Theological Studies
57 (1996)

DIVINE-COMMAND, NATURAL-LAW, AND MUTUAL-LOVE ETHICS

EDWARD COLLINS VACEK, S.J.

Weston Jesuit School of Theology

DIVINE-COMMAND ethics and natural-law ethics have had an enduring appeal for Christians. Scripture, papal teaching, and popular discourse commonly mingle these two approaches. I will argue however that divine-command ethics is humanistically inadequate, even though it is the standard bearer of popular Christian discourse. I will further argue that natural-law ethics is religiously inadequate, even though it has been central to Catholic moral theology. And I hope to explain how a mutual-love ethics overcomes these deficiencies, as I answer Beverly Harrison's plea for "a new vision of *both* God *and* humanity, a vision of holiness or godliness and a vision of humanity as cocapacity-in-relationship."[1]

These three ethical theories explain quite differently why something, be it a thought, deed, omission, habit, practice, or institution, is morally right or wrong for an individual or a group. In divine-command ethics, something is right because it is commanded, and the fundamental moral task is to obey. In natural-law ethics, something is right because it fulfills human nature, and the task is to discover and realize that nature. In mutual-love ethics, something is finally right because it is appropriate to our love relationship with God, and the fundamental moral task is to live in accord with this relationship.[2]

Since what is right or wrong will usually be the same in all three ethical theories, they cannot be readily distinguished by "what" they require, permit, or forbid. Two examples may clarify this point. First, each ethical approach excludes murder. Why? For a divine-command theorist, the reason is that God forbids murder. For the natural-law theorist, the reason might be that murder violates human dignity. For the mutual-love ethicist, the reason would be that murder fails to cooperate with God's life-giving activity. A second example: Should we love our enemies? The first theory can refer to Jesus' command (Mt 5:44). The second might appeal to the way that love and not hate best fulfills humanity. The third theory enjoins love of enemies as sharing in the love that God has for all, whether righteous or not (Mt 5:45; Lk 15:1–7).

The nightmare test case for any moral theology, but especially for a

[1] Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics* (Boston: Beacon, 1985) 36.

[2] See Edward Vacek, S.J., *Love, Human and Divine* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1994) 135–40.

divine-command ethicist, occurs if God should command something terribly evil, such as the sacrifice of a child, as Yahweh reportedly once commanded: "I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live. I defiled them through their very gifts, in their offering up all their firstborn, in order that I might horrify them, so that they might know that I am the Lord" (Ezek 20:25–26; cf. Ex 22:28).[3] The divine-command ethicist would insist that we obey such defiling and horrifying laws. The natural-law ethicist would reject such laws as "not good" because they are maxims by which we "could not live." And the mutual-love ethicist would give a mixed response: while we are deeply inclined to cooperate with whatever God is doing, this action is not consistent with our love covenant; hence we should not sacrifice a child.

These three ethical approaches correlate respectively with God's sovereign will, God's organizing mind, and God's uniting heart, or, to use a more familiar triad, with God as Lord, Logos, and Spirit.[4] Divine-command ethics tends to be theocentric, though it can slide into a legalism. Natural-law ethics tends to be anthropocentric, and it can slide into practical agnosticism. Mutual-love ethics might be called theanthropic, and its tendency is to treat God as a fellow creature. I hope to show that the third is the most appropriate. As Martin D'Arcy once put it, just as "the dominant note of barbarism is will and that of culture, especially the culture influenced by Greek ideas, is reason or intellect, so that of Christendom is love."[5]

The more any typology suggests sharp, clear distinctions within a tradition that is as long and as rich as Christianity, the more likely it is to be unfair.[6] Still it is worthwhile to ask which of these theories is most fundamental. Each leads to a different form of moral living. Persons who benefit a stranger out of obedience to God, those who do so out of a sense that their aid fulfills their own selves, and those who do so out of sense that they are thereby cooperating with God's love are performing different acts and indeed becoming different kinds of persons. The external act may be the same, but the moral reality is different. This article examines that difference.

[3] Jon Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University, 1993) 3–17, 126, 223.

[4] Richard Mouw, *The God Who Commands* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990) 150–75; H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church," *Theology Today* 3 (1946) 371–84.

[5] *The Mind and Heart of Love* (New York: Holt, 1947) 21.

[6] Jon Levenson, "The Theologies of Commandment in Biblical Israel," *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980) 17–33. Aquinas grounds the rightness of an act variously in divine commands, natural reason, and love of God (*Summa contra gentiles* 3, chaps. 116 and 128–29; *Summa theologiae* [hereafter *ST*] 1–2, q. 57, a. 2; q. 93, a. 6; q. 94, a. 5; 2–2, q. 24, a. 12; q. 27, a. 6). Aquinas did not fully work out the connections between these; see James Keenan, S.J., *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1992) 129–30, 141–43.

DIVINE-COMMAND ETHICS

Few contemporary ethicists defend divine-command ethics. That is remarkable, since the Bible and common Christian discourse constantly promote obedience to God's will as the basis of the moral life. As Sandra Schneiders has noted: "obedience as the continuous seeking and faithful execution of the will of God in one's life is incumbent on all Christians."[7] When asked, Christians often say that stealing and lying are wrong because they are against the commandments. Janine Idziak offers a definition: "a 'divine command moralist' is one who maintains that the content of morality (i.e., what is right and wrong, good and evil, just and unjust, and the like) is directly and solely dependent upon the commands and prohibitions of God."[8] In Karl Barth's words, "something . . . is commanded or forbidden, and is therefore good or bad."[9] Just as, within limits, we should obey various human authorities, even when they are Scribes and Pharisees (Mt 22: 3), so, a fortiori, we owe complete obedience to God, the supreme authority (Mt 20:23; Jn 19:11).[10] For divine-command theorists, God's command is not an additional reason for the rightness of something, but *the* reason for it.

Tradition's Emphasis on Obedience

William Frankena, the highly respected philosopher and insightful critic of Christian ethics, once observed that the norm of love has not been foundational in Christian ethics. Rather Christian ethics has stressed obedience to God's will. This will of God, he observes, is specified as whatever is stated in Scripture, whatever is decided by church authorities, whatever God privately inspires, and so forth.[11]

This approach is very biblical. As John Crossin notes, "The morality of both the OT and NT is a morality of obedience."[12] Israel's role in the

[7] Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., *New Wineskins* (New York: Paulist, 1986) 62, 140–66; see also Mouw, *God Who Commands* 6.

[8] Janine Idziak, *Divine Command Morality* (Toronto: Mellen, 1979) 1. See, for example, Robert Adams, "Divine Commandment Metaethics Modified Again," *The Virtue of Faith* (New York: Oxford University, 1987) 128–43, at 139.

[9] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961) 31. For a fuller presentation of Barth's position, see *Church Dogmatics* II/2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957) 509 ff.

[10] John Hammond, "Divine Command Theories and Human Analogies," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1986) 216–23, at 218–20; Patrick Miller, Jr., "The Place of the Decalogue in the Old Testament and Its Law," *Interpretation* 43 (1989) 229–42, at 231.

[11] William Frankena, "Love and Principles in Christian Ethics," in *Faith and Philosophy,* ed. Alvin Plantinga (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 218, 223; also William Spohn, S.J., *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* (New York, Paulist, 1984) 19 ff.

[12] John Crossin, O.S.F.S., "Obedience," in *New Dictionary of Theology,* ed. Joseph Komonchak et al. (Wilmington: Glazier, 1987) 720–21, at 720. See also Eugene Borowitz, *Contemporary Christologies: A Jewish Response* (New York: Paulist, 1980) 125–27; Claus Westermann, *What Does the Old Testament Say about God?* (London: SPCK, 1979) 22, 55–56.

covenant is to obey (Deut 4:37–40), and God's continued favor is contingent upon whether Israel does what God commands (Exod 19:5; Jer 11:4). As Walter Brueggemann puts it, "Obedience is the primal form of biblical faith."[13] Correlative to human obedience is God's sovereignty: "I, Yahweh, am your God; hence you will keep my laws and my customs" (Lev 18:4; also Deut 30:2; Ps 106:34). Saul's sin is instructive: instead of destroying "all that was good" as he had been commanded, he saves and consecrates the best to God. God is greatly displeased with this reasonable, even devout act. The divine charge rings down the ages: "Obedience is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam 15:9, 22). The intrinsic value of worldly goods, human life, and even worship counts for naught.[14] Complete submission to God is all. Even the new heart promised by the prophets is a heart that obeys the commandments (Jer 31:33–34; Ezek 36:26–28, 37:24–27). Jesus, the eschatological prophet, does "as the Father has commanded" (Jn 14:31, 6:38). Jesus' final words in Matthew are "teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:20). In the Scriptures, God's love, far from being unconditional, is contingent upon our obedience (Jn 14:21; Acts 5:32).

Augustine considered obedience "the mother and guardian of all the virtues."[15] He did not just excuse but commended the biblical heroes who tried to kill the innocent in obedience to God's command.[16] Aquinas resolved biblical examples of lying, theft, adultery, polygamy, divorce, and murder similarly: "just as Abraham did not sin in being willing to slay his innocent son, because he obeyed God, although considered in itself it was contrary to right human reason in general, so, too, Osee sinned not in committing fornication by God's command."[17] God's ways are not our ways (Isa 55:8).[18]

As one might expect, major figures in the Protestant tradition build their ethics on a divine-command foundation. Thus Luther opens his "Treatise on Good Works" with the claim that "there are no good works

[13] Walter Brueggemann, *The Creative Word* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 101, 104.

[14] Germain Grisez, *Way of the Lord Jesus,* 2 vols. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1983) 1.219; Aquinas, *ST* 2–2, q. 104, a. 3.

[15] *City of God* (New York: Random House, 1950) 14.12. Augustine argued that obedience conforms one to God's truth; see Gerald Schlabach, "Augustine's Hermeneutic of Humility: An Alternative to Moral Imperialism and Moral Relativism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 22 (1994) 299–331.

[16] *City of God* 1.21; *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image, 1960) 3.7.

[17] *ST* 2-2, q. 154, a. 2; see also 1, q. 105, a. 6; 1–2, q. 63, a. 4; q. 94, a. 5; q. 100 a. 8–9; 2–2, q. 64, a. 4–6; q. 104, a. 4; q. 110, a. 3; *Supplement* 65.2, 67.2. Aquinas tries to give a natural-law twist to his position: whatever is decided by God is by that fact natural and in accord with right reason since God's reason is always right and God naturally has supreme authority over life, property, and marriage.

[18] James Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective,* 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 1.91–96, 2.56–58; *ST* 1, q. 105, a. 6; 1–2, q. 94, a. 5.

except those works God has commanded, just as there is no sin except that which God has forbidden. . . . [The Christian] needs to know nothing more than God's commandments. . . . [L]earn to recognize good works from the commandments of God, and not from the appearance, size, or number of the works themselves."[19] And Karl Barth repeatedly insisted that God's command, not human experience or analysis, determines which works are morally right.[20]

Positive Features

Although divine-command ethics has played a significant role in tradition, "talk about divine moral commands is extremely unpopular" among contemporary ethicists.[21] In the next section, I present reasons for this unpopularity. Before doing that, however, I argue that a divine-command theory highlights several religious considerations that any adequate Christian ethics should incorporate.

Divine-command theory undercuts human pretention. When this system predominates, we think of ourselves as servants or stewards, not as masters (Lk 12:42–48). Any power or authority we possess comes from God (Jn 19:11). We owe absolute allegiance to God and not to self, family, nation, or church.[22] Divine command theory also makes clear that we cannot presume that our best human judgments and institutions are divinely sanctioned. Since Isaac was spared at the sacrificial altar and Jesus was not, our sense of what is necessary (Mk 8:31; Jn 11:50–52) can never be completely confident. When some theologians criticized Abraham's obedient attempt to sacrifice his innocent son, Augustine retorted: "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou understandest not the things which be of God, but those which be of men."[23] And Aquinas claimed that, if we know that our human reason dictates something contrary to God's command, we should not abide by our reason.[24] These are theocentric views. They rightly recognize that the

[19] Martin Luther, *The Christian in Society,* in *Luther's Works,* ed. James Atkinson, 55 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 44.23.

[20] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4.12, also 4, 10, 23, 27.

[21] Richard Mouw, "Commands for Grown-Ups," in *Readings in Moral Theology* 4: *The Use of Scripture in Moral Theory,* ed. Richard McCormick, S.J., and Charles Curran (New York: Paulist, 1984) 66–77, at 67; J. Idziak, *Divine Command Morality* 8–13; Thomas Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 47–48.

[22] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959) 69, 75–76; Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love,* 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987) 1.251.

[23] "Reply to Faustus the Manichaean," 12.73 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* ed. Philip Schaff, 14 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956] 4:300); Levenson, *Death and Resurrection* 125–26.

[24] *ST* 1–2, q. 19, a. 5; 2–2, q. 64, a. 6; q. 104, a. 4.

mysterium tremendum cannot be domesticated. As Paul Tillich wrote, "God's *potestas absoluta* is a perennial threat to any given structure of things."[25]

Divine-command theory makes clear that our relationship with God is the one pursuit finally necessary and that all other activities should be judged finally in relation to it. Thus in the divine-command theory, washing floors and serving as the chair of a board are equally valuable, when each is obedience to God's will. As Luther noted, "In this faith all works become equal. . . . All distinctions between works fall away, whether they be great, small, short."[26] Our ethical stature as persons does not completely depend on what talents we are born with or on what works we perform. If we are acting appropriately to our relationship with God, we are doing all we can and must do.

Divine-command ethics correctly indicates that morality involves an individual's or group's unique vocation. Such vocations go beyond any set of universal rules.[27] Christian moral living is not simply a matter of seeking "justice" or doing "the good." Rather living ethically is ultimately a matter of personally responding to God.[28] Further, the voluntaristic character of divine-command theory indicates better than rationalistic theories that human life has many arbitrary aspects.[29] We would have very different moral obligations if, for example, it took the sperm of two males to impregnant a female. The point here is not the scientific question how "evolution" made us the way we are. The point rather is religious: we want to understand even the chance quality of so much of our life as not being outside God's will.[30] Finally, divine-command theory makes clear that moral obligations are not a matter of duties that we impose upon ourselves. If we say, for example, that people must tell the truth lest they contradict their own reason or

[25] *Systematic Theology,* 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967) 1.168. See also Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* 2d ed. (New York: Oxford, 1977) 18, 22.

[26] Luther, *The Christian in Society* 44.26; he later qualifies this position, 44.39. See also Douglas Schuurman, "Protestant Vocation Under Assault," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1994) 23–52, at 25–26; Richard B. Miller, "Moral Sources, Ordinary Life, and Truth-telling in Jeremy Taylor's Casuistry," in *Context of Casuistry,* ed. James Keenan, S.J., and Thomas Shannon (Washington: Georgetown University, 1995) 131–57, at 143–45.

[27] On this issue, compare Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 42–43; Gene Outka, "Universal Love and Impartiality," *Love Command* (Washington: Georgetown University 1992) 34; and Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love* (New York: Cambridge University, 1993) 211–12.

[28] Singer, *The Nature of Love* 1.251; see also Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4.11–12; Vincent MacNamara, *Faith and Ethics* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1985) 186; Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* 76; Miller, "Place of the Decalogue" 232.

[29] Thomas Shannon, "Method in Ethics: A Scotistic Contribution," in *Context of Casuistry* 3–24, at 7–8, 17.

[30] Benedict Ashley, O.P., *Theologies of the Body* (Braintree, Mass.: Pope John Center, 1985) 65, 353; Gerald Hughes, S.J., *Authority in Morals* (London: Heythrop College, 1978) 4–5; Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* 42, 133.

humanity, we inadequately explain our sense of moral obligation. Divine-command theory rightly indicates that our sense of obligation ultimately flows from our relationship with God.[31]

NATURAL-LAW ETHICS

Few contemporary Catholic ethicists appeal to a divine-command ethics. Instead, they generally appeal to natural-law ethics. Lutheran and Calvinist theologians who subscribe to divine-command ethics often appeal to natural law as the work of the "left hand" of God.[32] Although there are many natural-law ethical theories, most have in common that the "right" is that which fulfills human nature and/or that which conforms to rightly exercised human reason.[33] Human nature includes various tendencies. Reason's task is to discover, sort out, and order these inclinations in accord with appropriate human fulfillment.[34] Natural-law theology portrays God not as a sovereign who issues commands but as a wise and good Creator who has structured creation well (Isa 42:5). Since the structures of this world embody God's wisdom and goodness, it makes good sense for us to live in accord with these structures.[35] In particular, since God has created human nature, including above all human reason, we should live in accord with this nature.

Natural Rightness without God?

Natural-law ethicists criticize divine-command theory for distorting both the idea of God and the idea of morality. The intention behind this

[31] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4.13; Thomas Higgins, *Man as Man* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1958) 99; Lewis Smedes, *Mere Morality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 16; O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* 127.

[32] Karen Bloomquist, "How Adequate Is the Category of 'Natural' for a Lutheran Sexual Ethic Today?" *Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin* 73 (1993) 33–43; James Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978) 12–20; David Steinmetz, "The Reformation and the Ten Commandments," *Interpretation* 43 (1989) 256–66 at 260–61; Mouw, *God Who Commands* 102–4.

[33] Garth Hallett, *Greater Good: The Case for Proportionalism* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1995) 54–56; Paul McKeever, "Proportionalism As a Methodology in Catholic Moral Theology," in *Human Sexuality and Personhood* (St. Louis: Pope John Center, 1981) 211–22, at 215–16. See also my essays: "Proportionalism: One View of the Debate," *TS* 46 (1985) 287–314; "Catholic 'Natural Law' and Reproductive Ethics," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 17 (1992) 329–46; and "Natural Law and the Quest for a New Ethics," *Morality, Religion, and the Filipino: Essays in Honor of Vitaliano R. Gorospe, S.J.* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University, 1994) 97–111.

[34] Aquinas, *ST* 1–2, q. 94, a. 2; Lisa Sowle Cahill and Thomas Shannon, *Religion and Artificial Reproduction* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 37; James Burtchaell, *Giving and Taking of Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1989) 103.

[35] Aquinas, *ST* 1–2, q. 91, a. 1–2, q. 93, a. 1; 2–2, q. 154, a. 12; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus* (London: Collins Fount Paperbacks, 1983) 231.

theory, as John Mahoney explains, is "to glorify the transcendence and majesty of God, and his supreme freedom of activity."[36] The consequence, as John Reeder observes, has been that this voluntaristic theory "too radically separates God from his own creation."[37] The idea of God behind this theory seems closer to that of an Oriental potentate issuing edicts accompanied by promises and threats than to that of a person who so loved the world as to become incarnate. The God of the divine-command theory cannot be the whole story. Ethicists argue that this theory also distorts the idea of morality. Using a point that goes back to Plato, they reason that an action is not right because God commands it; rather God commands it because it is right.[38] They offer human comparisons to make their case: a child should not obey an angry parent who barks, "Next time, kill that bully!" Similarly, killing an innocent person does not become right if God commands it. Critics of the divine-command ethics usually rest their case at this point.

However, the matter is not quite so simply resolved. This line of argument tends to make religion superfluous. Kai Nielsen drew that conclusion: "It is not morality that rests on religion but religion on morality."[39] Therefore we can do morality without religion. John Ibberson pushes this point: before we even consider obeying God, God "must achieve a high score on our tests for right and wrong."[40] In other words, we must judge God's ways, not let God's ways judge ours. When we say that God would never command the murder of an innocent child, we confidently use human norms to decide what God can and cannot do. Needless to say, such anthropocentric thinking is abhorrent to theocentric theologians.

When Aquinas wrote, in an oft cited line, "We do not offend God except by doing something contrary to our own good,"[41] he himself opened the possibility of making our relationship with God superfluous for doing ethics. If the religious question of "offending God" depends on the prior moral question of "our own good," then the moral question may be settled independently. One advantage of this position is that,

[36] John Mahoney, S.J., *The Making of Moral Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 245–46.

[37] John Reeder, "Patterson Brown on God's Will as the Criterion of Morality," in *Divine Command Morality,* ed. Janine Idziak 259–68, at 266; for the tension, see D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 154, 202.

[38] Miller, "Moral Sources, Ordinary Life, and Truth-telling" 133–35.

[39] Kai Nielsen, "God and the Basis of Morality," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 10 (1982) 335–50, at 345. For a critique of Nielsen, see Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel* (Boston: Beacon, 1988) 109–20; Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* 2.137.

[40] John Ibberson, *Language of Decision* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities, 1986) 135–37; also German Grisez and Russel Shaw, *Beyond the New Morality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1988) 221.

[41] *Summa contra gentiles* 3, chap. 122. At times, Aquinas fails to distinguish between what is rational or good in itself and what is for our good; compare Shannon, "Method in Ethics" 5, 18–19.

since natural law is open to anyone who has reason, natural-law ethicists can discuss moral issues on an equal footing with people who do not share their religious tradition.[42] The disadvantage is that attention to God is superfluous for the doing of ethics. Natural-law ethics can proceed under a rubric of "methodological atheism."

David Luban summarizes: "reason and revelation are redundant alternative paths to the same conclusions."[43] As Christians, we may consult revelation as a way to knowledge, especially as a way to clarify and firm up our judgments about moral issues.[44] But once we have obtained this knowledge, we have no further need in fact for either revelation or the Revealer. We will then know for ourselves. If the watchword for divine-command ethics is that God wants obedience rather than sacrifice, the watchword for natural-law ethics might be the concluding line of the book of Judges (21:25): "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes." That is, we find the content of morality not in divine commands, but in our reasoned experience of our world.[45] As natural-law ethicists, we do not need a King.

Natural-law ethics even provides a secular explanation of our sense of moral obligation. As Gerald Hughes has noted, "Moral principles stand over against the judgement of the individual in just the same way, and to the same extent, as any true statement stands over and against the judgement of the individual."[46] Learning firsthand what is right brings with it the experience that it must be done. Thus it is argued that no special place is needed for God even to account for our experience of obligation. In short, natural-law ethics need not refer to God for either the content or the obliging force of our moral obligations.

When God is allowed into the natural-law picture, it is usually as the Supreme Good that will fulfill us: we need God to complete our own happiness. According to one strand of Aquinas's thought, we worship God not for God's sake but for our own; and if God did not bring us happiness, we would have no reason to love God.[47] Thus, even when it

[42] Walter Brueggemann argues that this happened in the biblical Wisdom Literature (*In Man We Trust* [Richmond, Virg.: John Knox, 1972]). See also Timothy Sedgwick, "Revising Anglican Theology," in *Anglican Moral Choice,* ed. Paul Elem (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow, 1983) 121–40, at 136–37; MacNamara, *Faith and Ethics* 72; Aquinas, *ST* 1–2, q. 94, a. 2, q. 94, a. 4.

[43] "A Theological Argument against Theopolitics," *Report from the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy* 16/1 (1996) 10–14, at 12.

[44] Charles Wood, "The Knowledge Born of Obedience," *Anglican Theological Review* 61 (1979) 331–40, at 333; see also Ceslaus Spicq, O.P., *Agape in the New Testament,* 3 vols. (St. Louis: Herder, 1966) 3:49; Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* 1.323.

[45] Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 3, chap. 121–22; Stephen Pope, *Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1994) 50–54.

[46] Gerald Hughes, S.J., *Authority in Morals* (London: Heythrop College, 1978) 88–89.

[47] *ST* 1–2, q. 1, a. 5; 2–2, q. 26, a. 13; q. 30, a. 4; also Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine* 244–47; Grisez rightly criticizes this position (*Way of the Lord Jesus* 1.460).

refers to God, natural-law ethics has tended to be quite anthropocentric.

Goodness of Human Nature

One great attraction of natural-law ethics is that it appreciates the world that God has created more adequately than divine-command ethics. Natural-law ethics insists on the goodness inherent in all creation, especially human nature. By contrast, when the content of morality depends solely on the command of God, then, as we have seen in Luther and Barth, any investigation of creaturely complexity and goodness appears to be morally irrelevant.[48] Divine-command theorists often criticize the use of experience or reason as just one more instance of trusting corrupt human nature. Rather, "One alone is good" (Mt 19:17); and the appropriate counsel is "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight" (Prov 3:5, also 14:12; 16:25; Eccl 12:13). This approach produces what Walter Brueggemann, reversing Schleiermacher's phrase, calls "religious despisers of culture," people who have a "general mistrust of human opinion" and who "devalue our capacity to discern what is real about life."[49] For divine-command theory, we must do the required deed, but we are not required either to understand or to agree with what we are doing. As Richard Mouw writes, "The proper human response in the context of this will-to-will confrontation [of God and humans] is not so much understanding as it is surrender."[50]

Against all this, natural-law ethicists insist that we have our own quasi-independent reality and ontological goodness.[51] Langdon Gilkey argues that even God must acknowledge this reality and value, or else be ignorant and wrong about us.[52] Of course, most Catholics hold God does acknowledge this goodness (Gen 1:31), and so should we (Mt 5:16, 13:37–38). The philosopher Kai Nielsen speaks for many in objecting strongly to blind obedience: "Is it really *hubris* or arrogance or sin on our part to wish for a life where we make our own decisions, where we

[48] Luther himself acknowledged this problem (*The Christian in Society* 44.39).

[49] Brueggemann, *In Man We Trust* 18, 25.

[50] Mouw, *God Who Commands* 98. Of course, we have massive evidence from the rabbinic tradition or the work of Karl Barth that one can employ the intellect in understanding, interpreting, or applying God's commandments. But one does not use the intellect to determine what the content of morality is.

[51] Josef Fuchs, S.J., "Das Gottesbild und die Moral innerweltlichen Handelns," *Stimmen der Zeit* 202 (1984) 363–82, at 366. Needless debates have resulted from a failure to distinguish moral/religious from ontological goodness. Augustine held that the cardinal virtues are vices if they do not relate us to God (*City of God* 19.25). Aquinas, on the other hand, held that acquired virtues were real virtues, even if they are also incomplete without a relation to God (*ST* 1–2, q. 65, a. 3; 2–2, q. 23, a. 7–8). See also Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* 13; Mouw, *God Who Commands* 67–70.

[52] Langdon Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind* (New York: Crossroad, 1976) 432.

follow the rules we do because we see the *point* of them and where we need not crucify our intellects?"[53] His protest is shared by natural-law theologians. Faith should not replace reason; it should give further impetus to use this precious gift.

Contemporary natural-law ethicists insist that the proper use of our freedom includes the capacity to make decisions about our lives. To be sure, divine-command ethics acknowledges freedom, namely, the freedom to obey or disobey. It also requires that complete handing over of one's self to God which is ultimate trust. But natural-law ethics adds that, in this life, we can and should also engage in quasi-independent, innovative self-determination. As Josef Fuchs argues, "Creation means we are both set free and commissioned to develop ourselves."[54] Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World states that "authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man. For God has willed that man be left 'in the hand of his own counsel' "[55] This freedom means that not only do we decide between this or that alternative; we also decide what sort of persons we will become.[56]

Natural-law ethics, in both its classical and its recent expressions, emphasizes the moral significance of human affectivity in a way that is not possible in divine-command ethics. While, on command, we can perform behaviors that typically express emotions, attitudes, or desires, we cannot directly will ourselves to have these emotions, attitudes, or desires. And so they are not suitable content for commands. Were my neighbor to ask why I loved her, she would not feel loved if I told her that I was commanded to do so. As Jacques Leclercq has noted, "To love out of obedience is not to love at all."[57] Commandments can even be counterproductive for a truly virtuous, loving person. When commanded to do what I already want to do, I am likely to experience

[53] Nielsen, "God and the Basis of Morality" 347–48; see also Mouw, *God Who Commands* 10–17.

[54] Josef Fuchs, S.J., *Christian Ethics in a Secular Arena* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1984) 7; see also Fuchs, "Das Gottesbild und die Moral innerweltlichen Handelns" 363–82; Schillebeeckx, *Jesus* 142; Roger Haight, S.J., "Liberation Theology and Middle Class America," *Chicago Studies* 32 (1993) 64–76, at 70; Vacek, "Catholic 'Natural Law' " 333–35.

[55] *Gaudium et spes* no. 17 (*The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. [New York: America Press, 1966]); Aquinas, *ST* 2–2, q. 104, a. 1.

[56] According to Jewish theologian Eugene Borowitz, this sort of turn to the subject was not prominent in Jewish biblical ethics (*Contemporary Christologies* 125, 128); see also Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981) 29. To be sure, the Hebrew Bible does not completely neglect concern about interiority (Exod 20:17; Deut 6:4–7, 28:47, 30:2; Lev 19:17–18). The New Testament is especially sensitive to interior attitudes and virtues (e.g. Mt 5:20, 28; 7:17–23; 12:33; 23:25–30; 1 Cor 13:1–13; Col 3:12–16); see Mahoney, *Making of Moral Theology* 248.

[57] Jacques Leclercq, *La philosophie morale de saint Thomas devant la pensée contemporaine* (Paris: Vrin, 1955) 403. See also Albert Plé, O.P., *Duty Or Pleasure?* (New York: Paragon, 1987) 65; Grisez, *Way of the Lord Jesus* 1.600.

new interior resistance. The law's command correlates to stiff-necked sinfulness: "We know that the law is good, provided that one uses it in the way law is supposed to be used, that is, with the understanding that it is aimed not at good men, but at the lawless and unruly, the irreligious and the sinful, the wicked and the godless" (1 Tim 1:8–9). While natural-law ethics can subscribe to the restraining force of commandments, it chiefly appeals to and supports those healthy tendencies in us which incline us to want what is good, beautiful, and true. In a natural-law framework, commandments often have to be reinterpreted as exhortations or statements of interior dispositions that we ought to foster.[58]

MUTUAL-LOVE ETHICS

Earlier, when considering divine-command ethics, I indicated that an adequate Christian ethics must affirm the primacy of God, relativize all creatures including the self, deal with the nonnecessary quality of human life, and affirm the uniqueness of persons and vocations. It must ennoble even the most menial forms of service, contribute to a personal identity, ground moral duties, and view our obligations as a response to a personal God. When considering natural law, I indicated that an adequate Christian ethics must affirm the goodness of human nature, offering considerable scope for intelligence, freedom, and affectivity. I now want to sketch another ethics that includes and transforms all these valuable elements within a mutual love relationship with God.

Coresponsibility

We are relational beings who develop our humanity in good part through actively participating in various relationships.[59] We relate to God in many ways, the most fundamental of which should be in mutual love. Mutual love is an affective affirmation that unites and differentiates its members. A love that is mutual creates a shared life that is progressively developed through the members' free self-communication and interactions.[60] When we have this sort of relationship with God, we attain a new identity; we become "co-creators" with God and, more paradoxically, "partners of the Absolute."[61]

[58] Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* 142–43; Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice* (New York: Oxford University, 1954) 76–77; Tillich, *Systematic Theology* 2:81; Aquinas, *ST* 1–2, q. 93, a. 6; *Summa contra gentiles* 3, chap. 128; Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959) 30–31. For the pedagogical and social roles of laws, see my essay, "The Function of Norms in Social Existence," *The Moral Sense in the Communal Significance of Life,* Analecta Husserliana 20 (Boston: Reidel, 1986) 369–91.

[59] Daniel Day Williams, *The Spirit and Forms of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 146.

[60] Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine* 287–295.

[61] Ibid. 116–56; see also Vacek, "John Paul II and Cooperation with God," *Annual of*

John Mahoney observes that one pitfall of classical theology has been "to view the divine-human relationship as a continual series of border incidents and demarcation disputes. The more one accords to man, the more is being subtracted from God."[62] There is a strand in Scripture which fosters the view that God is all good and we are only sinners, or that God does all and we simply receive (Josh 24:12–13; Ps 44:3–7, 103:13–18; Isa 26:12). This strand praises God but is not fair to us. We have our own goodness and belong to a holy people adopted by God (Gen 1:31; Rom 1:6–7, 8:14–17). God interacts with us, often in response to our initiative (Gen 18:17–33; Mt 7:7; Jn 1:9–18; Phil 2:5–11).[63] We can be God's "friends" (Ex 33:11; 2 Chron 20:7; Isa 41:8; Jam 2:23). Since God wants a mutual love relationship with us, God must accept dependence on us. Otherwise, there is no mutual love relationship. As Vincent Brümmer writes, "each partner in a relationship of love is necessarily dependent on the freedom and responsibility of the other partner for establishing and for maintaining the relationship. It is logically impossible for either partner to establish or maintain the relationship by him or herself."[64]

On our part, we can become fully human only when we are engaged in a mutual love with God. It is not enough for us just to fulfill God's commands. It is a mistake to substitute a love for our neighbor. And it is not enough for us either to possess God as our Supreme Good or to give ourselves onesidedly to God in complete self-sacrifice. Rather, we become the one that God's love wants to create only when we live as covenantal friends of God.[65] As such, we experience ourselves as unique. As such, however much our individual talents or achievements are equalled or even surpassed by others, we know ourselves to be irreplaceable.[66] As such, our actions, no matter how small, achieve their highest significance, since they matter not just to ourselves but to God. In this mutual love relationship, we are part of God's people and God is our God.

We live within, from, and for this covenantal relationship with God. In and through us, the history of salvation carries on. We welcome new individuals and groups who continually enter this history and add to it their relationships with God. These interlocking and evolving narra-

the Society of Christian Ethics (1990) 81–108; Letty Russell, *Future of Partnership* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979).

[62] Mahoney, *Making of Moral Theology* 246; Roger Haight, S.J., "Jesus and Salvation," *TS* 55 (1994) 225–51, at 246–48.

[63] John Lawry, "God and Temporal Being," *Philosophy Today* 8 (1984) 83–98, at 88; Richard Gula, S.S., *Reason Informed by Faith* (New York: Paulist, 1989) 318–19.

[64] Brümmer, *Model of Love* 160; Vincent Brümmer, *Speaking of a Personal God* (New York: Cambridge, 1992) 143.

[65] Edward Vacek, S.J., "Love of God—Is It Obligatory?" *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (Washington: Georgetown University, forthcoming in 1996).

[66] Brümmer, *Model of Love* 211–12.

tives close off some alternative ways of being and acting while opening up new alternatives. Whatever we do draws part of its intelligibility from this history and contributes to its enrichment. Both God and we are central to this shared life, though of course in very different ways. As a result, a mutual-love ethics is neither exclusively theocentric nor anthropocentric; it might well be called "theanthropic."

In divine-command ethics, God's sovereign authority is the fundamental moral fact. In the very encounter with God as Lord we know the rightness of obedience. In natural-law ethics, human nature is the fundamental moral fact. If people are not reasonable, they self-destructively contradict their nature as rational beings. For mutual-love ethics the fundamental fact is the rightness of being in a love relationship with God. This relationship itself bears the intelligibility that it "ought" to be and to be promoted.

Anyone who has experienced a deep mutual love knows how overridingly "right" this relationship feels. Indeed, all love relationships have a compelling, attractive quality. These relationships also tend to make us value other realities in terms of themselves. A normal human life has a variety of such relationships, each with its variously demanding and life-organizing requirements. What is true of creaturely loves should be true a fortiori and without qualification of our mutual love relationship with God. In this relationship we encounter the dominant, centering reason of everything we do. We experience ourselves as friends invited to share life with God. The deeds we do flow from our relationship with God; they symbolize it; and they serve to strengthen it. Gradually our love relationship "becomes the ground of all our choices which, in turn, unite us ever more profoundly with God."[67]

Transformation of Obedience

The most important shift that occurs in going from a divine-command to a mutual-love ethics has to do with how our will relates to God's will. Mutual love relationships do not as such involve commands or obedience. Paul Tillich put it starkly: "Obedience is not love. It can be the opposite of love."[68] When someone loves us, our proper response is not to obey them but to love them in return. Otherwise, parents should obey their loving children. But if love is not obedience, what should we make of the traditional Christian conviction that we ought to do the will of God? We should, I think, distinguish between God's commands and God's will. As friends we do not obey God, but we do want God's will to be fulfilled.[69]

[67] Schneiders, *New Wineskins* 142.

[68] Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice* 30–31; *Morality and Beyond* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 40–41; compare Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* 170.

[69] Joseph Lombardi, "Filial Gratitude and God's Right to Command," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 19 (1991) 93–118, at 94; MacNamara, *Faith and Ethics* 190–91.

At the same time, if we are in a mutual love relationship with God, God also wants our will to be done and God commits God's self, where possible, to promoting what we authentically want. Since our properly purified desires are codeterminative of what is good for us and since the exercise of our free self-determination is an essential good in our flourishing, God generally wants us to decide about ourselves and for ourselves. Extending the scope of one of John Courtney Murray's maxims, we can say that God wishes for us "as much freedom as possible and only as much restriction as necessary."[70]

In a mutual love, both unity as well as the difference of the partners must be preserved.[71] Accordingly, two extremes should be excluded: we must not ignore our own will and simply try to pursue God's will, and we must not ignore God's will and simply pursue our own will. The temptation of divine-command ethics is to the former. Karl Barth claimed that the sovereign God has decided for each moment the one and only thing God wants us to do.[72] Our proper task is to obey. Barth's position ignored the irreplaceable contribution that we must make to our relationship with God and therefore to our own moral life.

On the other hand, natural-law ethics has historically severed our search for the morally right or wrong from attention to God's particular will for us. Somewhat surprisingly, Aquinas argued that, while "we can know in a general way what God wills [namely, the good] . . . we know not what God wills in particular, and in this respect we are not bound to conform our will to the Divine Will."[73] Since our day-to-day decisions are almost always about a particular matter, reference to the will of God appears useless. Elsewhere Aquinas even argued that there should be a divergence between God's will and our own. For example, we properly love our own children more than the neighbor's children. We love them, Aquinas wrote, with a partiality that not only the neighbor, but even God should not have. Hence, he argued, it will often be the case that we should not align our wills with God's will.[74] While Aquinas's solution has the merit of preserving the differences between ourselves and God, it does not sufficiently account for the unity in mutual love.

In the positions of Barth and Aquinas, outlined here in a severely

[70] "Freedom, Authority, Community," *America* 115 (1966) 734–41, at 737; also Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J., "Does God Play Dice? Divine Providence and Chance," *TS* 57 (1996) 3–18, at 14.

[71] Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine* 21–27.

[72] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2:661–64; similarly, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1955) 245.

[73] *ST* 1–2, q. 19, a. 10; similarly, Roger Haight, S.J., "Foundational Issues in Jesuit Spirituality," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 19/4 (1987) 1–50, at 32–35; for the exact opposite, see Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2.663–65.

[74] *ST* 1–2, q. 19, a. 10; 2–2, q. 26, a. 7, q. 104, a. 4. Compare Brümmer who speaks of divine partiality (*Model of Love* 211–12).

truncated way, we push toward two extremes. In the first, we seem to have almost no role in deciding what we are to do; in the second, God appears to have little input.[75] Bernard of Clairvaux indicated that we must go beyond these extremes when he wrote, "What was begun by grace alone, is completed by grace and free choice together, in such a way that they contribute to each new achievement not singly but jointly; not by turns, but simultaneously. . . . [E]ach does the whole work, according to its peculiar contribution."[76]

How shall we understand this cooperation? Because God loves us, God affirms us as individuals and wants our fulfillment. We cannot achieve personal fulfillment unless we are actively involved in creatively planning and enacting our lives. Hence God's particular will for us is not determinate in advance of our own involvement, and our discernment of what we are to do is not simply a matter of figuring out what God has already decided. Rather, we must contribute to a decision our own personal insights, desires, affections, arbitrary choices, and so forth—all that makes us different from God. We must have a certain freedom and a certain mind of our own, even as we depend on God for these very gifts. Like all good lovers, God must be somewhat flexible and tolerant toward us. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17).

Since we love God, we gladly make our decisions from within and in light of our relationship with God. In most decisions, it may often seem as if God leaves the details up to us.[77] But, if God loves us, then God is also involved in and by our decisions. Needless to say, the enormous existential and ontological differences between God and ourselves must be preserved.[78] Appropriate at times is Jesus' exclamation, "Not my will, but Thy will be done" (Mk 14:36). But it should not be taken as paradigmatic. Normally it is not a matter of either God's will or our own. Jesus' desires were ordinarily not resistant to God's desires but at one with them. And his Abba's desires presumably were at one with Jesus' desire to live, though not only with his. There will be "crunch times," and Jesus' decision to go to Jerusalem seems to have been one of them. We must be willing at times to sacrifice our desires, even to lose our lives, for our friends (Jn 15:13). But losing one's life is not the normal pattern of a friendship, since any true loss to self threatens the friendship itself.

[75] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2.664–69.

[76] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Treatise 3: On Grace and Free Choice,* trans. Daniel O'Donovan (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1977) 14.47, p. 106.

[77] Charles Hartshorne, *Wisdom as Moderation* (Albany: State University of New York, 1987) 86; Aquinas, *ST* 2–2, q. 64, a. 5; see also Lawry, "God and Temporal Being" 90–91, 95.

[78] Johnson, "Does God Play Dice?" 11–18.

Transformation of Natural Law

Natural-law ethicists have come to see the centrality of the virtues, especially prudence, in living a moral life.[79] And they have taken up again the classical view that we cannot be content with avoiding sin but must be moving toward ideals.[80] They now also stress that our lives have a narrative dimension. As of yet, however, natural-law ethicists have insufficiently attended to the fact that love relationships are central to moral living. Chief among these relationships is, or should be, our love relationship with God. This mutual relationship transforms traditional natural law by enabling us to see and engage the world in its relation to God.

Like other relationships, only more powerfully, a mutual love relationship with God profoundly alters the way we encounter the world. In light of this relationship, Christians reevaluate their moral criteria (2 Cor 13:4–5). Religious experience does not obliterate the intrinsic meaning of creatures; rather it transforms their meaning by relating them to God as their Lord, Logos, and Lover and by relating them to ourselves as persons involved with this God.[81] Max Scheler observed that we achieve a new appreciation of a value when we encounter it as an aspect of someone we love.[82] When we have a relationship with God, we experience anew the goods of this world as created and enhanced by God. We experience evils as alien to God.[83] While religious experience does not turn a red apple into a green pear, it does reveal the apple as a gift of God and it marks the hunger of the poor as grievous to God.

As members of a community that has dedicated itself to God, we use the stories of our Church's involvement with God to locate and form the ongoing stories of our lives.[84] Thus we live an enriched reality not shared by a nonbeliever. For example, our enemies are not only human beings with dignity; they are also persons for whom Christ died (Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11). More fundamentally, we live not primarily under the natural-law maxim "do good and avoid evil" but under the maxim "be faithful to your mutual love relationship with God." It is not enough for us that God wills a particular good and that, perhaps coincidentally, we happen to will the same good. Presumably most atheists regularly do good deeds that God wants done. But, unlike atheists, we want to be personally cooperating with God while performing those

[79] Aquinas, *ST* 1–2, q. 58, a. 4; q. 61, a. 3; Charles Pinches, "Pagan Virtue and Christian Prudence," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 23 (1995) 93–115, at 107–08.

[80] James Keenan, S.J., and Thomas Shannon, "Contexts of Casuistry," *Context of Casuistry* 221–32, at 228.

[81] Nielsen, "God and the Basis of Morality" 338–41; O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* 88–93, 132; Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* 24; Huston Smith, "Has Process Theology Dismantled Classical Theism?" *Theology Digest* 35 (1988) 303–18, at 307, 309.

[82] Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and a Non-Formal Ethics of Value* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1973) 488.

[83] Jon Sobrino, S.J., *Christology at the Crossroads* (London: SCM, 1978) 190, 197.

[84] MacNamara, *Faith and Ethics* 88.

deeds. Because of that difference, we and the atheist may perform the same external behavior but our acts have different meanings. The narratives of our lives are different. In and through our actions we are personally sharing life with God.

Our cooperation with God in the world is not simply a matter of acting with a loving attitude. Cooperation has content, and this content is generally given through the exercise of love-informed reason reflecting on our various involvements in the world. Love is not blind but a revealer of value.[85] Thus, when we try to discern what love asks of us in a particular situation, we attempt to discover the one or several alternatives that are appropriate to our present love relationship with our God, who is creatively involved with all of creation.[86]

Classical natural-law ethics generally imagined that the present structures of the world came straight from the hand of God and hence were perfectly ordered (Deut 32:3–5). Thus to try to improve on their original nature was both to commit the sin of pride and to make things worse.[87] In a mutual-love ethics, we understand ourselves to be involved with God's love for the world, and we realize that this love continues to bring forth new, even undreamed goods. We realize that the way things are may not be the way God's love is leading them to be (Isa 43:18–19, 65:17–25; cf. Apoc 21:15). As John Haught writes, "divine creativity is much more closely related to disorder than an older natural theology could ever have contemplated. . . . Hence, a biblically based theology is not surprised to find divine creativity hovering very close to turbulence."[88] Similarly, Cynthia Crysdale argues that "[the] moral task involves not conforming to nature but transforming it."[89] Therefore those involved in a mutual love relationship with God not only have to take into account God's original creation and thus to rely heavily on natural-law ethics; they must also creatively lend their lives to whatever new things God wants to bring about.[90]

IMAGES OF GOD AND APPROPRIATE RESPONSES

Divine-command theorists, usually out of fidelity to the Bible, portray God as a holy, sovereign Lord who lays down laws and demands

[85] Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine* 11–21.

[86] Schneiders, *New Wineskins* 142–43.

[87] Pope Pius XI, "On Christian Marriage" no. 94–96, and Pius XII, "Address to Italian Medical-biological Union" (12 November 1944) no. 10, both in *Love and Sexuality,* ed. Odile Liebard (Wilmington, N.C.: McGrath, 1978). See also Aquinas, *ST* 1–2, q. 91, a. 1–2; 2–2, q. 154, a. 12; *Supplement* 65.1; *Summa contra gentiles* 3, chap. 126; Shannon, "Method in Ethics" 3, 16–17.

[88] John Haught, "Chaos, Complexity and Theology," *Teilhard Studies* no. 30 (1994) 13.

[89] Cynthia Crysdale, "Revisioning Natural Law," *TS* 56 (1995) 464–84, at 479.

[90] Jack Bonsor, "History, Dogma, and Nature," *TS* 55 (1994) 295–313, at 308–09. But some authors warn that striving for overall good and lesser evil betrays a lack of trust in God, e.g. Grisez, *Way of the Lord Jesus* 1.105, 151; Gilbert Meilaender, "*Eritis Sicut Deus:* Moral Theory and the Sin of Pride," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986) 397–415, at 407–408.

obedience.[91] This God enforces these demands with promises of blessings and threats of punishments (e.g. Lev 26:14; Deut 28; Mt 5:30, 6:4). Since an absolutely sovereign God must remain in control of everything, this God is pictured as willing even objective evils. Yahweh announces, "I create good and I create evil" (Isa 45:7 [literal translation]; also Prov 16:4). This God holds people responsible for doing the very moral evil that God arranges for them to do (e.g. Ex 7:3–5; Deut 32:39; 2 Sam 12:11; Prov 16:4; Isa 6:9–10; Mk 4:12; Acts 2:23; Rom 1:28). As D. A. Carson writes, "Old Testament writers do not shy away from making Yahweh himself . . . the 'ultimate' cause of many evils. Examples are so numerous. . . . 'God redeems a situation, but . . . the situation is itself precipitated by his determination.' "[92] Likewise, in the New Testament, God's sovereignty is the origin not only of sickness and death but also of the immoral actions of Judas, Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate who killed Jesus (Mk 14:21; Jn 9:1–3, 11:4, 49–52; 19:10–11; Acts 4:24–28). Commenting on the Fourth Gospel, Carson continues, "So crucial a saving event as the death/exaltation of Jesus Christ could not be thought to turn on the whim of a sinful man: God himself was behind it. . . . John presupposes that God never relinquishes his absolute sovereignty, and by exercising his mysterious control, brings his purposes to pass."[93] Again, classical theology imaged God as a sovereign who does not need our help or cooperation in accomplishing redemption. Brümmer notes that in the classical model, salvation does "not consist in reconciling a broken relationship but rather in being freed from a condition of corruption. This can exclusively be brought about by the action of an omnipotent God."[94] Not only does this sovereign God act by "Himself" alone, but this God also at times acts for "Himself" alone: "Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name" (Ezek 36:22; see also Exod 9:14–16, 14:4; Ps 115:1; Ezek 20:9, 14, 22). In brief, this standard image of God as sovereign throws into question not only human freedom but also God's generosity and love.

By contrast, natural-law ethicists have portrayed God as the Creator who establishes a good creation and gives it the ability to follow its own pregiven intrinsic order. They picture God as Creator, Logos, and Supreme Good. These images point to the way that God metaphysically affects creatures as their origin, ordering principle, and goal. The problem is that these standard images of God insufficiently invite a personal relationship with God. God is not clearly represented as one who wants not only to give us a well-ordered existence but also to share life with us.

[91] Borowitz, *Contemporary Christologies* 125–28. Westermann, *What Does the Old Testament Say About God?* 22, 74; Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* 154–60, 168–70; Spohn, *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* 19–35.

[92] Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* 28–29.

[93] Ibid. 128–32; Levenson, *Death and Resurrection* 5–7.

[94] Brümmer, *Model of Love* 188; also Mouw, *God Who Commands* 95–96.

Theologians must add the image of God as Love Partner. To be sure, the God we love is God and therefore has the right to command our obedience. But our God is not primarily someone we obey.[95] Similarly, the God we love is the One who continues to create and order the universe. But it is not enough for us to respectfully conform to God's original plan. Even when natural-law ethics insists that God is our source of ultimate happiness, this God is not yet the Parent who has adopted us as daughters and sons (Rom 8:15–16; Gal 4:5–6; Eph 1:5). Rather, the Judeo-Christian God is better imaged as the One who says to us, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jer 31:3). This God has come among us and wants to be faithful to us throughout history (Deut 7:9; Isa 62:1, 4; Jn 1:14; 1 Cor 1:8–9).

I suggest that for our times the most appropriate image of God is that of Love Partner. This God creates us in order to love us and share life with us. This God may issue commandments to help us resist our inclinations to evil. But primarily this God desires to enter into a mutual love relationship with us. Paul wrote to Philemon, whom he describes as a partner: "although I feel I have every right to command you to do what ought to be done, I prefer to appeal in the name of love" (Philemon 8). God has a much greater right to command us, but God chooses to appeal to us in the name of love. Accordingly, for mutual-love ethics, God is not in the first place sovereign Lord, sagacious Creator, or final Good, but engaged and engaging Lover. In response, then, we want primarily to be love partners or friends with God, not because God promises rewards or threatens punishments, nor simply because we seek to fulfill our own nature, but because of the desirability of being united with God.[96] We conform ourselves in the first place not to a command, nor to the structures of our own humanity, but to our relationship with God.

With some truth Whitehead exclaimed that the "Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar." The God of love, he argued, proceeds differently. "Love neither rules, nor is it unmoved; also it is a little oblivious as to morals."[97] Our God is not Caesar and does not cling to divine Lordship (Phil 2:5–8). While the language of God as Lord and Logos has proper Christian usage, I propose that we should primarily image God as the incarnate, redeeming, and sanctifying Lover. The subject "God" proscribes any cozy relation and points to awesome, incomprehensible Mystery. A god who is not at times experienced as uncanny, terrifying and wholly transcen-

[95] Lucien Richard, O.M.I., *Is There a Christian Ethics?* (New York: Paulist, 1987) 21–22.

[96] Brümmer, *Speaking of a Personal God* 80–81; Smedes, *Mere Morality* 75. See Hans Reiner, *Duty and Inclination,* in *Phaenomenologica* 93 (Boston: Nijhoff, 1983) 184–87.

[97] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957) 520.

dent is not God.[98] But the other terms indicate that God is personally involved with us: God has accepted responsibility for us from the beginning of human history (Gen 6:3) and will do so until the end of time (Apoc 21:3–6). In between, God is "gracious" to us, where the word "grace" implies both unpredictable gratuity and generous self-communication. In this communion, God is also our Love Partner with whom we cooperate and share responsibility for God's reign.[99]

[98] Bonsor, "History, Dogma, and Nature" 306–7.

[99] For their helpful suggestions during the writing of this article I wish to thank John Kselman, Margaret Causey, Garth Hallett, Colleen Dalton, and colleagues at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology and at St. John's University, New York.

WJK THEOLOGY & REFERENCE

Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms

Donald K. McKim

Paper $20.00 Cloth $33.00

This unique volume briefly identifies *nearly 6000 theological terms* and encompasses a broad range of theological disciplines. No other single volume provides such easy access to so many theological definitions.

WESTMINSTER JOHN KNOX PRESS
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, KY 40202-1396

At your bookstore, your Cokesbury bookstore or call toll-free 1-800-227-2872