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SPIRITUALITY AND ETHICS: EXPLORING THE CONNECTIONS

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[Editor's Note: This Note on Moral Theology builds on the distinction between morality and ethics, and shows various ways in which the concept of "spirituality" occurs in contemporary theology. The importance of distinguishing yet not separating ethics and spirituality is then argued.]

THERE ARE promising and problematic connections between ethics and the emerging phenomena of spirituality. Any definitive resolution of this relationship would be premature because the discipline of spirituality is still defining itself. The variety of spiritualities is enormous, ranging from New Age practices to feminist political writings and Twelve Step programs.

On the positive side, certain forms of spirituality can augment those ethical systems that have achieved intellectual rigor at the cost of ignoring the wellsprings of motivation necessary to live morally. In addition, practical considerations from spirituality may open up ethical debates that have become hardened in academic and ecclesiastical circles.[1] On the negative side, some forms of spirituality appear resistant to any form of normative reflection, whether it be ethical, religious, or theological. Personal intuition and pragmatic results supply their own warrants for the validity of certain practices. This private assurance parallels the current preference for personal spirituality over institutional religion.[2] One hears people assert, "I'm not a religious person, but I am very spiritual." This may mean that they have found resources for inner strength in practices that are not burdened by the doctrinal and historical baggage of institutional religion. Or it

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[1] See John P. Burgess, "Does Scripture Matter? Scripture as Ethical Norm in a Time of Ecclesial Crisis," an unpublished paper delivered at Society for Christian Ethics convention at Albuquerque, January 7, 1996. Christian ethicists' customary neglect of the moral import of loving God is ably redressed in Edward Collins Vacek, S.J., *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1994).

[2] See Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), esp. the bibliography, at 269-85.

may mean that their practices make no reference to God or any comparable ground of meaning. One wonders how such people are able to assess their spiritual experience without the intellectual and moral criteria that have been honed in religious communities.[3]

Michael Downey discerns two recurrent themes in the multiple varieties of spirituality: "First, and most importantly, there is an awareness that there are levels of reality not immediately apparent.... Second, there is a quest for personal integration in the face of forces of fragentation and depersonalization."[4] Since this quest is usually directed to the highest value in the individual's belief system, spirituality has direct reference to morality, though not necessarily to God.

"Spirituality" was mostly a Roman Catholic term until the late 19th century.[5] Although it originally referred to living according to the Spirit of Jesus in response to God, the term "gradually came to mean that life as the special concern of 'souls seeking perfection' rather than as the common experience of all Christians."[6] This elitist description has been rejected in the past two decades in favor of more inclusive definitions. Bernard McGinn proposed a working definition of spirituality that has guided the editors and contributors of a major series in the field:

> Chistian spirituality is the lived experience of Christian belief in both its general and more specialized forms.... It is possible to distinguish spirituality from doctrine in that it concentrates not on faith itself, but on the reaction that faith arouses in religious consciousness and practice. It can likewise be distinguished from Christian ethics in that it treats not all human actions in their relation to God, but those acts in which the relation to God is immediate and explicit.[7]

[3] Michael Downey comments that both the institutional dimension of religion and critical reflection "are sorely neglected in so many developments of spirituality today which tend to be overly subjective to the detriment of more objective and external consideration, as well as preoccupied with pragmatic result.... The results, as so many currents in contemporary spirituality manifest, is a highly individualized, indeed privatized approach to the sacred, devoid of any clear sense of belonging to a community, and a lack of a clear sense of critical social responsibility which any authentic awareness of the sacred demands" (*Understanding Christian Spirituality* [New York: Paulist, 1996] 25). This volume is the best available overview of contemporary Christian spirituality.

[4] Ibid. 14.

[5] For a historical treatment, see Mark O'Keefe, O.S.B., *Becoming Good, Becoming Holy: On the Relationship of Christian Ethics and Spirituality* (New York: Paulist, 1995); see also the various articles in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Michael Downey, ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1993).

[6] Joann Wolski Conn, "Spirituality," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, Dermot A. Lane, ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991) 972.

[7] Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq, *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1985) xv-xvi. I do not insist that the relation between moral acts and God considered by spirituality must be "immediate and explicit," since this would give the impression that spirituality is concerned only with commands of God or direct inspirations, mystical discernments, etc. Sandra M. Schneiders uses personalist vocabulary to define spirituality as religious self-transcendence that provides integrity and meaning to life by situating the person within the

The recent widespread interest in spirituality in American Protestant circles may be attributed to an increased interest in more personal forms of religion, to ecumenical interaction, and to popular retrieval of Reformation piety described by Charles Taylor as "the affirmation of ordinary life."[8] Although initially suspected by some as a reappearance of anti-intellectual pietism, spirituality has begun to appear as a regular component of Protestant seminary curricula and in widely read texts by Protestant theologians.[9]

TERMS OF DISCUSSION

First, a provisional stipulation about terminology. Let me distinguish morality from ethics and, in parallel fashion, spirituality as lived experience from spirituality as academic reflection. "Morality" refers to "first-order" descriptive accounts of the lived experience of human values and obligations. It is a rich "fabric of sensibilities—perceptions, beliefs and practices."[10] "Ethics" refers to the "second-order" reflection that probes their rational supports and systematic interconnections. Bernard McGinn makes an analogous distinction about two orders of discourse in spirituality.[11]

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horizon of ultimacy ("Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?" *Horizons* 13 [1986] 253-74). For more historical treatments, see Louis Bouyer, Jean Leclercq, and François Vandenbroucke, *A History of Christian Spirituality,* 3 vols. (New York: Seabury, 1977). Gustavo Gutiérrez describes liberation theology as a spirituality of the poor of Latin America; like every spirituality, it is "a distinctive way of being Christian" (*We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1984] 37).

[8] "The affirmation of ordinary life finds its origins in Judeo-Christian spirituality, and the particular impetus it receives in the modern era comes first of all from the Reformation" (Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1989] 215). The collapse of the mediating role of church and clergy led to an appreciation for the sanctity of work, marriage and family, and lay life in general. This led to an intensification of religious practice and a new stress on the individual. Catholicism is witnessing a similar development since the Second Vatican Council.

[9] Marcus J. Borg writes that he began to understand Jesus when he "began to see Jesus as one whose spirituality—his experiential awareness of Spirit—was foundational for his life" (*Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994] 15). Jesus was a "Spirit person," that is, one who has "a strong sense of there being more to reality than the tangible world of our ordinary experience" and one who is also a mediator of the sacred to others (ibid. 32). See also Dorothee Soelle, *The Window of Vulnerability: A Political Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). For womanist expressions of spirituality, see Emilie M. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); and *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993).

[10] Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University, 1993) ix; see also his definition of ethics as second-order discourse (ibid. 4).

[11] Bernard McGinn, "The Letter and the Spirit: Spirituality as an Academic Discipline," *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 1/2 (1993) 1-10, at 4. See also Henry David Aiken, "Levels of Moral Discourse," *Reason and Conduct: New Bearings in Moral Philosophy* (New York: Knopf, 1962) 65-87.

"Lived spirituality," analogous to morality, refers to the practice of transformative, affective, practical, and holistic disciplines that seek to connect the person with reality's deepest meanings. It is concerned not primarily with isolated experiences such as visions or insights, but with a way of life that consciously seeks to live in tune with ultimate or comprehensive realities. "Reflective spirituality," analogous to ethics, stands for the second-order interpretation and communication of this dimension of experience as experience. It employs theological, historical-contextual, artistic, anthropological, and hermeneutical methods to analyze the lived experience.[12]

Morality and lived spirituality overlap inasmuch as devotional practices often seek to inculcate virtues and pursue moral values to their ultimate depths. However, morality and lived spirituality cannot be identified, because spirituality often adresses regions of experience that seem "off the scale" of ordinary morality. At one end of the spectrum, radically evil threats to meaning such as the scandal of the Holocaust and ecological devastation have generated contemporary spiritualities; so too have the witness of heroic sanctity and mystical union with the Good at the other extreme.[13] In addition, morality does not emphasize personal transformation and holistic integration to the degree which most forms of lived spirituality do.

Many versions of lived spirituality are more pedagogical than ordinary morality. They inculcate a way of life by practices of study, meditation, and compassion that develop certain intellectual, moral, and religious capacities.[14] With the help of a guide or director, these prac-

[12] Sandra M. Schneiders assesses the various strengths and weaknesses of these methods; see her "Spirituality as an Academic Discipline: Reflections from Experience," *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 1/2 (1993) 10-15, and "A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality," *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 2/1 (1994) 9-14. Joann Wolski Conn notes "the advantages of spirituality's method of staying close to experience in all explanations and testing past assumptions against one's critical reflection upon experience" ("Spirituality," in *The New Dictionary of Theology* 985).

[13] See Bernard McGinn, *Anti-Christ: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); Roger S. Gottleib, "Ethics and Trauma: Levinas, Feminism, and Deep Ecology," *Cross Currents* 44 (1994) 222-39; Donna L. Orsuto, "The Saint as Moral Paradigm," *Spirituality and Morality: Integrating Prayer and Action*, ed. Dennis J. Billy, C.S.S.R., and Donna Lynn Orsuto (New York: Paulist, 1996) 127-40. Some forms of virtue ethics not affiliated with religious traditions have a somewhat broader but still limited range. Liberal virtue theorists such as Judith N. Shklar allow for a gamut running from cruelty to fairness and tolerance (*Ordinary Vices* [Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1984]), but that range seems a bit pallid next to many spiritualities. On the difficulties of conceptualizing sanctity in a strictly philosophical framework, see Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982) 419-39, and the reply by Robert Merrihew Adams, "Saints," *Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984) 392-401.

[14] See Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988). Foster, a Quaker, describes the gradual transformation from a life of self-interest and fear to one that welcomes God's abundance. This transformation is God's work in which the person cooperates by committed practice of traditional spiritual disciplines. Foster describes four "inward disciplines" (meditation, prayer, fasting, and study), four "outward disciplines" (simplicity, solitude,

tices help the person break with an unauthentic way of existence in order to embrace a more authentic level, usually through contact with a more radical level of reality.[15] The spiritual disciplines then provide a structure for deepening and expanding the initial conversion.[16]

Ethics and reflective spirituality may examine the same phenomena but on different grounds. The virtue of compassion and practices of justice may be justified normatively by philosophical ethics or by theological and metaphysical warrants. Since disciplined reflection on spiritual experience should be normative as well as historical, reflective spirituality remains incomplete without reference to ethics. Spirituality, however, is not merely the application of principles derived from religious morality and belief, as in the older Catholic definition of "ascetical and mystical theology" that served as practical adjuncts to "dogmatic theology."[17]

Problems arise when a lived spirituality is cut off from an adequate reflective spirituality, that is, from traditions and communities that could provide normative theological and ethical categories. In their absence, spiritual practices are often justified by appeal to unexamined cultural commonplaces or narcissistic good feelings that are ripe for self-deception. In addition, contact with the sacred can be employed as an instrument to advance a particular ideology and social program. (Compare the "spiritual tourism" of New Age movements that offer odd medleys of practices divorced from the convictions and traditions that grounded them: Buddhist chanting, native American vision quests and sweat lodges, tantric yoga, astrology, ersatz witchcraft rituals, and the like.)

Other problems arise in the relation of lived spirituality to ethics. Some practitioners want spiritual practices to "do the work" of ethical reflection by immediately and intuitively grounding their preferred way of life. Conversely, some ethicists consider the practices of spirituality to be sectarian because they are not accountable to public criteria of truth and meaning.[18] The relation between reflective spirituality and ethics is more promising, since the former can expand the scope of ethics beyond a strictly formal or impartialist account, while ethics can encourage the study of spirituality to move beyond histori-

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submission, and service), and finally four "corporate disciplines" (confession, worship, guidance, and celebration).

[15] Spiritual directors have ensured accountability since the desert monks of Egypt; see Lawrence S. Cunningham, "Cassian's Hero and Discernment: Some Reflections," in *Finding God in All Things: Essays in Honor of Michael J. Buckley, S.J.*, ed. Michael J. Himes and Stephen J. Pope (New York: Crossroad, 1996) 231–43.

[16] See, e.g., the various articles in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Gordon S. Wakefield (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983); and *The Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

[17] See Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* 117–19.

[18] See Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, "Moral Imperialism vs. Moral Conflict: Conflicting Aims of Education," in *Can Virtue Be Taught?*, ed. Barbara Darling-Smith (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1993) 33–51.

cal, psychological, and sociological description to normative reflection. Many discussions of lived spirituality quickly shift into more reflective modes, because the experiential components of lived spirituality are primarily accessible to nonpractitioners through those more formal presentations. While most of the authors discussed here argue on a second-order level of discourse, their reflections consciously arise from personal engagement.[19]

In recent writings one finds still more comprehensive uses of the term "spirituality" in relation to morality. Daniel Maguire cites "a sense of the sheer giftedness and sanctity of life. . . . From this primal awe, moral oughts are born; and from this primal reverence, religion emanates. The moral response pronounces the gift good; the religious response goes on to proclaim it holy."[20] Peter J. Paris describes the core of African peoples' religion and morality in these terms: "The 'spirituality' of a people refers to the imaginative and integrative power that constitutes the principal frame of meaning for individual and collective experiences."[21] The distinctive interconnection of spirit, history, and nature leads in African peoples' spirituality to the basic "moral obligation to build a community in harmony with all the various powers in the cosmos."[22] These broader usages retain aspects of lived and reflective spirituality since they point to aspects of experience that are empowering, holistic, practical, affective, religious, and integrative.

SPIRITUALITY AND ETHICS OF CHARACTER

Perception, motivation, and identity are three regions of moral experience where the concerns and practices of spirituality are supplementing, if not supplanting, formal ethical approaches. Moral philosophers who are reviving Aristotelian ethics and others interested in the implicatons of psychology for the moral life (often associated under the rubric "ethics of character") are beginning to pay attention to these dimensions of moral experience.[23] Kantian, utilitarian, and contractarian approaches, however, tend to move from lived experi-

[19] Spirituality is still in the process of being defined as an academic discipline. See Walter H. Principe, "Toward Defining Spirituality," *Studies in Religion / Sciences religieuses* 12 (1983) 139, and "Christian Spirituality," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* 931–38; Gordon Wakefield, *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) v; Joann Wolski Conn, ed. *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development* (New York: Paulist, 1986) introduction; Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988) 13–45; Sandra M. Schneiders, "Spirituality in the Academy," *TS* 50 (1989) 676–97.

[20] Daniel C. Maguire, *The Moral Core of Judaism and Christianity: Reclaiming the Revolution* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 41.

[21] Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 22.

[22] Ibid. 35.

[23] See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University, 1990) 54-105; Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Person-*

ence to morality and ethics by a rigorous process of pruning away the influences of emotion, particular relationships, and preferences that emanate from specific life plans or religious traditions. Spirituality poses a greater challenge to these universalist and impartialist forms of ethics.

Perception

What we value depends on what we pay attention to and how we pay attention to it. We make choices in the world that we notice, and what we notice is shaped by the metaphors and habits of the heart that we bring to experience. These resources for attentiveness may be derived from spirituality or from morality and ethics. Prior to thinking clearly about injustice one needs to recognize situations as morally problematic and also notice salient features in them that can lead to change. Evil conditions persist more frequently by reason of apathy and moral obtuseness than by conscious collusion. New moral categories like sexism and racism make us less obtuse to forms of injustice that had previously been taken for granted.[24] Philosophers and social critics fashion new moral categories, but how does one acquire the virtues that foster moral discernment and clarity?

Belden C. Lane turns to the desert to learn moral attentiveness and indifference.[25] He posits "the surly, discourteous piety of the desert fathers and mothers" as the antidote to the egoistic, undemanding niceness of much American spirituality. Stimulated by the endless onslaught of consumer culture, we are "plagued by a highly diffused attention" and "give ourselves to everything lightly. In saying yes to everything, we attend to nothing."[26] The desert teaches that attentiveness comes out of familiarity with emptiness. "Indifference" is the "slowly-learned attitude of abandonment that comes from prolonged desert experience."[27] Attachment to God made the detachment of the desert monks possible. "Indifference serves as a corrective lens, indicating what does and doesn't deserve attention."[28] An AIDS ward or shelters for the abused and addicted are today's deserts, places where

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ality: Ethics and Psychological Realism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1991); William C. Spohn, "Passions and Principles," *TS* 52 (1991) 69-87.

[24] See Lawrence A. Blum questions one new moral commonplace: the assumption that women operate under an ethic of care and relationships while men operate under an ethic of principles and rationality does not stand up empirically or philosophically (*Moral Perception and Particularity* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994] 183-267). See also Kathryn Tanner, "The Care That Does Justice: Recent Writings in Feminist Ethics and Theology," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24 (1996) 171-91.

[25] Belden C. Lane, "Desert Attentiveness, Desert Indifference: Countercultural Spirituality in the Desert Fathers and Mothers," *Cross Currents* 44 (1994) 193-206.

[26] Ibid. 197. [27] Ibid. 195.

[28] Ibid. 200; see Richard A. McCormick, S.J., who uses the same metaphor for a moral theology attuned to spirituality (*Corrective Vision: Explorations in Moral Theology* [Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed and Ward, 1994]).

the hard discipline of self-emptying takes place through solidarity with the suffering.

Iris Murdoch, the prolific novelist and occasional philosopher, writes about the importance of moral attention from a spirituality that is nontheistic.[29] She has for some time urged that ordinary moral vision is egocentric and needs transformation by getting connected with a transcendent source of beauty and goodness, some version of Plato's Form of the Good.[30] Unfortunately, she did not mention any practical means to effect this transformation. Recently she has discovered spiritual practices to train moral perceptiveness. Contemplative prayer, even without reference to God, can help purify human desires. Attachment to a transcendent goodness and beauty detaches us from sentimental distortion of the other, thereby freeing us to appreciate the other as it is. "But there is also a natural way of mysticism, as indicated by St. Paul, which involves a deepened and purified apprehension of our surroundings."[31]

Zen meditation provides the forms of spiritual practice for this natural mysticism. Through practices that empty the mind, Zen engenders the typically Buddhist respect and love of all things by training the person to empty the self by focusing on small details of ordinary life and nature.[32] Admittedly, such practices do not guarantee moral improvement: "One may not be sure that those who observe stones and snails lovingly will also thus observe human beings, but such observation is a *way*, an act of respect for individuals, which is itself a virtue, and an image of virtue."[33] Murdoch believes that with the collapse of traditional religion new forms of spiritual practice must be discovered to connect morality with its mystical background. "We can make our own rites and images, we can preserve the concept of holiness."[34]

At the level of perception, the practices of spirituality do not threaten ethics, but they can correct the abstract and universal emphases of some philosophies that neglect the particular contours of actual persons and unique situations.

Motivation

Spirituality corrects impartialist moral philosophies in a second way by attending to virtues and vices, the defining elements of char-

[29] For another nontheistic spirituality, see Vaclav Havel, *Living in Truth* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990). Geraldine Finn takes exception to Havel and other "spiritual" readings of the fall of Communism in her "The Politics of Spirituality: The Spirituality of Politics," *Listening* 27 (1992) 119–32.

[30] See Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Schocken, 1971).

[31] Murdoch cites Philippians 4:8 in her *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Viking Penguin, 1992) 301.

[32] Ibid. 245.

[33] Ibid. 244.

[34] Ibid. 249.

acter. Religion has often been more aware of the connection between vision and virtue, as Murdoch points out: "The most evident bridge between morality and religion is the idea of virtue" which calls us to a goodness that goes beyond fulfilling our duties.[35] Spiritual practices aim to inculcate specific habits of the heart that will serve to guide conduct. Dispositions like justice and compassion establish an embedded network of values that functions normatively in at least two ways.[36] It screens out contrary courses of action and sets the context for evaluating particular deeds. Proposed actions that harmonize with the set of dispositions will be discerned as appropriate, while those that clash with it are discerned as unfitting.[37] In practical discernment the set of dispositions exercises a normative function often neglected by philosophers and theologians who concentrate on rules and principles as the only normative elements in morality.[38]

Many contemporary spiritualities shy away from explicit moral norms and principles. They often rely on a set of dispositions that are expected to characterize the practitioner and function normatively in decision and action. It is not clear that any set of dispositions can do all the work of ethics. Although dispositions are scenarios of action for those who follow a particular spiritual path, it is not clear that they can provide the explicit normative criteria that are needed to justify action to those outside that spirituality. Let me cite two instances of spiritualities that present a normative *Gestalt* of dispositions in place of rules and principles:

(1) Gustavo Gutiérrez does not outline a theory of justice or apply the norms of just-war theory to the problem of revolution. Instead he describes a pattern of familiar gospel dispositions that have been reshaped by the Latin American struggle for liberation: conversion as a requirement for solidarity, gratuitousness as the atmosphere for effective action, joy as the victory over suffering, spiritual childhood, radical dependence on God as the requirement for commitment to the poor, and community born out of solitude.[39] The encounter with God that occurs in identifying with the poor in Christian faith ought to

[35] Ibid. 481.

[36] Culture redefines virtues and vices according to quite distinctive paradigms and religious warrants; see Bernard T. Adeney, *Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1995).

[37] On discernment in Jesuit spirituality, see David Lonsdale, S.J., *Listening to the Music of the Spirit: The Art of Discernment* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1993); Philip Sheldrake, S.J., *Befriending Our Desires* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1994); Herbert Alphonso, S.J., "Docility to the Spirit: Discerning the Extraordinary in the Ordinary," in *Spirituality and Morality* (cited n. 13 above) 112-26.

[38] See G. Simon Harak, S.J., *Virtuous Passions: The Formation of Christian Character* (New York: Paulist, 1993).

[39] Gutiérrez, *We Drink* 91-135. Jon Sobrino endorses this work of Gutiérrez as the finest expression of Latin American liberation spirituality (*Spirituality of Liberation* 50-79); see also Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994).

evoke these particular virtues; it establishes a path along which these dispositions are the roadmarkers. Like every major Christian spirituality, this path is shaped by the gospel story and specific sociohistorical challenges: "the concrete forms of the following of Jesus are connected with the great historical movements of an age."[40]

This spirituality of liberation is grounded in self-conscious reflection which includes critical interpretations of Scripture, theology, sociohistorical conditions, philosophy, and other traditional spiritualities with which it shares common patterns of Christian discipleship such as those reflected in the writings of John of the Cross.[41]

(2) Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza also presents a normative pattern of dispositions behind her proposals for an emancipatory feminist biblical hermeneutics. Although her work is concerned more with critical method than with explicating a spiritual experience, she mentions features common to other spiritualities: conversion, struggle against entrenched evil, the discovery of the divine presence in the struggle, practices of imagination and celebration.[42]

Schüssler Fiorenza, however, stands in sharp contrast to Gutiérrez when it comes to dispositional content and justification. Scripture, she argues, cannot set any normative pattern of dispositions for feminism because it is thoroughly contaminated by androcentric interpretation and inscribed patterns of domination. Every authority is subject to the authority of experience expressed in contemporary feminist praxis. One aim controls the reading of Scripture: to determine "whether and how Scripture can become an enabling, motivating resource and empowering authority in women's struggle for justice, liberation, and solidarity."[43]

The normative set of dispositions is grounded in contemporary democratic and egalitarian convictions rather than in theology, tradition, or philosophical ethics. A "spirituality of vision and imagination" grounded in the logic of democracy "requires passionate involvement, respect, and recognition of the other, desire for justice, recognition of needs, zest for life, the capacity to relate to others, and especially the vision of a different community of equals."[44] Richard B. Hays expresses serious reservations about Schüssler Fiorenza's project: "The

[40] Ibid. 27.

[41] See ibid. 87. In more recent writings Gutiérrez has mined another classic journey of purgation and solitude struggling toward God; see his *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992).

[42] See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1992) 89, 115, 156, 176.

[43] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1984) 60.

[44] Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said* 157. The logic of democracy defines a moralized version of the Reign of God. The *basileia* is "G-d's intended world" that occurs whenever Jesus or any of his followers tells stories "about the uninvited who are invited or about the least who will be first. . . . In sum, the well-being and happiness of everyone is the central vision of the *basileia* movement" (ibid. 215-16).

danger is that her approach might ultimately undermine the authority of the New Testament so thoroughly that its liberating power would also be lost, as the church finds its identity increasingly shaped by the ideals of liberal democracy and the apparent dictates of contemporary experience,"[45] Unlike Gutiérrez, this spirituality of liberation seems immune to criticism from Scripture or tradition. The experience of struggle against patriarchy judges the Bible, doctrinal and moral theology; but can anything judge the movement? Schüssler Fiorenza's work may indicate what happens when the lived spirituality of a movement lacks an adequate theoretical justification.

Other spiritualities ground their strategies and practices in psychology as well as in ethical and religious warrants. James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead analyze the negative emotions of anger, shame and guilt and suggest practical ways to transform them in creative directions.[46] Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon use Scripture and Jungian psychology to address contemporary issues from workaholism to individuation.[47]

Identity

Ethics and spirituality make identity a central concern. Both assume that action flows from the specific identity of the person, the constellation of habits, commitments, and emotions that we call character. Since we tend to discern the moral appropriateness of actions in relation to our "sense of self," the question of identity assumes priority in moral reflection. Who we think we are and who we want to become, our *identity*, comes to a considerable extent from *identification*, namely, the persons, causes and values with which we identify. Spirituality usually adds a transformative urgency to the question of identity. When the self overidentifies with external goods like success, power, and pleasure, it is bound to be unauthentic. Spiritualities insist on conversion and dedication to worthwhile sources of meaning in order to forge a genuine identity.

In her recent historical survey *Love Your Enemies*, Lisa Sowle Cahill finds that the issue of identity lies behind the tension between Christian pacifism and just-war theories.[48] Pacifists from Erasmus,

[45] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996) 282. Similar questions about Schüssler Fiorenza's book *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* (New York: Continuum, 1994) are raised by Pheme Perkins in *America* 172 (May 13, 1995) 26-27.

[46] James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Shadows of the Heart: A Spirituality of the Negative Emotions* (New York: Crossroad, 1995).

[47] Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart: A Spirituality of Integration* (New York: Paulist, 1995).

[48] Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

the Anabaptists, and the Quakers to Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton have had a sense of ugency about the reign of God that had led them to reject worldly ways in order to identify with the ways of Jesus witnessed in the New Testament.[49] That urgency does not always derive from belief in an imminent return of Jesus. Instead, it arises from a sense of identification with the neighbor and with Christ: "they are cognizant . . . of his life as putting them within reach in the present of a new life for us, out of which flows conduct often indicated in the language of demand, but actually constituting a spontaneous and characteristic mode of being for those united to Christ."[50] The joy and steadfast witness of Quakers and Anabaptists in the midst of suffering are unintelligible without this sense of identification with the suffering Jesus who is also the risen and present Lord.

Advocates of just-war theory, on the other hand, usually miss the lived spirituality that drives Christian pacifism because they interpret it through the lens of ethics. Christian pacifism, however, cannot be understood to be a strategy deduced from a general conviction of the value of human life. Nor is it concerned with detailing exceptions to a general moral prohibition against violence. Rather, Christian pacifism "seems to arise before the point at which just war thinking begins. It asks first of all not about the exceptional case, but about the quality of a communal life based in Christ and in the kingdom of God, a life that turns out to make violence incomprehensible."[51]

Christian pacifism is originally a lived spirituality whose second-order discourse may perhaps be better understood as a reflective spirituality than an ethics. This second-order discourse has an ethical dimension that is translated into certain moral practices and prohibitions. Pacifism's moral stance rests on an intuition that violence is incompatible with Christian identity. That intuition cannot always be expressed in terms that will be persuasive to others, even fellow Christians, who do not share that same spirituality. This failure will almost certainly occur if the critic insists that the discussion be carried on in the language of strategy and political prudence or if one rules out religious warrants as "sectarian" or insufficiently "public."[52] When ethical discourse strips Christian pacifism of its particularity, it renders it unin-

[49] Ibid. 151.

[50] Ibid. 176.

[51] Ibid. 229.

[52] Stanley Hauerwas's arguments for Christian pacifism exemplify Cahill's thesis since they are conversion-based rather than rule-based. They arise out of identification with the path of the gospel Jesus. As such, neither the reasoning nor the depth of motivation that drives his prohibition of violence are likely to be fully grasped by those whose identity is not centered on this story and person (Stanley M. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1983] 145). See also James M. Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University," *Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings* 40 (1985) 83-94, and Hauerwas's reply in *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World and Living in Between* (Durham: Labyrinth, 1988) 1-21.

telligible. When pacifists couch their witness too narrowly, however, they court misunderstanding from those who do not share their spirituality. Although spirituality cannot do the work of ethics, ethicists ought not to dismiss spirituality as necessarily premoral or sectarian.

The question of identity also lies at the heart of the discussion about the environmental crisis.[53] Do we conceive of nature anthropocentrically or as a complex system of which humanity is one part among many? Should our moral community extend beyond humanity to other sentient and nonsentient beings? Environmental devastation is increasingly seen not only as immoral but also as a violation of the sacred. Buddhist forms of ecospirituality are invoked to resacralize nature. Practices of meditation contribute to a reinterpretation of personal identity: "By accepting and yielding to .... groundlessness I can discover that *I have always been grounded* not as a self-contained being but as *one manifestation of a web of relationships which encompasses everything*."[54] This identification with the whole shapes an ecospirituality that inculcates the virtues of interdependence and universal compassion.[55]

John D'Arcy May calls for a critical correlation of Buddhist and Christian resources to ground an interreligious ecological ethic. Today's "consumerist" ethic ("I want it all, and I want it now") can be checked by a more ascetic ethic ("I want it, but I don't need it"). Spiritual practices of the world's religious traditions, however, propose a "contemplative" ethic whose motto would be "I don't want it, because I love it." If I espouse this stance, possessing or exploiting the desired object "would seem like a betrayal of myself and my world."[56] Western

[53] See Christopher Manes, *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990); *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1990); Ian Ball, Margaret Goodall, Clare Palmer and John Reader, ed., *The Earth Beneath: A Critical Guide to Green Theology* (London: SPCK, 1992); Charles Cummings, *Eco-Spirituality: Toward a Reverent Life* (New York: Paulist, 1991); John F. Haught, *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose* (New York: Paulist, 1993); Richard N. Fragomeni and John T. Pawlikowski, ed., *The Ecological Challenge: Ethical, Liturgical and Spiritual Responses* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1994); *Um des Menschen willens: Moralität und Spiritualität*, ed. Michael Schramm and Udo Zelinka (Würzburg: Echter, 1994); George E. Tinker, "Spirituality, Native American Personhood, Sovereignty and Solidarity," *Ecumenical Review* 44 (1992) 312-24; John Bolt, "The Greening of Spirituality: A Review Article," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995) 194-211.

[54] David Loy, "Avoiding the Void: The Lack of Self in Psychotherapy and Buddhism," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 24 (1992) 176, cited in Corrado Pensa, "A Buddhist View of Eco-Spirituality: Interdependence, Emptiness and Compassion," in *Eco-spirituality: Perspectives from World Religions*, ed. Augustine Thottakara, C.M.I., Spirituality Series No. 5 (Rome: Center for Indian and Inter-Religious Studies, 1995) 80-96, at 89.

[55] James Gustafson points out that nature is characterized by conflict as much as by harmony (*A Sense of the Divine: The Natural Environment from a Theocentric Perspective* [Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1994]).

[56] John D'Arcy May, " 'Rights of the Earth' and 'Care for the Earth': Two Paradigms for a Buddhist-Christian Ecological Ethic," *Horizons* 21 (1994) 48-61, at 56; see also Kenneth Kraft, "The Greening of Buddhist Practice," *Cross Currents* 44 (1994) 163-79.

Buddhists have pioneered a more activist ecological ethic of care, but they have had difficulty integrating it into a Western appreciation of rights and justice. May argues that the two traditions are not incompatible, and that "deep ecology requires a deep ecumenism" which can integrate an ethics of justice with an ethics of cosmic care.[57]

The question remains, however, whether the theoretical foundations of Buddhism will be adequate to ground a social morality. A Western Buddhist critic faults his coreligionists for being "committed to ethically unproblematic issues—like rainforests, whales, primal peoples, animal rights, even human rights and world peace—and to all forms of service, rather than involving themselves with the militant wretched of the Earth (especially those close to home), and with the structural violence of our social system."[58] Christian commentators voice similar concerns, fearing that the Buddhist principles of interconnectedness and "mutually conditioned co-origination" may lead to a "depersonalizing of ethics, thus undermining the concept of responsibility with its intrinsically social dimension."[59] "The widening circle of ethical concerns must not skip over human beings, but move through them."[60] However much we identify with nature and the earth, the fact remains that the cost of ecocide are borne mostly by the poor and people of color. The convergence between certain Buddhist and Christian practices at the level of lived spirituality may be undermined by incompatible ethical and ontological suppositions at the more theoretical level.

CONCLUSION

In ecospirituality and Christian pacifism a cause integrates the self and locates it in a comprehensive framework of meaning. Certain actions are morally proscribed because they would betray the sense of self which has been fashioned by spiritual convictions and practices. Moral philosophy does not seem capable of creating personal identity. Philosophical ethics may have to be content to set certain outer limits of action that will inevitably remain rather formal. Ethics must look to specific traditions and movements to fill in the outline with narratives, symbols and practices that constitute a more or less coherent way of life. Reflective spirituality should be one of these supplementary sources for ethics. It may also be true that every ethics rests on some particular tradition that implicitly contains a life narrative that gives content to virtue terms and gives priority to some common human values over others.

[57] Ibid. 61.

[58] Ken Jones, "Getting Out of Our Own Light," in *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, ed. Allan Hunt Badiner (Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax, 1990) 183-90, at 188.

[59] May, "Rights of the Earth" 58.

[60] Gottleib, "Ethics and Trauma" 238.

The authors cited here connect spirituality and ethics in relatively irenic approaches because, with some exceptions, they are compatible with philosophical ethics and universalist forms of theological ethics. In the ideal sense, spiritualities get their practitioners in touch with meaning that is humane and constructive of human community. Indeed, some would reserve the name "spirituality" to these constructive practices and movements.

An examination of spiritualities that reject ethics would be the topic for another study. Moral perception, motivation, and identity can be enhanced by most of the forms of spirituality that I have examined. Some are religious; some are primarily moral but presume an undogmatic religious background. The least dogmatic of the authors, Iris Murdoch, makes a good case that at base morality, religion, and mysticism overlap. Spiritualities that arise from an experience of great trauma, like the Holocaust, ecocide, or the oppression of women and the poor, may be more susceptible to using spirituality ideologically. The sacred is enlisted as an ally to remedy social conditions of evil. However, if the sacred is primarily used as an instrument rather than appreciated in its own right, legitimate suspicions arise. Some movement spiritualities are more willing to be accountable to other visions and voices than to those coming from their own ranks. Insofar as they are not accountable to other voices, they run the risk of being insular and ideological, because they will inculcate some of the very oppressive and exclusionary traits that their writings denounce.

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