that goes beyond the scope of ethics understood as a body of norms intended to guide action. It draws on other branches of philosophy and theology, as well as on the social sciences. For instance, a comprehensive and fundamental interpretation of business activity should deal with the nature of causality in social organizations, the connections between causality and moral responsibility, the interweaving of individual and community in a philosophical or theological understanding of human personhood, the place of business activities in the long historical transformation of human society and in the different types of political systems and ideologies.

It would ultimately move toward a spirituality of work and business. Historically, the professions and human activities that have received such a comprehensive interpretation in philosophical or theological terms have been the clergy, political rulers, and the medical profession. But there can be little doubt that, unless there is such a comprehensive interpretation, business ethics will be confined to the honorable but subsidiary function of applying principles to cases.

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PARABLE AND NARRATIVE IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Should Scripture be as central to moral theology as it often is to Christian moral experience? Do biblical stories, symbols, parables, and proverbs address conscience equally as much as the Decalogue and other explicitly normative material? In Roman Catholic circles these questions arise in the debate over the distinctiveness of Christian ethics. Most Catholic moralists still agree with Thomas Aquinas that Scripture does not alter natural human ethics, at least on the level of rules, principles, and basic human values.[1] An increasing minority, however, hold that distinctive religious convictions shape the meaning of moral values and principles and that the New Testament commands certain practices (such as voluntary poverty and nonviolence) that might not be fully intelligible to non-Christians.[2]

Protestant ethicists whose work begins from Scripture rather than from a philosophical ethics are insisting that Scripture influences Christian moral experience primarily through literary forms rather than

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[1] See 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); John Langan, S.J., "The Christian Difference in Ethics," *TS* 49 (1988) 131–50.

[2] See Vincent MacNamara, *Faith and Ethics: Recent Roman Catholicism* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 1985) 103-14, 122-31; Richard M. Gula, S. S., *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations for a Catholic Morality* (New York: Paulist, 1989) chap. 4.

through specific moral norms. The narratives of Exodus and Jesus' passion, the lyric expression of psalms and parables form the conscience through the imagination and dispositions. They provoke a new self-understanding and ways of interpreting the world which can and should lead to distinctive action. This approach is finding increasing agreement among Catholic biblical scholars and some moralists. I shall examine the appeal and problems posed by narrative theology and then turn to the discussion of biblical parables and stories to see how these literary forms shape moral consciousness.

Promises and Problems of Narrative Theology

Gabriel Fackre provides a two-level definition of narrative theology: "Taking into account its very wide borders, narrative theology is discourse about God in the setting of story. Narrative (in its narrow sense) becomes the decisive image for understanding and interpreting faith."[3] This approach can make at least three contributions to moral theology.

First, it promises normative guidance for the moral agent as a unique person. In his masterly work *The Making of Moral Theology*, John Mahoney, S.J., describes the current reworking of moral theology's scope and methods as unprecedented in the history of the Church. What the new developments "must betoken is a reappraisal of the traditional distinction between objective and subjective morality in terms of the diversity of individuals and of their distinct moral universes."[4] The moral act, once so confidently defined by relevant objective norms, must now be seen in the context of the particular moral agent. While the moral act has its standards, what criteria guide the moral agent as a whole in the struggle for authentic conversion and transformation?

Natural law rested on a fairly determinate notion of common human nature, but as contemporary moral theology shifts from "nature" to "person," it moves from the image of mass-produced goods to the image

[3] Gabriel Fackre, "Narrative Theology: An Overview," *Interpretation* 37 (1983) 343. See Amos Wilder, "Story and Story-World," ibid. 353-64; Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983); James Wm. McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986); Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life* (rev. ed.; Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1989) chaps. 8 and 9.

[4] John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 329. The individual does not discern in isolated fashion; for an illuminating account of the role of community and the Holy Spirit in moral discernment, see his *Seeking the Spirit: Essays in Moral and Pastoral Theology* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1981) Part 2. He writes that moral theology's dominant understanding of the moral life as law and God as supreme legislator resulted from a literalist reading of a limited analogy for moral experience which ignored its symbolic character and leads to serious distortions in Christian moral understanding (*Making* 252).

of a unique fabric woven by specific acts of interpretation, choice, relationship, and suffering. Since the individual person is an emergent reality, the gradual achievement of a coherent character becomes a central part of the human project. Personal identity and character are like an unfolding story or a script that is still being written.[5]

Narrative theology begins from the insight that the medium of moral guidance uniquely suited to the emergent self is *story:* a dramatic unity which unfolds in time wherein character emerges through action and suffering. In 1941 H. Richard Niebuhr wrote that impersonal categories cannot reveal the significance of personal experience. Although mechanical or organic images can organize material sense perceptions, personal images are required to order affective experience to illumine the life journey. The discerning self refers to paradigmatic persons and events as analogies that can disclose the deeper significance of life's events.[6]

Secondly, attending to the narrative framework of Scripture promises a more theological interpretation of its normative material. While few dispute that biblical authors borrowed moral insights from contemporary secular wisdom, they inserted that wisdom into the "world" of faith whose outlines are set by the biblical stories. Some appreciation of that narrative is necessary to understand the most central moral commands of Scripture. The Decalogue in Exodus has the story of God's mighty deliverance from Egypt as its preamble (Exodus 20). The oft-repeated injunction to care for the widow, orphan, and migrant worker bears the reminder that "you yourselves were once strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exod 23:9). The commandment to love the neighbor is explained paradoxically by the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37), not by abstract instruction. In John's Gospel Jesus specifies his "new commandment" by referring to three narrative touchstones. In chapter 13 he points to the washing of the disciples' feet and the memory of their history with him ("such as my love has been for you": 13:34), while in chapter 15 he refers to his impending death for their sakes (vv. 12-13).[7]

Finally, the story of Jesus is the key to many if not all of the virtues and norms mandated by the New Testament. Stanley Hauerwas, the best-known advocate of narrative theology, argues that all virtues are "narrative dependent" since they are defined by the stories of particular

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[5] See James E. Giles, "The Story of the Self: The Self of the Story," *Religion and Intellectual Life* 4 (1986) 105-12.

[6] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941) chap. 3.

[7] George W. Stroup in his *The Promise of Narrative Theology: Recovering the Gospel in the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) was one of the first to argue that narrative is also key to understanding all of Christian theology, since it rests on the gracious self-disclosure of God as personal, a message which could most adequately be expressed in the medium of narrative.

communities. What is distinctive about Christian virtues is the story of Jesus that defines them by graphically displaying their meaning.[8] Recall the Sermon on the Mount's injunction to turn the other cheek for an example of how the story of Jesus serves as the subtext that gives both content and motivation to the norm (Mt 5:39). It does not stand as an isolated proverb but is freighted with the background of Jesus' conduct during his passion and, more remotely, with the messianic forbearance pictured in the Servant Songs of Isaiah.[9]

Recently, serious challenges have been posed to narrative theology. Many of them have arisen in American theology's noisiest current tug of war: the debate between "confessionalists" and "universalists" on the issue of theological truth claims. The assertions of most faith communities' beliefs are meaningful to their adherents, but must they also be true? If so, must they be validated in ways which any reasonable person could understand? If their "truth" rests primarily on their personal import (that is, their meaning) for believers, is this not intellectually suspect? Confessionalists reply that no one can grasp their world view without participating in the community's way of life. A number of the most sophisticated proponents of the confessionalist position come from Yale Divinity School and rely on contemporary epistemology and hermeneutics to warrant their position: Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Ronald F. Thiemann, and the most comprehensive work to date on ethics, Paul Nelson's *Narrative and Morality: A Theological Inquiry*.[10] Stanley Hauerwas, a Yale graduate of somewhat different hue, is wary of hermeneutical

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[8] See Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981) chaps. 2, 3, 6; *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1983) chaps. 2 and 7. Hauerwas relies on Alasdair MacIntyre for this view of virtue as defined by a given culture's stories; see MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981).

[9] See Stephen Charles Mott, "The Use of the New Testament for Social Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 15 (1987) 225-60. For the recent comprehensive treatment of NT moral material that should become the standard point of reference for the field, see Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

[10] See Frank McConnell, ed., *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition* (New York: Oxford University, 1986) esp. Hans W. Frei, "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?" (36-77), and James M. Robinson, "The Gospels as Narrative" (97-112). Also George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1985); Paul Nelson, *Narrative and Morality: A Theological Inquiry* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University, 1989); Garrett Green, ed., *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), an outstanding collection of essays in this Festschrift for Hans W. Frei, esp. chapters by Maurice Wiles, Stephen Crites, David H. Kelsey, Gene Outka, and George Lindbeck.

arguments that he believes distract from the concrete testimony of communities where the gospel is being lived.[11]

The tension between community meaning and publicly defensible truth has important pastoral consequences. Paul Lauritzen writes that no one has put the problem more trenchantly than Jeffrey Stout:

> Christian believers were, and are, faced with the following dilemma: either they reformulate their beliefs in a way that is compatible with modernity—in which case their beliefs inevitably lose their distinctiveness—or they positively celebrate the paradoxical nature of the beliefs—in which case the beliefs remain incomprehensible and hence socially irrelevant in the modern world.[12]

Both Hauerwas and Johannes Metz appeal to narrative in order to navigate between the twin perils of irrelevance and lack of distinctiveness. They hold that Christian stories and the convictions they engender are not justified conceptually but practically insofar as they produce communities of faith committed to embody their transforming power. However, the two authors derive opposing strategies of life from the same stories. "For Metz, the result is a life committed to near revolutionary social action; for Hauerwas, a life given to a sort of sectarian pacifistic witness."[13] This sharp divergence signals trouble for a pragmatic justification of the Christian story. "For if the truthfulness of the Christian story is to be judged by its practical consequences, and these consequences are as varied as Hauerwas and Metz's writings would suggest, how does an appeal to narrative establish the truthfulness of Christian convictions, even on pragmatic grounds?"[14] The pragmatic demonstration does not work even within the community of belief, let alone before a secular audience.

James M. Gustafson charged that Hauerwas' position is a "sectarian temptation" for theology.[15] His reply to Lauritzen would probably echo

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[11] "The bible does not make sense apart from the community that gives it intelligibility" (Stanley Hauerwas and Steve Long, "Interpreting the Bible as a Political Act," *Religion and Intellectual Life* 6, nos. 3/4, 134-42). For a mediating position which builds on H. Richard Cook's work to ground confessional claims on a philosophically defensible basis, see Martin Cook's forthcoming volume from Augsburg/Fortress, entitled *The Open Circle: A Confessional Method in Theology.*

[12] Paul Lauritzen, "Is 'Narrative' Really a Panacea? The Use of 'Narrative' in the Work of Metz and Hauerwas," *Journal of Religion* 67 (1987) 322-39; see Jeffrey Stout, *Flight from Authority* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981).

[13] Lauritzen, "Narrative" 336.

[14] Ibid. 338. For a nuanced discussion on the justification of religious convictions by combining pragmatic and phenomenological approaches, see William Schweiker, "Iconoclasts, Builders, and Dramatists: The Use of Scripture in Theological Ethics," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 1986, 129-62.

[15] See James Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the

his rejoinder to Gustafson: "Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere ... theological convictions inextricably involve truth-claims that are in principle open to challenge." He asserts, however, that a confessional standpoint is necessary to judge these claims: "the very content of Christian convictions requires that the self be transformed if we are adequately to see the truth of the convictions—e.g., that I am a creature of a good creator yet in rebellion against my status as such."[16]

The debate over narrative highlights an epistemological problem that haunts Western philosophy. Are meaning, value, and intelligibility grounded in particular events and experiences or in universal structures? Although nominalists and American pragmatism opted for the particular, most philosophers and theologians look to the universal as the basis of truth and value. Charles W. Allen recommends a retrieval of Aristotle's notion of *phronēsis* in order to heal the dichotomy between the richness of contingency and the universality of abstraction. *Phronēsis* combines the correlative notions of "informative particularity and malleable universality."[17] Allen supports a pragmatism that sees truth and meaning as performative and reconstructive; therefore no measure of validity can ignore the practical valence of the concept or principle in question. This is a fortiori true for the propositions of Christian faith, which require commitment to personal and social transformation.[18]

The Gospel in Parable

The title of John Donahue's well-received volume on parables expresses the epistemological challenge. How do symbols, events, parables, and stories become "informative particulars" that embody the gospel message? They are not literary devices to illustrate a point already established

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Church, and the University," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 40 (1985) 83-94.

[16] Stanley M. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World and Living in Between* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth, 1988) 9, 10.

[17] "It presumes ... that the particularity of our contingent standpoints can be more than particularly informative without denying their full particularity, and that the standards appropriate to guide our discernment of informative particularity can aim for a malleable universality that need not be seen as any less universal for being malleable" (Charles W. Allen, "The Primacy of *Phronesis:* A Proposal for Avoiding Frustrating Tendencies in Our Conceptions of Rationality," *Journal of Religion* 69 [1989] 368).

[18] On the wisdom of confessionalism, see also Michael G. Cartwright, "The Practice and Performance of Scripture: Grounding Christian Ethics in a Communal Hermeneutic," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 1988, 31-53. For the other side of the argument, see Gary Comstock, "Truth or Meaning: Ricoeur versus Frei on Biblical Narrative," *Journal of Religion* 66 (1986) 117-40; also David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity," *TS* 50 (1989) 548-70, and Tracy's *Plurality and Ambiguity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

in theory or motivational appeals to support general moral principles. The Exodus narrative and the parable of the Good Samaritan reveal fundamental patterns of meaning in their earthiness and drama. If abstracted from parable and story, these patterns lose much of their significance and capacity to transform the agent. William Wimsatt defines a "concrete universal" as a work of literature or art that presents "an object which in a mysterious and special way is both highly general and highly particular."[19] As concrete universals, biblical images and narratives have an impact on moral life, since they shape the self-understanding of moral agents, fix distinctive angles of vision on the world, and indicate conduct that fits their meaning.[20]

Donahue emphasizes four elements in the parables of Jesus. They are realistic, metaphorical, paradoxical or surprising, and open-ended. He cites C. H. Dodd's classic definition: "At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought."[21] If myths establish a world, parables subvert it. In recounting the story, the reader becomes caught and then exposed. When the prophet Nathan's parable of the "little ewe lamb" snares King David (2 Sam 12:1-10), we glimpse the power of parables. We do not interpret them as much as they interpret us. They make us recognize more about ourselves then we care to.

The parable of the Two Debtors which Jesus tells to Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:41-43) functions in similar fashion as a trap and elicits a grudging acceptance from Simon. So too today, when we read the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14) and smugly identify with the humble prayer of the tax collector, we are in effect adopting the attitude of the Pharisee, "I am not like others" (Luke 18:11, au. trans.).[22]

    [19] Cited in John A. Donahue, S.J., *The Gospel in Parable: Metaphor, Narrative, and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 14. The book includes a comprehensive bibliography of the abundant material on parable that has appeared in the last two decades. See also Pheme Perkins, *Hearing the Parables of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1981).
    [20] William F. May examines the moral import of dominant symbols on the medical profession: parent, fighter, technician, and teacher. He notes that these images support and correct one another by exposing the limits of a particular metaphor. Viewing the physician as contractor distorts the relation to the patient by suppressing the elements of gift and indebtedness, mutuality and responsibility. A biblically nourished image of covenant is a more truthful key to the practice of medicine (*The Physician's Covenant: Images of the Healer in Medical Ethics* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983]). See also Robert Veatch and Carol Mason, "Hippocratic versus Judeo-Christian Medical Ethics: Principles in Conflict," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 15 (1987) 86-105.
    [21] C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner's, 1961) 5.
    [22] Donahue, *Gospel* 19.

Revelation can occur in the shocking moment when the realism of the parable breaks down and God's action breaks into mundane life. Metaphor and story assault our settled notions of who we are and how the world always runs. New possibilities break in and we are forced to imagine that we can be different if the reign of God is drawing near. Because the parables are open-ended, they do not allow the hearer to remain aloof or inactive. They do not dictate specific conduct, since "as religious language they present not simply a series of ethical paradigms or exhortations, though they are often so interpreted, but a *vision of reality which becomes a presupposition to ethics.*"[23]

Donahue takes the reader through the details and dramatic unfolding of the parables to recapture the transformative power of stories that moralizing preachers have turned into clichés. The parables' tension and surprise have to be recaptured. As George Stroup describes it, revelation comes not in a "fusion of horizons" between the worlds of parable and hearer but in a "collision of horizons."[24] Like every metaphoric expression, the meaning cannot be distilled off from the parabolic narrative as a "lesson." Donahue traces how the dramatic action of the Good Samaritan parable refuses to let either the audience or the lawyer set limits on who must be loved; it turns the tables on any attempt to circumscribe the scope of compassion. "Under Luke's tutelage the parable becomes *a paradigm of the compassionate vision* which is the presupposition for ethical action."[25] His "expanding contextual analysis" yields new insights. For example, Luke employs a doublet of parables to show that the love command

is a *single commandment* with a double focus. The parable of the Good Samaritan with its exhortation to do mercy to the neighbor and the story of Martha and Mary with its praise of the one who sits and listens to the Lord form a twofold parabolic illustration of the single command. In both, an outsider (Samaritan or woman) is chosen to shock the hearers and allow them to see discipleship in a new light. To love God with whole heart and mind and the neighbor as one's self demands both compassionate and effective entry into the world of the neighbor as well as undistracted attentiveness to the word of the Lord.[26]

If believers read the Synoptics as extended parables, they are less likely to absolutize the Gospel text. The Gospel and the figure of Jesus point

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[23] Ibid. 17; see also 151.

[24] Stroup, *Promise* 144, 209. For a useful study of examples of actual sermons employing a parabolic form, see Eugene L. Lowrey, *How to Preach a Parable: Designs for Narrative Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989).

[25] Stroup, *Promise* 132. See Benedict M. Guevin, "The Moral Imagination and the Shaping Power of the Parables," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 17 (1989) 63-79.

[26] Stroup, *Promise* 126-27.

beyond themselves "to the ultimate mystery of the divine-human encounter." Like the parables, the Gospel requires adaptation to new situations and creative response to the world of new possibilities it discloses.[27] However, Donahue does not agree with those who locate the transformative power of the parables in the metaphorical process itself. The parables are narratives in metaphoric form which refer to another beyond themselves. Those who seem to imagine that "salvation comes from metaphor alone" ignore the metaphor's actual referent. "Jesus' language is powerful not because of its aesthetic brilliance or paradoxical quality, but because of the experience of God it mediates and the kind of life Jesus himself lived. For example, one can think of his association with tax collectors, sinners, and other marginal groups as an enacted parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1-7)."[28]

Sallie McFague holds that Christian theology should be rewritten in a metaphorical key to avoid becoming literal and idolatrous. She describes the way metaphors work on the imagination to spark insight. "The response to a metaphor is similar to the response to a riddle: one 'gets' it or not, and what one 'gets' is the new, extended meaning which is a result of the interaction of the subjects."[29] In asserting "war is a chess game," for example, both sets of connotations interact to spark an insight; taken literally, the interaction and the insight both vanish. She writes:

As Ricoeur has said perceptively, the interactive partners in permanent tension in a parable are two ways of being in the world, one of which is the conventional way and the other, the way of the kingdom. . . . The plot of the parable forms one partner of the interactive metaphor while the conventional context against which it is set is the other partner. Reality is redescribed through the tension generated by these two perspectives.[30]

Robert W. Funk summarizes the tension inherent in the startling ways of relating to others which we find in the Laborers in the Vineyard (Mt 20:1-16) and other parables as the tension between the logic of merit and

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[27] Ibid. 198. See Donahue's "Jesus as the Parable of God in the Gospel of Mark," *Interpretation* 32 (1978) 369-86, and "The 'Parable' of the Sheep and Goats: A Challenge to Christian Ethics," *TS* 47 (1986) 3-31. Also Robert A. Krieg, C.S.C., *Story-Shaped Christology: The Role of Narratives in Identifying Jesus Christ* (New York: Paulist, 1988), which shows the connection between Gospel and the response of faith by interweaving his theology with the narrative of Dorothy Day's life.

[28] Donahue, *Gospel* 11.

[29] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 39; see also her *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

[30] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* 46.

the logic of grace.[31] The interaction of these different perspectives makes the whole life of Jesus metaphorical, and, McFague argues, it requires that Christian theology should be framed metaphorically, thus emphasizing the indirectness and dissimilarity between our concepts and the reality of God. She charges that the Catholic tradition is prone to take theological language idolatrously, reading metaphor literally.[32] She calls for a redescription of God in new ways which will have meaning for groups hitherto excluded from the patriarchal world of traditional Christianity.

John C. Hoffman challenges McFague's position that parables are extended metaphors rather than narratives. "Story is qualitatively and not merely quantitatively other than metaphor. . . . Is melody only an extended chord? Is a motion picture really a series of still photos? Like such analogies from music and cinema, story incorporates time while metaphor is static."[33] Metaphorical images, while tensive, do not develop; time, on the other hand, is central to the unfolding plot of stories. In addition, narrative gives a "full sense of history, choice and the clear distinction between the open future and the closed past."[34] Since choice and time are integral to human experience, narrative provides a more apt vehicle for human identity than metaphor. Indeed, "we more accurately speak of metaphor as the limiting case of story—narrative with its temporal life stilled."[35]

Narrative and Moral Reflection

If parables challenge the agent's ethical presuppositions, biblical narratives guide moral reflection and action more directly.

1. At the most general level, Judeo-Christian faith responds to the depiction of God, creation, and other humans displayed in biblical narratives; a faithful way of life must be consonant with that world view. The narrative approach insists that the agent learns this world view

[31] Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic and the Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 193-96.

[32] For another view see Michael L. Cook, "Revelation as Metaphoric Process," *TS* 47 (1986) 388-411.

[33] John C. Hoffman, "Metaphorical or Narrative Theology," *Studies in Religion* 16 (1987) 174; see also his *Law, Freedom and Story: The Role of Narrative Theology in Therapy, Society, and Faith* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University, 1986).

[34] Hoffman, "Metaphorical or Narrative Theology" 176.

[35] Ibid, 182. Donahue endorses Ricoeur's position that parables are a combination of the metaphoric process and narrative form; see Donahue, *Gospel* 10-11. Whether all human experience has an implicitly narrative shape remains an open question, despite the fact that many narrative theologians take it to be self-evident.

through the stories of a believing community. This faith perspective functions through an educated imagination that grasps "the whole" which the "parts" (specific acts and virtues) must fit.[36] Narrativists hold that this perspective is not a transcendental structure of consciousness or universally given horizon of meaning.

2. In terms of the agent's perspective and vision, biblical events and images can serve as "lenses" for interpreting some current experiences as analogous to those paradigms, thereby indicating an analogous (not identical) response. This use is not necessarily confined to believers, as Michael Walzer points out in *Exodus and Revolution*:

And because of the centrality of the bible in Western thought and the endless repetition of the story, the pattern has been etched deeply into our political culture. It isn't only the case that events fall, almost naturally, into an Exodus shape; we work actively to give them that shape. We complain about oppression; we hope (against all the odds of human history) for deliverance; we join in covenants and constitutions; we aim at a new and better social order. Though in attenuated form, Exodus thinking seems to have survived the secularization of political theory.[37]

3. Biblical narratives, especially as interpreted and embodied in the living medium of faith communities, inform and inspire dispositions or "virtues." Without denying that there are cross-cultural affinities among various practices of virtues, most narrative theologians insist that virtuous practices are defined through the basic stories of particular communities. Accordingly, a philosophical definition of honesty remains rather pallid alongside the depiction of honesty and integrity in John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.[38] Without narrative display, one cannot learn how a virtue serves as a skill to navigate in life's complexities. Some virtues that are notoriously difficult to combine in a theoretical account are held together in narratives: e.g., Jesus meets the demands of both mercy and justice in his treatment of the woman caught in adultery in Jn 8:1-11.

4. Graphic biblical injunctions such as "turning the other cheek" or

[36] This use of the imagination is a common feature in any ethical perspective; see Sabina Lovibund, *Realism and Imagination in Ethics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983).

[37] Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985) 134. On the use of Exile as analogy, see Ralph W. Klein, *Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). For an example of the moral use of a biblical institution (the jubilee remission of debts), see Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985). On the role of symbols in "the theological interpretation of the significance of circumstances" and their critical control, see James M. Gustafson, *Can Ethics Be Christian?* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1975) chap. 5.

[38] John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: Modern Library, 1950).

"washing one another's feet" are images or compressed stories that guide imagination and emotion. They challenge spontaneous impulses (here to retaliation or self-seeking) and shape specific intentions coherent with them, without absolving the agent from thinking through what to do.

The common denominator for these uses of narratives and symbols in moral reflection is *analogy*. They display a pattern which can be paradigmatic for evaluation and discernment of action. The meaning of the analogy is captured in the interplay of character and motivation in the narrative plot, or in the arresting metaphor. In moral discernment we do not treat the story or image as raw material from which a general principle can be extracted and then can be held in reserve until the appropriate cases reappear, ready for the principle's application. The application is more direct, intuitive, and imaginative. James M. Fischer describes the method for using biblical material developed by a joint commission of exegetes and moralists: "It begins with the observation that most human decisions are reached on the basis more of images than of reasoning."[39]

Since we are simultaneously members of several "communities" (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church, U.S. society, the academic guild, a given family, late capitalist consumer society, various corporate cultures, etc.) whose respective stories do not necessarily converge, how are biblical images to assert some directive primacy? Biblical images and stories ought to challenge the prediscursive patterns of self-understanding that the secular culture has inculcated in the agent, stimulating insight like the parables do. Moral philosophers and theologians have neglected this prediscursive and imaginative side of moral *recognition* in favor of the more intellectual *justification* of choices accomplished by providing publicly intelligible reasons. As moral theology expands its scope to include character, dispositions, and community ethos, it needs a richer model of moral discernment than the practical syllogism. Narrative theology will be an important resource in expanding the range of moral deliberation to include both the disclosive and pragmatic meanings of truth.

Granted that, there are a variety of qualifications which must be made, all of which fit under the general conclusion of Paul Nelson's recent work: "narrative is necessary but insufficient for Christian ethics. To describe the moral realm as an interweaving of narrative-dependent and

[39] Robert J. Daly, S.J., et al., *Christian Biblical Ethics: From Biblical Revelation to Contemporary Christian Praxis: Method and Content* (New York: Paulist, 1984) 257; see also 175, 289. For the traditional use of analogy in moral theology, see Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988) esp. 251-52. The particular affinity of the Catholic tradition for the analogical use of symbols and the theological significance of "classic" literary products is spelled out in David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

narrative-independent features does not nullify the distinctive contribu-
tion of narrative to the texture of the Christian moral life."[40] He detects
"in Hauerwas' position a submerged theory of something like natural
law" in the requirement for universalizability of moral principles and in
the choice of "narrative-independent" criteria to guide the choice of
which narrative to follow.[41] Two obstacles prevent narrative from being
"a universal solvent for all theological disagreements." Scripture contains
an irreducible plurality of narratives that require selection based on non-
narrative grounds. Hence "attention to different narratives within scrip-
ture may yield discrepant conclusions. Second, the same narrative or
biblical narrative as a whole can be construed in different ways and used
to warrant a variety of substantive theological proposals."[42]

Furthermore, analogy requires flexible application, since the new sit-
uation is always unlike the prime analogue in some respects. The creative
imagination relates the present situation to the appropriate gestalt in
Scripture to discern new ways of acting that are consonant with it.
Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza advocates using Scripture as prototype
rather than as archetype. An archetypal use takes "historically limited
experiences and texts and posits them as universals, which then become
authoritative and normative for all times and cultures."[43] A prototypical
reading employs biblical materials as "critically open to the possibility,
even the necessity, of its own transformation."[44] Feminist biblical her-
meneutics highlight certain androcentric biases operative in the received
text of Scripture that have been made normative by a patriarchal culture.
Although the commitment to liberation provides some control on how
biblical images can be transformed, that perspective itself may become

[40] Nelson, *Narrative* 149.

[41] Ibid. 128. On the question of such criteria, Roberto Mangabeira Unger writes: "The
difficulty lies in the overabundance of reasons for preference rather than in their absence"
(*Passion: An Essay on Personality* [New York: Free, 1984] 84). He then spells out a set of
criteria coherent with his insightful phenomenology of the emotions.

[42] Nelson, *Narrative* 83-84. Anyone doubting Nelson's caveats should read Michael
Goldberg's spirited disagreement with Ronald Thiemann's interpretation of Israel's nar-
rative in "God, Action and Narrative: *Which* Narrative? *Which* Action? *Which* God?"
Journal of Religion 68 (1988) 39-56. See also Goldberg, *Jews and Christians, Getting Our
Stories Straight: The Exodus and the Passion-Resurrection* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985),
and Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschogrod, eds., *Parable and Story in Christianity*
(New York: Paulist, 1989).

[43] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical
Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1984) 10.

[44] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Towards a Feminist Liberation Hermeneutic," in
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) 377; cited and
discussed in Schweiker, "Iconoclasts" 140.

ideological unless it relies on other rational controls on the use of analogies.[45]

Moral theology needs to pay serious attention to the various media through which parables, stories, and images are transmitted. Studying the practices of preaching, liturgy, hagiography, and meditation would contribute richer human and social dimensions to hermeneutics, which often seems to envision a solitary interpreter confronting a text. From an anthropological standpoint Ronald L. Grimes charges that self-identity is not universally constituted by forming a personal story but "in other ways by ritual, for instance, or by principles."[46] Passing from narrative to moral judgments through a community's ritual-dramatic expression serves to check self-deception about the extent to which we have embodied ethical ideals. Donald E. Saliers writes that liturgy is a school for the affections: "To pray is to give oneself to the Christian story in such a way that there is an internal link between the emotions and virtues exercised in that life and the meaning of the texts, prayers and symbols enacted in the rites."[47] Because it normatively shapes intentions and affections, "good liturgy is the fundamental imaginal framework of encounter with God in Christ...."[48]

Narrative theology operates closer to the fabric of Christian moral experience than most speculative theologies. Its shift of focus can support a broader definition of ethics that recognizes the normative guidance that symbolic material brings to disposition and character. However, incorporating narrative elements does not mean that appeals to a common Christian story will settle every theoretical question in moral theology. Whether or not narrative theology needs to be supported by philosophical arguments that are intelligible to those outside communities guided by the narrative, it is a promising, if partial, development in moral theology. Can we examine the paths of moral insight and discovery

[45] See Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1984); Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Carolyn Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives," *Religion and Intellectual Life* 6, no. 3/4, 96-109.

[46] Ronald L. Grimes, "Of Words the Speaker, of Deeds the Doer," *Journal of Religion* 66 (1986) 4.

[47] Donald E. Saliers, "Liturgy and Ethics: Some New Beginnings," in Ronald P. Hamel and Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., eds., *Introduction to Christian Ethics: A Reader* (New York: Paulist, 1989) 182.

[48] Ibid. 180. See also Vigen Guroian, "Seeing Worship as Ethics: An Orthodox Perspective," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 13 (1985) 332-59. On the role of saints in various world religions, including Christianity, see John Stratton Hawley, ed., *Saints and Virtues* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 1987).

with the same care that has been devoted to explicating moral argument? Those who dismiss the aesthetic phase of moral discernment as "prerational" or "prediscursive" cut their theology off from its deepest religious roots. They also may sabotage their attempt to discover a "public language" in which moral issues may be discussed. The variety of moral perspectives is fed by different imaginative and symbolic traditions that lead to different definitions of the moral issues involved in such areas as abortion; the different definitions lead to intractable disagreements. Until those imaginative frameworks are brought to the surface, diatribe and denunciation will substitute for actual debate.

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