

ROMAN CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT INTERACTION IN ETHICS: AN INTERPRETATION

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THE AIM of this article outreaches the present competence of its author. To peer retrospectively over 50, or better, 75 years of the relations between Roman Catholic and Protestant ethics suggests large research projects: a thorough study of the interpretations of Roman Catholic ethics by Protestant theologians, of Protestant ethics by Roman Catholic theologians, and of literature on ethics and moral theology from each tradition to analyze the use of sources from the other. Seventy-five (at least) years would be preferable to 50, for one should examine the books being read in theological schools in 1940, many of which came from the preceding decades. To describe the state of the exchanges, if there were any, in 1940 would only set the stage for an intensive examination of the literature in many Western languages in the last 50 years, and especially since Vatican II.

Were the treatments from each tradition stereotypical and very general until, let us say, 1960? Did writers from each tradition refer primarily to founding fathers or great synthesizers in each from ages past, or is there evidence that they examined contemporary writings? Were certain issues, theological and ethical, in focus? What reasons determined these foci? If one assumes a considerable development over the past three or four decades, whose writings from each tradition seemed to gain attention? What reasons seem to determine intensification of interaction? On what "levels of discourse" does the developing interaction occur? The moral level of judgments about war, abortion, economic issues, etc.? The level of philosophical justifications for the moral judgments? The level of theological backings for positions taken? If interaction was sustained by an incoming tide of ecumenism, has that tide ebbed? Are there practical moral questions regnant in current discussions about which one cannot divide opinion as characteristically Catholic or Protestant? If so, or not so, why? E.g., pacifism and just war? Are there theological issues which are accented in current discussions on which the house is not divided by traditional party lines? E.g., that of the particularity or distinctiveness of Christian moral outlooks and behavior in contrast to ethics as autonomous and Christianity as new interiority or as exhortative?

A further set of concerns evades competence for exhaustive interpre-

tation. It pertains to background conditions shared by both traditions not only in Western culture and societies but also in Third World nations. For example, there are strong similarities in theologies and ethics of liberation written by Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians. To what extent is this due to shared social conditions? To shared intellectual input from theological, philosophical, economic, and sociological writers? Are larger social forces such as secularization in Western societies being responded to by both traditions—in similar or different ways? If Roman Catholic moral theology and ethics no longer shares the degree of consensus it had in 1940, i.e. if there is a “pluralism” in the Catholic Church, is this due to responses to different background conditions, to different movements in the literary and social world? Or would a more strictly academic, i.e. philosophical and theological, account be most adequate, if not sufficient? (In my judgment, most of the discussions of the social bases for theological and ethical preferences are exceedingly vague. Without any success I have over and over recommended Robert K. Merton’s “Paradigm for the Sociology of Knowledge” in an effort to refine these analyses. See his *Social Theory and Social Structure* [Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1949] 221–22.)

This introduction, with its caveats, resembles the opening section of many essays by Karl Rahner! Its justification is simply that it is “spading and digging” to locate what I am able to do in a more comprehensive context. If there are monographs that do what I propose is necessary for a competent treatment, unfortunately I do not know them.

PROFILE OF PROTESTANT DISCUSSION BEFORE VATICAN II

If “Koch-Preuss” was used in seminaries in 1940, Roman Catholic clergy, and presumably the faithful they cared for, were taught that the division between Catholic and Protestant ethics was deep and broad. In less than four pages the assertions—and that is all they are—mark clear differences. I quote from only the first paragraph.

Catholic Moral Theology is based on the dogmatic teaching of the one true Church. Protestant ethics rests on arbitrary assumptions. . . . Catholics acknowledge an infallible authority in questions of both dogma and morals, whereas Protestants possess no objective rule for either, but are buffeted to and fro by winds of subjectivism and error.¹

John Gallagher of the department of theology at Loyola University in Chicago in his forthcoming book demonstrates clearly that the “manual-

¹ Antony Koch (adapted and edited by Arthur Preuss), *A Handbook of Moral Theology* (5 vols. St. Louis: Herder, 1918) 1:7. Chapter 3 is titled “The Differences between Catholic Moral Theology and Protestant Ethics.”

ist tradition" is not as uniform as superficial impressions suggest, but my limited investigation indicates that Protestantism was either characterized in the mode of the quotation or blithely ignored. Whether Protestant views of Catholic moral theology were any subtler or more sophisticated than Koch-Preuss on Protestantism is a matter I shall attend to with admittedly selective evidences. The publication dates do not all fit precisely the prenativity of *Theological Studies*, but all precede Vatican II.

For the reader with only modest knowledge of Protestant and Roman Catholic theology, there are no big surprises forthcoming from this investigation. Most of the attention is on the theological level, i.e. on doctrinal questions that have been controverted since the Reformation. This level is intricately intertwined with the philosophical level; charges of distortions of theology and ethics because of the influence of Aristotelian, and to some extent Stoic, philosophy create both theological issues such as the relations between God and creation, and ethical issues such as the foundations of morality and the understanding of human persons. There are some, but remarkably few, discussions of differences on particular moral questions. All this reflects a conventional Protestant theological agenda, and also how ethics, in the context of Protestant theology, was more integrated into systematic theology than was the case in the Roman Catholic tradition with its sharper distinction between the areas of theological research and writing.

The relation of moral philosophy to moral theology or theological ethics is the fulcrum on which swing both the relatively extended discussions published by Karl Barth. His polemic is, however, directed more toward "neo-Protestantism" than toward Roman Catholicism. Indeed, on this point he wrote: "And if we were compelled to choose between the Neo-Protestant and the Roman Catholic solutions, in this as in so many other questions we should have no option but to prefer the latter."² At an earlier time he described Roman Catholic moral theology as a "bold union of Aristotle and Augustine," and after a very nonjudgmental summary of what he perceived to be the major features of this synthesis he lines out the issues: "Between the Roman Catholic view and our own stands a difference in the concept of God, of man, of the sin of man, and grace which comes of him."³ While there is formal agreement on the definition of relations between moral philosophy and moral theology, the "intention and character" of the definition is materially very different.

Underlying the issues is "the fundamental Roman Catholic conception

² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 2/2 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1957) 529.

³ Karl Barth, *Ethics*, ed. Dietrich Braun (New York: Seabury, 1981) 30. These lectures were delivered in 1928, but published in German only in 1973 and 1978.

of the harmony, rooted in the concept of being, between nature and supernature, nature and grace, reason and revelation, man and God."⁴ The order of being is the common presupposition in both philosophy and theology; metaphysics is "a basic discipline superior to both philosophy and theology." Barth's queries are epistemological, but freighted with theological and ethical implications. "Where and how," he asks, "is God knowable and given to us in his being and not in and as his act?"⁵ In Catholic moral theology God seems to be grasped as an entity that humans can master, and such an entity does not deserve to be called God. It is impermissible, for Barth, to construct the order of obligation on the order of being, for then human beings have derived the obligation; it is grounded in human activity and not in the command of God. "Does not its command have to be one and the same as the divine act of commanding; indeed as the divine commanding itself?"⁶

The ethics of the divine commands of a gracious God that Barth developed so fully is, of course, backed not simply by his rejection of the analogy of being, but also by his view of revelation, his Christology, and other matters. It is clear that other Protestants shared some of Barth's criticisms of Catholic moral theology but came to positions different from his in their own ethical writings. I believe, however, that Barth's statement about a Roman Catholic conception of harmony could be said to underlie many of the Protestant charges. While other writers are not as vehement as Barth in his charge of human usurpation of divine prerogatives in moral theology,⁷ the worry about absolutizing the relative based on natural law is quite pervasive.

Emil Brunner is particularly interesting on this point, since his systematic ethics combines a view of divine commands with a structure of orders of creation. If sin has corrupted all spheres of life—which he believes Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers hold at least about the economic order—then one must be wary of identifying any given historical order

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. 31.

⁶ Ibid. Cf. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 2/2, 530 on the theme of harmony, and 532–33 on the issue of human derivation of obligations. On the latter: "From the very outset man is assured of a right of consultation and control in God's command. Whatever else it may be and mean for him, it can never become for him a command that affects him personally and binds him unconditionally." What is common between the 1928 lectures and *Church Dogmatics* 2/2 is the priority of divine act over being, and thus the language of divine commands. The latter discussion bears more marks of Barth's developed Christocentric theology; in Jesus Christ a divinely imperative obligation is part of the "divine act of the world's reconciliation with God as the act of His pure goodness" (532).

⁷ See, e.g., Barth's discussion of casuistry as a procedure in *Church Dogmatics* 3/4 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1961) 6–19, and the application of his criticism throughout his discussion of issues of taking human life (397–407).

with the divine order. He charges that "modern Catholics" ignore this point. "Their idea of 'the Law of Nature' is so fully adapted to the actual state of things—think for instance of their doctrine of private property—that the contradiction either disappears entirely, or is concealed by the formula: 'out of consideration for special circumstances.'"⁸

Reinhold Niebuhr makes a similar charge, though in one of his discussions his research led him to a qualification often cited in recent Catholic moral theology. In the first volume of *The Nature and Destiny of Man* he wrote: "The social ethics of Thomas Aquinas embody the peculiarities and contingent factors of a feudal-agrarian economy into a system of fixed socio-ethical principles."⁹ In *Faith and History* he wrote: "It is certainly dangerous to fill the 'natural law' with too many specific injunctions and prohibitions." In his footnote to this passage he aptly notes "that Thomas Aquinas had less specific content in his natural law than is found in modern Catholic theory," and cites the oft-quoted passage from *Summa theologiae* 1-2, q. 94, a. 4, pertaining to defects as one descends from the common principle to the particular circumstances.¹⁰ But Catholics are not the only ones who falsely absolutize the relative: "both Catholic and Protestant social theory tended to make the right of property much too absolute."¹¹

Obviously backing the criticisms of absolutizing the relative are not only metaphysical and epistemological matters, but also a traditional Protestant view of sin, followed by correlative interpretations of grace. The discussion is, again, primarily on the theological level but has implications for ethics. For Barth the first consideration is, of course, grace, and sin is the second. For him human fellowship with God can be understood only as grace, which "rules out any attempt to snatch God's being beyond his act. . . . We could no longer understand grace as grace . . . if grace really shared its power with a capacity of our own nature and reason, if an ascent of man to God were really possible, and an order of obligation could exist, on the basis of a direct relation of man to God which grasps the divine being and thus bypasses grace."¹² The accuracy of this blunt insinuation directed to Catholic moral theology, of course, can be disputed, but the force of Barth's alternative frames a radically

⁸ Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1947) 661 (endnote 8 to p. 399).

⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (2 vols. New York: Scribner's, 1945) 1:281.

¹⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History* (New York: Scribner's, 1949) 182.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 191.

¹² Barth, *Ethics* 31, Cf. *Church Dogmatics* 2/2, 509-732, *Church Dogmatics* 3/4, 324-470, and *The Christian Life, Church Dogmatics* 4/4 (Lecture Fragments) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) for the implications of this for both ethical theory and "special ethics."

different view of ethics. His correlative view of sin is a traditional Protestant one. Sin must be viewed "much more sharply" than Roman Catholic doctrine views it. He rejects "any fitness of man for cooperation with God."¹³ Thus justification and sanctification are the work of God alone and not of God and human beings together.

There is an air of Protestant conventionality about the discussions of sin and its outcome for ethics. The Lutheran Werner Elert, for example, summarizes Catholicism in a way one could cite from many other sources: "In the final analysis, guilt consists only in the fact that man, who in things natural has remained essentially unharmed, suffers from one deficiency."¹⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr states that the "official Catholic doctrine of original sin" does not differ greatly from Pelagianism. By its distinction between *pura naturalia*, the essential nature of humans, and a *donum superadditum* it incorporates the biblical idea of the Fall without dealing with the corruption of the essential nature of the human.¹⁵ Various writers are more or less nuanced in their interpretations of sin in Roman Catholicism, and various citations from Aquinas are used to support their views. But the inference for ethics is generally the same: the Catholic doctrine of sin leaves too much confidence in human beings to know and do the right and the good.

Citation from St. Thomas is always interesting to observe. I found no Protestants who are worried about excessive claims of human capacity citing the following passage: "Yet because human nature is not altogether corrupted by sin, namely, so as to be shorn of every good of nature, even in the state of corrupted nature it can, by virtue of its natural endowments, perform some particular good, *such as building dwellings, plant vineyards, and the like*; yet it cannot do all the good natural to it, so as to fall short in nothing."¹⁶ And all Protestant scholars surely knew that Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, and others conceded that human capacities were present in a sufficient way to function in the civil use of the law. One can wonder to what extent the matter in hand has been, at least for some authors, a theological and religious one, i.e. a defense of salvation by grace alone so that no moral effectiveness could count toward the restoration of human relations to God. Or, whether the concern was more ethical in character, i.e. overweening confidence in human judgments

¹³Barth, *Ethics* 32. The discussions of sin in *Church Dogmatics* are, I believe, fundamentally consistent with this earlier discussion, but also set in different context because of the elaboration of the significance of a gracious God for moral life.

¹⁴Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957) 149.

¹⁵Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* 1:247-48.

¹⁶Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1-2, q. 109, a. 2. I do not find this cited in Roman Catholic authors either. Italics are mine.

about moral matters. The term "legalism" appears with frequency in some of the literature, and it seems to bear on both of these concerns. "Merit" is often the focus of attention.

Protestant theologians did not, on the whole, interpret Catholic moral theology as radically Pelagian, though certainly some popular Protestant interpretations did. Helmut Thielicke, e.g., writes "that Thomism does not present the doctrine of justification in such crude and deistic fashion that Christ is, as it were, only the initiator of justification, and that then, having started the movement, he withdraws . . . and leaves everything to the human action. . . ." ¹⁷ Thomism, he says very fairly, regards all merits attained by human beings as merits only through grace. Anders Nygren, whose *Agape and Eros* influenced many Protestant authors, wrote: "Mediaeval theology is a theology of merit. But this does not mean that it is not at the same time a theology of grace." ¹⁸ What Catholicism does is regard merit and grace as one, while from the Evangelical view they exclude each other.

One might think that the controversy over grace and merit would be of little interest to ethicists; the issue is primarily about how one is saved. But such thought would be a gross error, and ethical issues are joined between the traditions on this point. In the background is also the doctrine of habits and virtues that gives content to the view of the human in the Catholic tradition. Barth makes the charge with characteristic bluntness. The ethics of Aquinas as found in both parts of the second part of the *Summa* "has its basis in Aristotle and its crown and true scope in the religious life in the narrowest sense of the term, namely, the life of the clergyman and the monk." ¹⁹ One finds in Protestant literature charges of tendencies toward moral perfectionism, of a two-storeyed ethics, that result from traditional Catholic moral anthropology and cooperating grace. Reinhold Niebuhr's summary judgment, based on Thomas' *Treatise on Grace*, question 109, is not untypical. "The issue at stake here is whether man's historical existence is such that he can ever, by any discipline of reason or by any merit of grace, confront a divine judgment upon his life with an easy conscience. If he can it means that it is possible for a will centered in an individual ego to be brought into essential conformity with the will and power that governs all things. On this question the Catholic answer is a consistently affirmative one." Niebuhr cites from Thomas the necessity of continued divine help, but also the view that in the "redeemed state" human beings can be kept

¹⁷ Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics* (2 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 1:74. The German edition of which the American is an abridgment was published in 1958.

¹⁸ Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London: S.P.C.K., 1953) 621.

¹⁹ Barth, *Ethics* 6.

from mortal sin, "which is grounded in reason." "According to this formulation the conformity of the human to the divine will is well nigh absolute, and the only sin which remains is occasioned by vagrant impulses below the level of the will." In a kind of dialectical fashion, however, Niebuhr acknowledges the qualifications of this tendency in Thomas by quoting him: "Because man's will is not wholly subject to God it follows that there must be many disorders in the acts of reason."²⁰

I have reviewed selectively and in a too perfunctory manner various Protestant attestations to Barth's series of charges quoted above: the differences are in "the concept of God, of man, of the sin of man, and the grace that comes to him." Important sources have not been cited, e.g. H. Richard Niebuhr's chapter on "Christ above Culture," Paul Lehmann's discussion of "the synthetic thrust" and his chapter "A Critique of Moral Theology," and some non-English works that I have reviewed.²¹ It is important, while indicating similarities in these Protestant interpretations of Catholic ethics, not to oversimplify or overgeneralize them.

By far the majority of the Protestant interpretations use classical Catholic sources; the exceptions to this are interesting and important. Barth makes references to Mausbach; Brunner has a more interesting analysis of a difference between Aristotelian and Augustinian Thomists, and uses Cathrein, *Moralphilosophie*, 1924, as his source for the former and Mausbach, *Katholische Moraltheologie*, 1927, for the latter.²² Lehmann's chapter on moral theology is a brief Protestant version of tendencies that were developing just before Vatican II; he uses Henry Davis, S.J., *Moral and Pastoral Theology*, as his example of the "manualist" tradition, and begins to trace the critique of such works from within Catholicism by discussing Gilleman's *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology*, Bernard Häring's *The Law of Christ*, and Dietrich von Hildebrand's *Christian Ethics*. (Space does not permit a comparison between Lehmann and the important discussion in Ford and Kelly of critical

²⁰ Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* 2:141. Niebuhr sees the worst tendencies finally affecting the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Church. "All Catholic errors in overestimating the sinlessness of the redeemed reach their culmination, or at least their most vivid and striking expression, in the doctrine of the church" (*ibid.* 144).

²¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951) 116-48; Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) 256-59, 287-325.

²² Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* 95-99. An interesting interpretive prerogative taken by Brunner is worth quoting. He quotes Mausbach: "Speaking from the Christian point of view, the inner surrender of the will to the Moral Law and to Good, the reverent love to God on the part of the creature, a love which is eager to serve, is essentially, and under all circumstances morally good, the opposite is morally bad." Brunner adds: "What the author really wishes to say is this: that everything is *only* good in virtue of this love, and that without this love it is *not* good. But this he *dare* not say."

trends within moral theology.²³)

I stated above that there would be no surprises in this profile to a reasonably knowledgeable Catholic or Protestant reader. Indeed, something like Barth's agenda of issues frames three studies of Catholic and Protestant ethics that emerged in the 1960s, two by Roman Catholics and one by a Protestant, all Europeans.²⁴

PERSISTENCE OF THE AGENDA

Franz Böckle, the Bonn Roman Catholic moral theologian, and Roger Mehl, the Strasbourg Reformed theologian, both produced comparative books based on lectures which focus on controverted issues. The agenda shared between them is significantly larger than the differences. Böckle's three chapter titles express it well: "Law and Gospel," "Precept and Order of Nature," and "Sinners and Sin." The structure of each chapter is basically the same: a summary of "the Protestant" view and the Catholic response. Böckle attends both to classic Protestant sources and to contemporary European authors. I cite only enough to illustrate, but not substantiate, my contention that a standard agenda of controverted issues provides the frame for analysis. In Böckle's chapter on "Law and Gospel" he summarizes "The Concern of the Reformers" in three propositions: "The Gospel as the message of redemption by Christ destroys every form of human self-justification"; "The Gospel does not take away

²³ See John C. Ford, S.J., and Gerald Kelly, S.J., *Contemporary Moral Theology* (2 vols. Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1958) 1:42-140.

²⁴ In the Anglican moral theology tradition as well as in social ethics there has been historically much greater affinity with the Roman Catholic tradition than is the case with Continental Protestantism and its American heirs. From Richard Hooker forward, some notion of natural law gets approval, though its relations to gospel, to piety, etc., take different forms in different authors. In the period under consideration here, the work of Kenneth Kirk is notable: see, e.g., his *Conscience and Its Problems: An Introduction to Casuistry* (new ed. London: Longmans, Green, 1936). Kirk differentiates his positions from Roman Catholic ones on some theoretical as well as some practical matters, e.g. birth control, but is evidently in a continuing conversation with them. In social ethics the "Christendom Group," which was very active and identifiable until the late 1940s, had the idea of a natural order at the basis of its proposals for social reform. See, e.g., Maurice B. Reckitt, ed., *Prospects for Christendom: Essays in Catholic Social Reconstruction* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), and V. A. Demant, *Theology of Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947). Archbishop William Temple's very influential book *Christianity and Social Order* (New York: Penguin, 1942) has a brief discussion of natural law in which he writes: "It is wholesome to go back to this conception of Natural Law because it holds together two aspects of truth which it is not easy to hold in combination—the ideal and the practical" (60). All of these materials show, also, distinctively Protestant elements. None of them is very technical in a scholarly sense; they were written for quite practical ends. A breadth and depth of learning lies behind them, but what I have delineated as the conventional Protestant agenda is not a prominent feature.

the will of God, but directly preaches of its fulfillment through Christ and our sharing in it"; and "Insofar as the Gospel does lay down demands, these do not mean demands for action that we must accomplish as leading to our salvation; but rather the Gospel demands are a counsel pointing out things we may venture to achieve as a fruit of our salvation."²⁵ In his statements of a Catholic alternative he consciously bypasses three centuries of Roman Catholic textbooks because they are "over-freighted" with canon law, and their "narrowness and overemphasis" on law was partially anti-Protestant. His Catholic rebuttal relies largely on Augustine, Aquinas, and the Council of Trent. The discussion has moved far from the simplicity and dogmatism of the chapter on Protestant ethics in Koch-Preuss!

Mehl's book stems from Warfield Lectures delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1968. Again a sketch has to suffice. The first lecture lines out the historical contentions about how ethics is situated in the theologies of Luther, Calvin, and "traditional" Catholicism. In his second chapter on "The Persistent Divergences" three of his four sections support my contention: "Nature and Supernature: The Anthropological Problem"; "The Problem of Natural Law and of Natural Morality"; and "Soul and Body; Virtue and Perfection: The Sexual Life." The fourth, in retrospect, might well reflect a special interest of the decade in which the lectures were delivered: "The Meaning of Secularization." Mehl in his final chapter notes two areas of convergence: the effects on ethics of biblical renewal, and new concerns in social ethics. The studies of biblical ethics by Rudolf Schnackenburg and Ceslaus Spicq, which impressed many of us Protestants, are his principal sources for the former, and the encyclicals of John XXIII and Paul VI for the latter.²⁶

Josef Fuchs, S.J., in his *Natural Law: A Theological Investigation*, does not give as sharp and comprehensive attention to debates between Protestant and Catholic views of ethics, but it would be difficult to read his work without inferring that he seeks to justify natural law in the light of the criticisms of major Protestant theologians of this century: Barth, Brunner, Niels Sørensen, Thielicke, Schlink, Ernst Wolf, Reinhold Niebuhr, and others. One strand of the argument, in my judgment, is to establish biblical and theological grounds for natural law which temper many conventional Protestant criticisms. Like the works of Böckle and Mehl, the major topics can well fit Barth's list of issues; the argument, however, is more systematic and developed than theirs.²⁷

²⁵ Franz Böckle, *Law and Conscience* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966) 29, 30-31, 32.

²⁶ Roger Mehl, *Catholic Ethics and Protestant Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970).

²⁷ Josef Fuchs, S.J., *Natural Law: A Theological Investigation* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965).

The discourse in these studies is basically on the theological level, and how theological judgments affect justifications of ethical principles, moral values, and the nature of human action. All three authors turn to classic sources in both traditions to formulate the issues, and all three take into account significant writers in theological ethics among their contemporaries. There is ample evidence that Protestants are also concerned about particular moral teachings of Catholics during the period represented by these authors, e.g. Paul Ramsey's work on just war, discussions of birth control, etc. A hypothesis I hazard, however, is that one finds an increasing tendency in the literature by both Protestant ethicists and Roman Catholic moral theologians to leave these critical theological matters in the background. There are exceptions, such as Bernard Häring's major writings, *The Law of Christ* and *Free and Faithful*, essays by Charles Curran, and others. A perusal of decades of "Notes on Moral Theology" in this journal, however, backs my hypothesis on the Catholic side.

Quite different from these three books is one that was especially important at the time of its publication, namely Edward Duff, S.J., *The Social Thought of the World Council of Churches*. Duff's book provides the best available survey of its topic through the early 1950s. His principal heuristic device utilizes J. H. Oldham's well-known distinction between the "ethic of inspiration" and an "ethic of ends." The former is aptly characterized by Duff: it "insists that the fundamental and characteristic Christian moral attitude is not obedience to fixed norms or to a moral code but a living response to a living person, a fellowship with God who is sovereignly free and whose Will is sought for a present personal decision." This was a commonly held biblical-theological view among Protestants. The latter, in his words, "is based on an idea of the proper ordering of society and its parts whose overall purposes and particular functions are discoverable by a rational examination of their nature and operations," a more Catholic position. He demonstrates how a tension between these two types of ethics was present in the development of the World Council's "social philosophy,"²⁸ and notes how it issues in incoherence in social ethics. The purpose of the study, clearly, is not to examine various works by theologians; it is a thorough and judiciously fair assessment of somewhat unscholarly material. Not only its content but also the quite irenic spirit in which it is written marked a milestone in the conversation between the two traditions. The book aids the reader to see how matters discussed on the theological level make differences on the level not only of ethical theory but also of moral evaluations and prescriptions for society.

²⁸Edward Duff, S.J., *The Social Thought of the World Council of Churches* (New York: Association, 1956) 94.

VATICAN II AND ECUMENISM

The literature becomes much more complex during and following the Second Vatican Council. There were stirrings for change in Catholic moral theology prior to that time which opened discussions within that tradition during and after the Council. Catholicism confronted "situation ethics" at least a decade before Joseph Fletcher's book by that title appeared. Ford and Kelly noted that "A feeling of uneasiness about moral theology has been in the air for some years. It is a feeling which cannot be brushed aside as mere murmuring by malcontents."²⁹ They provide a good list of the concerns: charity, the heart of the Christian life, does not vivify moral doctrine and teaching; the practice of virtue is passed over quickly because of the preoccupation with distinction of sins; scriptural and patristic sources are neglected; moral theology has been divorced from dogmatic theology; social obligations are not emphasized and an individualism reigns; the view of the human has not taken into account modern psychologies; the use of language about universal abstracts repels the modern mind; and the person of Christ has dropped from sight in the preoccupation with casuistry, legalism, and sinful deviation. A brief summary of the writings of important critics is followed by summaries of new approaches. (Bernard Häring's *Das Gesetz Christi*, which had already gone through four or five editions when Ford and Kelly published their book, is not mentioned. My impression is that of all the "new approaches," Häring's had the widest impact among priests and religious, at least, for well over a decade.) Ford's and Kelly's own reflections on the new approaches, while critical, are quite sympathetic. One does not find in their book any of the kind of vituperative dogmatism in favor of the old ways to which John Courtney Murray was exposed, and which one finds in the more recent events surrounding Charles E. Curran.³⁰ With reference to the traditional agenda of controversy, however, Ford and Kelly provide a practical, and not theological, defense of the past. "Just as one cannot incorporate the whole science of ascetics into the moral course, much less can one incorporate the dogma. . . . In teaching theology one must necessarily partition it."³¹

During the 1960s and 1970s occurrences other than publications affected the range and quality of Catholic and Protestant ethical interaction in North America, at least. In the areas of social action members of both communities participated together often, perhaps, finding greater affinity

²⁹ Ford and Kelly, *Contemporary Moral Theology* 1:42.

³⁰ On Murray's case see Donald E. Pelotte, *John Courtney Murray: Theologian in Conflict* (New York: Paulist, 1976) 27-73; on Curran's case see Charles E. Curran, *Faithful Dissent* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed and Ward, 1986).

³¹ Ford and Kelly, *Contemporary Moral Theology* 1:100.

with each other than with many members of their own communions; one thinks of the peace and civil-rights movements. Catholic moral theologians began to participate in the American Society for Christian Ethics, and Protestant scholars read papers at the Catholic Theological Society of America. Roman Catholic students—priests, religious, and lay—were enrolled in graduate programs in universities that historically were Protestant; my impression is that fewer Protestant students received degrees from doctoral programs in moral theology in Catholic institutions. Dissertations often required research in materials from both traditions.³² Syllabi for courses at college, seminary, and doctoral levels became more inclusive. Important faculties added members from each other's tradition. Books by both Protestant and Roman Catholic authors began to reflect the broadening and deepening of knowledge, and informally as well as formally new clusters of conversation partners developed. An unsuccessful series, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, published four volumes under the general editorship of Richard A. McCormick, S.J., Paul Ramsey, and myself; evidence of mutually knowledgeable writings appeared in more effective forms. Issues in social ethics such as war and peace, the economy, ecology, and oppressed groups such as women and ethnic minorities, as well as issues of medical research and practice and sexuality, drew attention like magnets from authors in both traditions; on many of them the division of opinion was no longer between Catholic and Protestant.

In *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement* I interpreted trends that were present in both traditions as moving toward at least common concerns if not common grounds. Put in a cursory manner, while Roman Catholics were moving from rigid and closed ways of thinking toward more flexibility, some Protestants were moving from the view Oldham and Duff characterize as "ethics of inspiration" to an appreciation for casuistry. These tendencies on the level of practical moral reasoning were supported by shifts in philosophical and theological thinking.³³ I noted in the Preface that by the time of the publication of that book the "flush of ecumenical enthusiasm" was gone. This was not a matter of regret, since finding a least common denominator between traditions is not desirable. The task, I wrote, "is to formulate the important questions and find the most adequate and

³²I could cite many by both Protestants and Catholics. One that launched an important scholarly career was Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Euthanasia: A Catholic and a Protestant Perspective" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1976).

³³James M. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1978). The book is based largely on lectures delivered in January 1973.

coherent answers.³⁴

The interpretive thematic structure of my *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* cannot bear the weight of the proliferation of writings in ethics and moral theology in both traditions since its publication. Developments are too diverse, and there are strong defenses of more extreme positions than was the case in the materials I used. (Most of the developments have been chronicled in articles since Vatican II and in books that summarized recent discussion.³⁵) In the remainder of this article I shall make insufficiently substantiated observations and interpretations that generally back this view.

First, there is no longer much interest in developing ecumenical consensus, per se, between Protestant and Roman Catholic ethics. As I noted above, from one perspective this is commendable; at its best, writers in both traditions are dealing with methodological, social, and moral issues regnant in our time which are shared by both communities. Evidence for this includes publications on ethical methods, including casuistry; on whether ethics is autonomous or necessarily confessional; on the use of biblical materials in ethics; and on matters of war and peace, the economy, liberation from various forms of oppression, and quite specific medical choices and general medical policies. For example, little is written by Roman Catholics on war and medical matters that does not take into account the prolific writings of the late Paul Ramsey, and little is written by Protestants that does not interact with the writings of Richard McCormick, Bryan Hehir, Charles Curran, and many others. Indeed, the generations of authors who did their graduate studies beginning in the

³⁴Ibid. viii.

³⁵The flow of essays by Charles Curran through the years provides a very fine account of discussions. While the essays focus on Roman Catholic moral theology, they show a serious consideration of Protestant writings as a source for targeting issues in Catholicism and for Curran's constructive proposals. For examples only, see "Catholic Moral Theology Today," in Curran, *New Perspectives in Moral Theology* (Notre Dame: Fides, 1974) 1-46; "The Stance of Moral Theology," *ibid.* 47-86; "Dialogue with Scriptures," in *Catholic Moral Theology in Dialogue* (Notre Dame: Fides, 1972) 24-64; "Social Ethics and Method in Moral Theology," *ibid.* 225-39; "The Relevance of the Gospel Ethic," in *Themes in Fundamental Moral Theology* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1977) 5-26; "A Methodological Overview of Fundamental Moral Theology," in *Moral Theology: A Continuing Journey* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1982) 35-61; "Three Methodological Issues in Moral Theology," *ibid.* 62-89; and his book-length dialogue with Paul Ramsey, *Politics, Medicine, and Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973). Two remarkably clear and informative brief summaries of issues are Richard M. Gula, S.S., *What Are They Saying about Moral Norms?* (New York: Paulist, 1982), and William C. Spohn, S.J., *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* (New York: Paulist, 1984). See also "Notes on Moral Theology" through the years in this journal, and the useful series *Readings in Moral Theology* edited by Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist, 1979-).

1960s find it natural to take account of publications from both traditions—sometimes in a polemical way and sometimes in an irenic way. Ecumenism generally has lost much of the vitality it had 20 years ago, but it is worth noting that on doctrinal matters efforts continue to overcome historic differences, e.g. on justification and sanctification, the sacraments, and biblical authority in theology. My impression is that no similarly concerted effort occurs on moral matters, on social-ethical issues, on matters of ethical method, and on theological aspects of ethics. Why this is the case I cannot fully explain.³⁶

A partial explanation may be that within Roman Catholicism controversies have occurred which leave little time and effort for more ecumenical interests. To be sure, some Protestants have entered into these controversies as well. I have in mind not only divisions among Catholics on practical moral and social questions, but also on some quite recondite matters of method which are seen to warrant practical judgments, e.g. the principle of double effect, proportionalism, and “consequentialism.” (The latter seems to be a venial, if not mortal, intellectual sin.) I believe one could fruitfully interpret these internal Catholic debates on the continuum known from the history of moral theology: from laxism through probabilism and its qualifications to rigorism. I also believe that underlying various positions taken are not only intellectual issues but pastoral concerns: for some persons a fear of opening the gates of a dam so that prevailing undesirable currents of modern culture are not contained, for others a concern for the turmoils of conscience and suffering that rigorism can create.

Another partial explanation is that Roman Catholic moral theologians necessarily have to deal with the controverted issue of magisterial authority. To establish a magisterium of moral theologians with relative independence from the official magisterium takes great effort and concentration of attention. Some moral theologians who, under other conditions, might have interests in ecumenism have been put on the intellectual and institutional defensive.³⁷ Ecclesiological issues, and not only issues of ecclesiastical authority, have to be faced, e.g. that of who among the People of God are to participate in the formation of official moral teachings. Whose experiences ought to be taken into account? Perhaps

³⁶ In November 1987, Loyola University of Chicago sponsored a series of papers and a one-day symposium on Joseph Cardinal Bernardin’s “consistent ethic of life.” One paper was written by a Protestant, but it was noteworthy that in the discussion no interest was shown in ecumenical consensus. The concentration of discussion was on matters quite internal to Roman Catholic moral theology.

³⁷ See Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J., eds., *Readings in Moral Theology, No. 3: The Magisterium and Morality* (New York: Paulist, 1982).

Protestants have been reluctant to publish a great deal on these matters for fear of making life more difficult for their Catholic friends.³⁸

There is no significant evidence that Protestant writers in ethics are any more interested in focusing attention on ecumenical consensus, per se, than are Roman Catholics. Where one finds a confluence of thinking, it is directed more by practical matters than by matters philosophical and theological. Evidence for this can be adduced from literature on liberation theology and ethics, feminist theology and ethics, and matters of human sexuality. Perhaps informal clusters of unity on such items have developed, and ecumenism among the participants is a by-product. My impression, however, is that at least some important intellectual issues, both theological and philosophical, are bypassed.³⁹

Second, an issue that has always been present between Protestant ethics built on the principle of Scripture alone and the Roman Catholic tradition continues to be debated with great vigor. In Barth's terms it is the relation of Christian theological ethics to moral philosophy. There are various layers to the general issue. One is how the specifically Christian aspects of morality and theology are related to more general

³⁸ Noteworthy for its direct and critical analysis of the Roman Catholic position (as well as others) on the abortion issue is Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Our Right to Choose: Toward a New Ethic of Abortion* (Boston: Beacon, 1983).

³⁹ There is a wing of conservative Protestantism from which are coming works that are not in any sense anti-Catholic but are grounded in Protestant traditions of biblical theology as the basis for ethics. See, e.g., Donald G. Bloesch, *Freedom for Obedience: Evangelical Ethics in Contemporary Times* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987). Bloesch states that his principal mentors in ethics are Karl Barth, Jacques Ellul, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The pattern of the book is more a description of an evangelical position contrasted with other positions (with expositions of a wide variety of materials) than it is a strongly developed apology for the evangelical position. For example, one finds summary statements such as the following: "Whereas philosophical ethics seeks to understand the good in the light of a general metaphysic or world view, theological ethics appeals to a definitive revelation of God in the sacred history mirrored in the Bible" (19). Ethics in general refers to the meaning of the good: "Christian ethics . . . means the attempt to live the Christian life, a life reflecting the passion and victory of Jesus Christ" (21). A "revealed reality, the living Word of God, . . . shapes moral decisions and guides moral reflection" (ibid.). There are brief discussions of some Roman Catholic writers in his section on contemporary ethical alternatives, but no ecumenical interest, per se, can be found.

Oliver O'Donovan, the Regius Professor of Moral Theology at Oxford, subtitled his book *Resurrection and Moral Order* as follows: *An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). While it is Christocentric like Bloesch's book, its argument is very different and much more complex. A major difference is O'Donovan's emphasis on the "created order," which is renewed in the resurrection of Christ and can be known through the Holy Spirit, which gives human beings access to it. Affinities with classic Catholicism, including patristic materials, are apparent; indeed, the argument builds upon some of them but in an "evangelical" way. For a more extended response to this book, see my review in *Journal of Religion* 68 (1988) 131-32.

ethical themes. Indeed, within that layer one finds different answers to the question about what is specifically Christian. This opens another layer, which I shall look at separately: how the biblical material is to be used in moral theology and Christian ethics. It is important to note that there are differences of opinion in that layer between Roman Catholics as well as between them and some Protestants. For example, the use of biblical theologies as one basis for political and social ethics is present in a great deal of Catholic liberation theology. Social ethics developed from that base take quite a different form, and sometimes content as well, from social ethics based on natural law.⁴⁰ Other layers can be suggested by questions. What is the norm for the lives of individual Christians and for the Christian community? Is it conformity to Christ as revealed in the Gospels, a fidelity to him which is often also the way of the cross? Or is it a kind of deputyship of Christians in the world and its institutions seeking to bring events into accord with moral principles derived from nature, from creation? Ecclesiological questions come up. Is the Christian community to be a prophetic minority engaged in critical responses—responses based on its fidelity to Christ—to both general ethical theories and events in society? Or is it to be a community that is “worldly” not in a pejorative sense but in the sense of participating in policy formation and events in such a way that “compromise” of Gospel “ideals” and norms is required? Theological issues, in a very focused sense, are involved. Is the divine intention known in and through the divine ordering of creation? Or is it known almost exclusively through the historic revelation in Christ? How an individual theologian or a tradition interprets the relations between creation and redemption, how this relation is understood, in effect, in the Godhead has very important implications for ethics.⁴¹

How ought Christian ethics to be related to philosophical ethics? This theme was introduced in my survey of pre-Vatican II Protestant theologians, and the discussion continues. Current discussion is, however, less on the theological and more on the methodological level. Indeed, my impression is that it has become a debate and is more intense now than it has been in the recent past. On the whole, Roman Catholic moral

⁴⁰For an interesting comparative analysis of this point, see David A. Krueger, “The Economic Ethics of John A. Ryan and Gustavo Gutierrez” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1988).

⁴¹Douglas J. Schuurman, in “Creation, Eschaton and Ethics” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1988), demonstrates this by examining two Protestant theologians, Emil Brunner and Jürgen Moltmann. The systematic question is how eschatologies affect ethics, with particular focus on whether the eschaton is interpreted as a restoration and fulfilment of all of creation or primarily of history. Comparable studies comparing Roman Catholic theologians with some Protestants would be instructive.

theologians have avoided defending intensely confessional positions—those which emphasize the distinctiveness and particularity in Christian ethics relative to moral philosophy. This, as all readers of this journal know, is in keeping with the mainstream of Catholic tradition, and with the mainline of the Reformation tradition. On the latter, one could cite Luther on the civic use of the law, Calvin on the natural law, and Melancthon's ethical writings, as well as others.

Examples of recent Catholic publications can be drawn from both sides of the Atlantic. A very useful analysis of the issue was given by Charles Curran in which he both surveys the literature and argues his own position. His personal conclusion is that there is a Christian ethic insofar as Christians "reflect on action in the light of their explicitly Christian understanding of moral data, but Christians and non-Christians can and do share the same general goals and intentions, attitudes and dispositions, as well as norms and concrete actions." There is a Catholic ethic insofar as "Catholics act and Catholic theology reflects on action in the light of Catholic self-understanding, but this results in no different moral data although more importance might be given to certain aspects such as the ecclesial element."⁴² After a mildly critical response, Richard McCormick concludes that "being a Christian means: (1) being human—in continuity with the human but in a context and atmosphere where grasp of the human may be intensified by Christian intentionalities; (2) being social—essentially a member of an *ecclesia* whose knowledge is shared knowledge; and (3) being individual—with existential calls and obligations not shared by others."⁴³

Quite similar positions are expounded and defended from across the Atlantic. McCormick echoes quite accurately notes coming from his German Jesuit colleagues. Josef Fuchs concludes that "the newness that Christ brings is not really a new (material) morality, but a new creature of grace and of the Kingdom of God, a man of divinely self-giving love." The Christian realities do not bring a *basis* for morality different from truly human morality; "the meaning of the *Christianum* for our concrete living is to be found in its motivating power." There is a distinctive intentionality in the Christian life but not a different morality.⁴⁴ Bruno Schüller distinguishes, among other things, between exhortation and normative ethics; biblical ethics are exhortative, and normative ethics

⁴² Charles E. Curran, "Is There a Catholic and/or Christian Ethic?" *Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Annual Convention of the CTSA* (1974) 153–54.

⁴³ Richard A. McCormick, S.J., "Response to Professor Curran—II," *ibid.* 164.

⁴⁴ Josef Fuchs, S.J., "Is There a Distinctively Christian Morality," in *Personal Responsibility and Christian Morality* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Univ., 1983) 54–68; quotations are from 61 and 63.

are to be tested by universal criteria of truth.⁴⁵ Gerard J. Hughes summarizes his approach as follows: "In the end, my argument turns on the contention that belief in revelation is irrational unless that revelation somehow fits in with our antecedent convictions, and, in particular, with our antecedent moral convictions."⁴⁶

The general tendency of this traditional Roman Catholic position is under criticism in vigorous ways at the present time, though not all Protestants are in agreement in the debate. Robin Lovin's study, e.g., of the social ethics of Barth, Brunner, and Bonhoeffer is grounded in a systematic question put to *sola scriptura* theologians. If Protestant ethics persists in rejecting natural law, or views that are in some way functionally equivalent to it, how can it contribute to public choices in a significant way?⁴⁷ The issue expressed in such a question has several dimensions. In my judgment, two of the currently most influential Protestant ethicists represent radical challenges to the traditional Catholic position and to Protestants such as Lovin: Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder.

The opening sentence of Hauerwas' *A Community of Character* articulates a motif that is central to his perspective: "Though this book touches on many issues it is dominated by one concern: to reassert the social significance of the church as a distinct society with an integrity peculiar to itself."⁴⁸ Yoder argues for radical reformation, not on the basis of historical precedents from the 16th century but on the basis of

⁴⁵ Bruno Schüller, S.J., "The Debate on the Specific Character of a Christian Ethics: Some Remarks," in *Wholly Human* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Univ., 1986) 15-42.

⁴⁶ Gerard J. Hughes, S.J., *Authority in Morals: An Essay in Christian Ethics* (London: Heythrop Monographs, 1978) 10. The essays by Curran, Fuchs, and Schüller that I have cited are among those included in the useful anthology *Readings in Moral Theology No. 2: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, eds. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J. (New York: Paulist, 1980). Space does not permit me to interpret the differences between these authors or to develop their arguments for the conclusions I have noted. For other essays see *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Faith and Public Choices* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). Lovin's general concern is shared by many other Protestants. I addressed the issues in several dimensions in an uncharacteristically polemical lecture prepared for the 1985 convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church and the University." See *Proceedings of the Fortieth Annual Convention* (1985) 83-94.

⁴⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1981) 1. Similar statements can be found in many of his essays on social and theological ethics. E.g., ". . . [T]heology cannot begin a consideration of ethics with claims about creation and redemption, but must begin with God's choice of Israel and the life of Jesus. . . . [T]he first social task of the church is to be the church, which entails being a community capable of being a critic to every human pretension" (*The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* [Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1983] xviii).

the truth of the biblical theology which he expounds and defends. As with Hauerwas, no short quotations grasp the full argument, but the following are representative. "The church precedes the world epistemologically. We know more fully from Jesus Christ and in the context of the confessed faith than we know in other ways. . . . The church precedes the world as well axiologically, in that the lordship of Christ is the center which must guide critical value choices, so that we may be called to subordinate or even to reject those values which contradict Jesus."⁴⁹ An effect of such views is an aggressive prophetic ethics from an accepted "minority position" based on fidelity to the authors' interpretation of New Testament faith and ethics.

I noted that there are several dimensions to radical Protestant discussions of the issue under consideration. Morally, there is the dimension of what appears to be compromise of Christian morality in efforts to be relevant, or in Lovin's terms to be a full participant in public choices. Theologically, there is a dimension of confidence in the biblical revelation and its universal truth claims, and in which interpretation of it is correct. Philosophically, these authors find support in the writings of critics of "foundationalisms" in epistemology, of "rationalism" in ethical theory, and similar movements. They find support for their theological method in George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*.⁵⁰ They are historicists in the senses that history rather than nature is the ground of their theology and ethics and that all truth claims are relative to the historic communities from which they come. Ecclesiologically, as Yoder argues, the believers' church represented by the disciplined congregationalism in some of Protestant history is normative.

Space does not permit further elaboration of current Protestant challenges to the traditional Catholic interpretation of the relation of Christian ethics to philosophical ethics. I am surprised, however, that there is so little Catholic criticism of these Protestant trends, and that fundamental theological matters receive so little attention. And there is evi-

⁴⁹ John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1984) 11. Yoder's earlier book *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) contains a section entitled "Mainstream Ethics: Jesus Is Not the Norm" (15-19).

⁵⁰ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984). Lindbeck's preference for a cultural linguistic view of the doctrinal task shares the "antifoundationalism" of the ethicists and in its penultimate sentence commends those "younger" theologians who are renewing "the ancient practice of absorbing the universe into the biblical world." (There are interesting affinities between Lindbeck's book and similar work by others and my *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* [New York: Harper, 1961]. What I called a kind of sociology of religion has now become theology, or at least a theological method.)

dence of considerable influence of these Protestant trends in some Catholic quarters, as well as Protestant quarters that have traditionally had more affinity with Catholicism on this issue. My perception of this aspect of recent discussions is one reason that the interpretive framework of my *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* is no longer as useful as it was.

Third, as I noted, embedded in the issue of the relation of the particularly Christian to general ethics and moral philosophy is the authority and use of Scripture in Christian ethics and in Christian moral life. The literature on this topic by both Catholics and Protestants has increased significantly in the past 20 years. The topic can be divided by the following questions. (1) What interpretation of the ethics in the Bible is correct? (2) How are theological themes in the Bible related to its moral teachings? (3) Ought Christian ethics to be "biblical ethics," i.e. ought they to conform to the theology and the morality of the Bible? (4) If not, how ought the biblical themes be related to ethics? At the theological level? At the moral level?

A cursory summary of "classic" Catholicism will have to suffice as a base line for my discussion. Clearly, the Bible functioned theologically in the determination of the ultimate basis of ethics; sacred doctrine comes only from revelation. The natural law participates in the mind of God, a gracious Creator, and God's end for the creation is only known through the revelation in Christ. Grace is available through Christ and through faith and the sacraments, and is efficacious in orienting and correcting Christians in their moral lives as they move toward their supernatural end. Biblical morality is, except in a few extremes instances, the same as morality derived from the moral order of the creation. The "hard sayings" of Jesus are not obligatory norms for all Christians; some have a special vocation to fulfil them.

There is no unanimity among significant Catholic moral and political theologians on the authority and role of Scripture in ethics. Bernard Häring's work, which in both of his extended systematic treatments is centered in biblical theology in a way that is distinctive, represents one point on a continuum. Various liberation theologies with their grounding in biblical theological themes, e.g. Exodus and the kingdom of God, like Häring's, are quite different from Bruno Schüller's relegating biblical ethics to exhortation.⁵¹ The use of biblical themes as heuristic principles

⁵¹ See Bernard Häring, *The Law of Christ* (3 vols. Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1963) 1:vii-xii and 35-53, for one example of his Christocentric biblical theology as a basis for ethics. See also Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ* (3 vols. New York: Seabury, 1978) 1:7-25, for a more recent discussion of the authority of the Bible. After a brief interpretation of biblical themes relevant to ethics, he has a significant section "The Bible and Normative

for understanding events in history and politics has no real analogues among moral theologians; none, to my knowledge, attempts to interpret the circumstances of individual moral choices in the light of what God is seeking to do in those events.⁵²

Toward another extreme in the continuum are writings by Schüller, Fuchs, Hughes, and others for whom ethics in its material content is defensible without recourse to biblical revelation, or for whom biblical morality can be justified on independent ethical grounds—even cases which have been exceptions in older traditions. This is not to say that for these authors biblical revelation has no theological and religious significance and moral effects, but clearly the function is very different from what one finds in Häring or in liberation theologians.

The role of the Bible in Christian ethics has been more consciously addressed by Protestants in the last decades, though the kind of concern expressed in Robin Lovin's study was present in the J. H. Oldham and John Bennett tradition of middle axioms, in the writings of Boston University ethicists such as Walter Muelder, and other places. Some of the work attempts to relate both biblical theology and biblical ethics to more systematic ethical positions. For example, after the publication of a very useful survey article, "The Use of Scripture in Ethics," Allen Verhey wrote *The Great Reversal*, which is a study of New Testament ethics and a "modest proposal" for using them.⁵³ Verhey's work is a rare

Ethics," in which he says: "Those authors who minimize or exclude a specifically Christian content of normative moral theology come from that tradition of manuals which presented a rather static code morality or an ethics of principles and norms which could be well controlled." He cites Franz Böckle, *Fundamental Moral Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1980), which I could well have included in my discussion of Curran, McCormick, Fuchs, Schüller, and Hughes. "A moral theology of creative liberty and fidelity finds its distinctively Christian quality in the light of the dynamic dimensions and perspectives which we find in the Bible" (Häring, *Free and Faithful* 1:23). I do not understand the reasons for what seems to be a studied ignoring of Häring by name and citation in major recent authors I have cited in this article, with the major exception of Curran, and a minor exception of periodic reference in McCormick's "Notes on Moral Theology" through the years. E.g., Fuchs's essay "The Law of Christ" makes no mention of Häring; see Josef Fuchs, *Human Values and Christian Morality* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970) 76–91.

⁵² Liberation theologians' use of biblical theology is exemplified in what has become the classic text, as well as in other books by other authors. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973). My impression is that Roman Catholic discussions of political and social ethics can be distinguished into two strands *theologically* (and not merely by social theories and philosophical leanings): those grounded in biblical theologies and those grounded in more traditional natural law. The American Catholic bishops' letter on war and peace has both strands, quite unknitted to each other in my judgment. See *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* (found in several editions and printings).

⁵³ Allen Verhey, "The Use of Scripture in Ethics," *Religious Studies Review* 4 (1978) 28–

combination of competence in biblical scholarship and moral philosophy. Thomas Ogletree's contribution is systematically oriented from a phenomenological hermeneutic, and is a more comprehensive and systematic account, materially as well as methodologically, than Verhey's work.⁵⁴

Two recent books by Catholic authors demonstrate ways in which the Bible has a different sort of usage in Christian ethics from those positions criticized implicitly (at least) by Fuchs, Schüller, et al. The subtitle of Lisa Sowle Cahill's *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* points to a contribution more significant than does the title. She carefully goes through the hermeneutical dilemmas in the use of the Bible and courageously makes informed judgments which are innovative; these lead her onward through her chapters on Genesis and the New Testament.⁵⁵ Her work, I think, is a model of ecumenically informed scholarship. More ambitious, but also more scattered because of multiple authorship and the book's organization, is *Christian Biblical Ethics* by Robert J. Daly, S.J., et al. The subtitle indicates their intention to take quite a different path than that suggested by Schüller et al.: *From Biblical Revelation to Contemporary Christian Praxis: Method and Content*.⁵⁶ Both of these efforts bridge gaps between what have been characteristically Protestant and Catholic approaches to the issues.

While extreme positions on the use of the Bible in ethics and moral theology—a *sola scriptura* approach on the one hand and the "autonomy of ethics" on the other—represent more traditional divisions between Protestants and Catholics, there is evidence of important efforts that cannot be stereotyped. This, I believe, is being done not for the sake of ecumenical consensus but out of efforts to find new resolutions to an age-old issue: the authority of the Bible for theology as well as for ethics.

From among other matters worthy of observation that would require emendation of my framework in *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics*, my fourth and final one is a growing interest in a cluster of items: the role of affectivity, the "heart," imagination, vision, virtues, etc., in ethical theory and in moral life. This interest stems from various sources: the

38, and *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

⁵⁴Thomas W. Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). Space does not permit more extended discussions of recent works by other Protestants. See the bibliographies in Verhey's RSR article (which includes Jewish materials) and in Ogletree. See also Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J., eds., *Readings in Moral Theology No. 4: The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1984), for selected essays on the topic. For an analysis of alternatives, see Spohn, *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* (n. 35 above).

⁵⁵Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Between the Sexes* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

⁵⁶Robert J. Daly, S.J., et al., *Christian Biblical Ethics* (New York: Paulist, 1984).

importance of more complete human experience for ethics, not limited to cognition and logic; the limitations perceived in rationalistic moral philosophy and theology; the influence of certain theories of human perception; the recovery of the narrative character of religion; a new look at and emphasis on ethics of virtue; work done on the use of metaphors and symbols, and others. Critics of this interest worry about subjective and irrational tendencies that might be unleashed. For example, a statement by the Protestant Paul Lehmann, amply polemicized against by Paul Ramsey, indicated what critics worry about: "The theonomous conscience is the conscience immediately sensitive to the freedom of God to do in the always changing human situation what his humanizing aims and purposes require."⁵⁷

Persons who address this interest have significant differences which cannot be developed in this article; what I want to note is that the interest is present and growing among both Roman Catholics and Protestants. Among Catholic authors three can be noted. Daniel C. Maguire developed a comprehensive interpretation of moral choices which draws on many sources and addresses many issues; imagination is only one of the vectors in his diagram. The accent on its role, however, in a larger scheme is distinctive. He discusses five aspects which can only be listed here: excitement, quiet, work, malleability, and a sense of the *kairos*. His contribution to the discussions of affectivity is also significant; he begins it with "All moral experience is grounded in affectivity, in the fundamental experience of personal value," and quotes Teilhard de Chardin, "Great truths are felt before they are expressed."⁵⁸

Philip S. Keane indicates that a number of moralists now join in a criticism of excessive reliance on "discursive reason" in ethics and wants it understood that a focus on imagination does not mean that such an emphasis is wrong in moral theology; his purpose is not to attack moral principles but "to get at the 'more' . . . which imagination can help offer us."⁵⁹ The book draws from a number of sources to shape a brief account of the role of imagination in moral choices and illustrates it by addressing a number of current issues. For example, in the area of economic life he distinguishes three aspects of the role of imagination: it helps "to form a true and vital vision of the moral nature of economic problems"; it helps

⁵⁷ Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) 358. Ramsey calls Lehmann's position "act-agapism" or "act-koinonia" ethics: Paul Ramsey, "The Contextualism of Paul Lehmann," in *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics* (New York: Scribner's, 1967) 49-103.

⁵⁸ Daniel C. Maguire, *The Moral Choice* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978): on "Ethics and Creativity," 198-217; on affectivity, his chapter "The Feel of Truth," 281-305; quotations are from 281.

⁵⁹ Philip S. Keane, S.S., *Christian Ethics and Imagination* (New York: Paulist, 1984) 14.

to overcome parochialism that stems from immersion in our own culture and economic system; and it helps to develop more flexible attitudes toward persons living in other systems.⁶⁰ Note the nub of the claims in this example, not untypical of claims made by others: a different vision, a freedom from the bondage of parochialism, and flexibility in attitude.

William C. Spohn's interest in affectivity particularly has led him to work within the context of a classic Jesuit project: the process of discernment. The resources on which he draws are both European and American, and both Catholic and Protestant. Discernment, he writes, "is precisely the reasoning of the heart." "It makes *judgments of affectivity* which are based on the central convictions of a person's character."⁶¹ His proposal is developed carefully and he summarizes his conclusion as follows:

Christian discernment brings to light rich elements in moral decision-making. Judgments of affectivity legitimately ground some moral decisions through the discriminating functions of memory and imagination. These judgments are evaluated not by formal logic but by aesthetic criteria: by the sense of self, the evaluation of events through biblical symbols, and the correlation of certain ways of acting and the configuration of Christian affections. Because these criteria are normative within the public tradition of the Christian community, discernment is not finally accountable only to itself.⁶²

Ignatius Loyola and Jonathan Edwards, Karl Rahner and H. Richard Niebuhr—such are sources from which Spohn draws.

Space does not permit development of literature by Protestants which addresses and develops similar themes as those the Catholics are proposing. To readers of Christian ethics, affinities with the work of Stanley Hauerwas, with some aspects of my own work, and with that of others will be apparent. This represents a focus on a set of realities which are perceived to be present in moral experience, and both Protestants and Catholics seek the effective concepts to describe, analyze, and recommend consideration of them for normative ethics.⁶³

This account of interaction between Roman Catholic and Protestant ethics has not done justice to a great deal of literature. Important Catholic

⁶⁰ Ibid. 137–41; quotation is from 138.

⁶¹ William C. Spohn, "The Reasoning Heart: An American Approach to Discernment," in Frank M. Oppenheim, S.J., ed., *The Reasoning Heart* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Univ., 1986) 51–73; quotations are from 52.

⁶² Ibid. 73.

⁶³ Nontheological authors are within speaking distance of some of these trends in moral theology, e.g. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1982), and other feminist authors; with more philosophical rigor, Sabina Lovibond, *Realism and Imagination in Ethics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); and with magnificent erudition as well as philosophical acumen, Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1986). Other citations could be added.

authors have been totally neglected: Germain Grisez, John Finnis, William E. May, Margaret Farley, John Boyle, David Hollenbach, many liberation theologians, and more. An equivalent number of important Protestant authors have been ignored or underutilized: Trutz Rendtorff, Paul Ramsey, John Bennett, Gene Outka, James Childress, Jürgen Moltmann, Robert MacAfee Brown, and more. Important journal literature which reflects the work of lesser-known authors has not been mined. For this reason and others no theses are conclusively proved. A few plausible generalizations have been put forward: prior to Vatican II the interaction was distant and largely set by the traditional controverted issues between Protestant and Catholic theology; in the period I attended to in my *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* convergences could be demonstrated in practical reasoning, philosophical backing, and theological reconsideration; more recently the theological issues have been subordinated to some degree to methodological issues, and on some of these the interaction is quite unselfconscious. One firm conviction comes forth: interest in ecumenism per se, i.e. in finding grounds for overcoming disagreements for the sake of greater unity of Christian moral witness, is dormant if not dead. Maybe it was never alive!⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Only after submission of this article did I have access to John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (New York: Oxford/Clarendon, 1987). While interaction with Protestant theology and ethics is not given attention, the comprehensiveness and integration of its agenda—historical, ecclesiological, methodological, theological, and ethical—would modify some generalizations made in this article about current RC literature and provide a framework for a fine comparative study of the traditions. See the review by James R. Pollock in *TS* 49 (1988) 762–63.