or values.¹⁰⁶

The discussion continues on this distinction of biblical exhortation from moral norms. James Gaffney argues that every norm may contain parenetic elements that are "part and parcel of moral norms."¹⁰⁷ He points out that, for Schüller, "whatever benefits morality may owe to parenesis, in moral argumentation parenesis never has the final word. Parenesis is an exhortation to some form of behavior, and one can respond to it ethically only if one is convinced about the moral rightness of what one is being exhorted to . . . [hence] behind every parenesis there must be a norm."¹⁰⁸ Those norms are already known by natural moral

¹⁰⁴ See Josef Fuchs, S.J., "Is There a Specifically Christian Morality?" in Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J., eds., *Readings in Moral Theology No. 2: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics* (New York: Paulist, 1980) 3-19. This volume collects the finest essays on the topic from 1970-78. See also Fuchs's more recent volumes: *Personal Responsibility and Christian Morality* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Univ., 1983) chaps. 2, 4, 5, and 6, and *Christian Ethics in a Secular Arena* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Univ., 1984).

¹⁰⁵ Bruno Schüller, S.J., "The Debate on the Specific Character of a Christian Ethics: Some Remarks," in Curran and McCormick, *Readings No. 2* 207-33.

¹⁰⁶ Fuchs qualifies this somewhat. Certain values such as virginity, and certain obligations such as worshiping God through sacramental participation, are categorical moral matters that become morally intelligible or binding by virtue of one's participation in the Christian community. See his "Is There a Specifically Christian Morality?" 15.

¹⁰⁷ James Gaffney, "On Parenesis and Fundamental Moral Theology," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11 (1983) 33.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 31.

consciousness; they are not established by Scripture but are presupposed by it.

Gaffney responds that every ethical norm is parenetic as well as descriptive. In effect, behind every moral norm there lies some exhortation. When we state a moral obligation, we inevitably are commending it to the listener, attempting to motivate its approval and urge its claim. "The view I have recommended as conformable to actual and traditional usage would regard moral norms as inextricably combining a kind of intellectual stating with a kind of emotional urging." Current discussion in metaethics steers a middle road between strictly cognitivist and strictly emotivist extremes, holding that "moral discourse typically and mysteriously combines cognitive and affective communication."¹⁰⁹

If Gaffney is correct in insisting that we must take into account the parenetic features that are intrinsic to moral norms, it may follow that Scripture plays a more central role in the norms of Christian moral life than Schüller and others would allow. In other words, the "as I have loved you" in Jn 13:34 enters constitutively into the content of the command "love one another." The way in which Jesus has loved the disciples, and by extension all subsequent disciples, gives distinctive content to the love-command. We are to love not only because Jesus has loved us but in the same way that he has loved us. The Christian moral life becomes more specific through the process of discipleship. Therefore the theologian cannot abstract from the particular history of Jesus to define love in some universal way without losing some of the cognitive content of Christian love.

It would seem that some of the same particular content derived from the life of Jesus enters into NT moral imperatives such as "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Mk 8:34). Although Fuchs rightly indicates that renunciation plays a necessary role in any serious moral life, he concentrates on the first part of the mandate.¹¹⁰ If, on the other hand, we take the "follow me" as intrinsic to the command, then the particular history of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection specifies the content of the renunciation to which Jesus calls his disciples.

One notes the increasing appeal to an ethics of discipleship in the two

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 32. See also Patricia B. Jung, "A Roman Catholic Perspective on the Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 12 (1984) 123-41. Jung argues that a distinctive Christian ethics need not be sectarian and that "non-Christians cannot arrive in principle at the exact same moral norms as Christians, though the analogy or resemblance between, for example, the Buddhist notion of compassion and the Christian notion of agape may be so great that there is practical identity" (ibid. 132).

¹¹⁰ Fuchs, "Is There a Specifically Christian Morality?" 12-13.

recent pastoral letters by the American bishops on the nuclear situation and the economy.¹¹¹ The bishops insist that strategies such as the preferential option for the poor are in principle intelligible to those who do not share a biblical faith. One wonders, however, whether the stories of the Exodus and the ministry of Jesus to the poor and outcasts do not enter constitutively into this moral mandate, whether in effect the ethics of discipleship is more distinctive than our natural-law preferences would lead us to acknowledge.¹¹²

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SEXUAL ETHICS, MARRIAGE, AND DIVORCE

Recent probings of the ethics of sexuality and the theology of marriage come from two directions. The more specific impetus is the 1983 Code of Canon Law; the more general is a re-examination in Catholic thought of the foundations of moral evaluation, including the need to rearticulate moral norms in ways sensitive to likely circumstances of application. In the latter category are several essays prompted by teaching documents or statements: e.g., *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education* (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1983) or the present Pope's commitments to the ban on artificial contraception. Authors coming from both directions are concerned to formulate adequately and convincingly the intrinsic meanings of marriage and sexuality. The traditional ranking of primary and secondary ends of marriage was replaced in the 1960s by parity of procreation and love; many current efforts try to express better the unity of these ends and to develop concretely what that unity means in practice, especially for sex education and for marital sexuality. Other important themes emerging from the literature here considered are the relation between marriage as sacrament and marriage as lived partnership; the relation between experience, including empirical descriptions of it, and sources of normative interpretation of experience, such as Scripture, tradition, theology, canon law; the function of "personalism" as a foundation for sexual ethics; the meaning and connection of objective and subjective morality; and the connection between objective morality and cultural change.

¹¹¹ See National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace* (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1983) pars. 39–55, 274–78; *Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy: Second Draft* (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1985) pars. 49–62.

¹¹² "Such [NT] perspectives provide a basis for what today is called the 'preferential option for the poor.' Though in the Gospels and in the New Testament as a whole the offer of salvation is extended to all peoples, Jesus takes the side of those most in need, physically and spiritually. The example of Jesus poses a number of challenges to the contemporary Church. . . . Our contemporary prosperity exists alongside the poverty of many at home and abroad, and the image of disciples who 'left all' to follow Jesus is difficult to reconcile with a contemporary ethos which encourages amassing as much as possible" (ibid., par. 60).