The Peaceable Kingdom:

A PRIMER IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS

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To the people
of the Broadway Methodist Church
for striving to be faithful
to the kingdom

3. MY ECCLESIAL STANCE

At the risk of testing my reader's patience beyond limit, there is one last issue that I feel I must say a word about—namely, do I write as a Catholic or as a Protestant? The answer is that I simply do not know. I do not believe that theology when rightly done is either Catholic or Protestant. The object of the theologian's inquiry is quite simply God—not Catholicism or Protestantism. The proper object of the qualifier "catholic" is the church, not theology or theologians. No theologian should desire anything less than that his or her theology reflect the catholic character of the church. Thus I hope my theology is catholic inasmuch as it is true to those Protestants and Roman Catholics who constitute the church catholic.

Of course the fact I am biographically a Protestant is not irrelevant to the way I work. I have no desire to rid myself of my particular background as an evangelical Methodist. Rather it is my conviction that Methodism, like other Christian traditions, with its limits and possibilities, helps awaken all of us to being members of Christ's whole church. Thus, even if I am critical of my tradition, I am rightly so only so long as that criticism serves to direct Protestants and Catholics alike to the one Lord who reigns over all people.

1. Christian Ethics in a Fragmented and Violent World

1. ETHICS AND THE DEMAND FOR ABSOLUTES

All ethical reflection occurs relative to a particular time and place. Not only do ethical problems change from one time to the next, but the very nature and structure of ethics is determined by the particularities of a community's history and convictions. From this perspective the notion of "ethics" is misleading, since it seems to suggest that "ethics" is an identifiable discipline that is constant across history. In fact, much of the burden of this book will be to suggest that ethics always requires an adjective or qualifier—such as, Jewish, Christian, Hindu, existentialist, pragmatic, utilitarian, humanist, medieval, modern—in order to denote the social and historical character of ethics as a discipline.[1] This is not to suggest that ethics does not address an identifiable set of relatively constant questions—the nature of the good or right, freedom and the nature of human behavior, the place and status of rules and virtues—but any response to these questions necessarily draws on the particular convictions of historic communities to whom such questions may have significantly different meanings.

That ethics is an activity relative to particular times, places, and communities may seem obvious, but it is also easily forgotten and its significance ignored. We each feel a powerful desire to claim that the ethic that guides us is free from historical relativity and/or arbitrariness. After all, morality often deals with matters that entail sacrifices by ourselves and others, and we think such sacrifices can only be justified on the basis of unchanging principles.

Thus it is often thought that one of the primary tasks of ethics is to show how morality is grounded in unchangeable principles and convictions. Many assume, moreover, that the best way to ensure the unchangeableness of our principles is to claim that they are sanctioned by God. We can be sure of our principles if they can be shown

to rely upon God's will. Because of this, some have claimed that if God does not exist everything is morally permissible. Though such a claim belies the complexity of the relation of religious convictions to morality, many believers and unbelievers alike seem to think that if God does not in some manner underwrite the absoluteness of our moral system we will not be able to say what is wrong with murder, or lying, or stealing, etc.

As a Christian ethicist I am often asked "Aren't there any absolutes anymore?" The questioners tend to assume that if the answer is "no," then ethics has simply ceased to exist. They assume this even though it is by no means clear to what their term "absolute" applies —to values, or rules, or convictions—or even if such absolutes have anything to do with Christian beliefs and practices.

To persons who hold this view, my claim that ethics always requires a qualifier seems an abdication of responsibility. They see the task of the ethicist in our time as that of reasserting the continued viability of those absolute norms that are not dependent upon a particular people's history, in order to sustain the moral character of our way of life. I maintain that such a view of ethics is radically misconceived, and particularly so for ethics done in a Christian context. But before suggesting why that is the case, we must try to understand the reasons behind the hunger for absolutes in our time.

2. LIVING AMID FRAGMENTS: THE INSUFFICIENCY OF ETHICS

One of the ironies of the current situation is that the attempt to *deny* that ethics responds to the peculiarity of our current social and historic situation only makes us more subject to that situation. We are told we live in a morally bankrupt age. People think what was at one time unthinkable; indeed they *do* what was once unthinkable. We experience our world as so morally chaotic that we now feel our only alternative is for each person "to choose," if not create, the standards by which they will live.

As pervasive as this feeling is, it is unclear exactly why we feel we are morally at sea. No time or society has ever been free of moral ambiguity. Why should we feel that some decisive change has occurred in our own time? Indeed, are we sure our values have changed, or is it their institutional settings? For example, we may still value the family, but may now have quite a different understanding of what we mean by "the family." Simply quoting divorce statistics does not suffice to show that we are morally confused about, or no longer

value, the family. Such statistics may be an indication that people have found the traditional commitments of marriage merely overzealous. Perhaps the moral force of marriage can be sustained in other settings; for example, maybe there is no inherent incompatibility between marriage and sex with more than one person.

I suspect that the experience of the world as morally adrift has a more profound source than the mere observation that people are permitted to do what was once unthinkable. Our disquiet about morality more likely arises from within us. Even though we feel strongly about abortion, divorce, dishonesty, and so on, we are not sure why we feel as we do. And the less sure we are of the reasons for our beliefs, the more dogmatically we hold to them as our only still point in a morally chaotic world. Ironically, our dogmatism only masks our more profound doubt, for although we hold certain moral convictions adamantly, we secretly suspect that we believe what we do because we have been conditioned. We hold certain beliefs as if they are unconditioned, yet are impressed with the knowledge that all beliefs are the result of environment, and thus at least potentially arbitrary. That very acknowledgment seems then to reduce all moral disagreements to subjective opinions about which there can be no argument.

This lurking suspicion that we really have no firm grounds for our beliefs makes us all the more unwilling to expose what we think to critical scrutiny. We thus take refuge among others who think as we do, hoping sheer numbers will protect us from the knowledge of our uncertainty. Or sometimes we suppose that if we think deeply and critically about our moral convictions, we will be able to supply adequate justification for what we believe. In both cases we assume that "ethics" must be able to provide the means for preventing our world from falling into a deeper moral chaos.

Underlying such a view or morality is the presupposition that we are required by our modern predicament to make up our "own minds" about what is good and bad. Indeed, those who do so with determination are seen as morally exemplary because they act autonomously rather than uncritically accept convention. But the very notion we are "choosing" or "making up" our morality contains the seeds of its own destruction, for moral authenticity seems to require that morality be not a matter of one's own shaping, but something that shapes one. We do not create moral values, principles, virtues; rather they constitute a life for us to appropriate. The very idea that we choose what is valuable undermines our confidence in its worth.

In many ways the current popularity that "ethics" enjoys is odd,

for most people most of the time would prefer not to have to think about what is the right or wrong thing to do. They simply want to get on with the living of their lives: to fall in love, raise families, have satisfying professions, support decent and worthwhile institutions.

Certainly there is something correct in our feeling that we are required to think too much about "ethics" today.[2] However, it is not that we are required to think—every society regardless of its "ethics" develops some forms of critical reflection about how best to act. Rather it is *what* we are required to think about. Contemporary ethics concentrates on moral quandaries: Should we lie to protect a friend? Is withholding the complete truth a form of lying? Must we tell a dying person he or she is dying? And so on. It thus appears that "ethics" is primarily concerned with ambiguous situations and hard decisions.[3] Such a concentration on "quandaries" obscures the fact that they make sense only in the light of convictions that tell us who we are. Our most important moral convictions are like the air we breathe: we never notice them because our life depends on them. For example, our concern with lying derives from the conviction that we should be truthful. Behind our current feeling of chaos lies the fact that very "air we breathe" is being questioned. I suspect that it is not that we have no moral guides, but that we have too many. As Alasdair MacIntyre has suggested, our problem is that we live amid fragments of past moralities each, with good reasons, competing for our loyalty. In order to understand the implications of this he asks us to:

> Imagine that the natural sciences were to suffer the effects of a catastrophe. A series of environmental disasters are blamed by the general public on the scientists. Widespread riots occur, laboratories are burnt down, physicists are lynched, books and instruments are destroyed. Finally a Know-Nothing political movement takes power and successfully abolishes science teaching in schools and universities, imprisoning and executing the remaining scientists. Later still there is a reaction against this destructive movement and enlightened people seek to revive science, although they have largely forgotten what it was. But all that they possess are fragments: a knowledge of experiments detached from any knowledge of the theoretical context which gave them significance; parts of theories unrelated either to the other bits and pieces of theory which they possess or to experiment; instruments whose use has been forgotten; half-chapters from books, single pages from articles, not always fully legible because torn and charred. None the less all these fragments are reembodied in a set of practices which go under the revived names of physics, chemistry and biology. Adults argue with each other about the respective merits of relativity theory, evolutionary theory and phlogiston theory, although they possess only a very partial knowledge of each. Children learn by heart the surviving portions of the periodic table and recite as incantations some of the theorems of Euclid. Nobody, or almost nobody, realises that what they are doing is not natural science in any proper sense at all. For everything that they do and say conforms to certain canons of consistency and coherence and those contexts which would be needed to make sense of what they are doing have been lost, perhaps irretrievably.
>
> In such a culture men would use expressions such as 'neutrino', 'mass', 'specific gravity', 'atomic weight' in systematic and often interrelated ways which would resemble in lesser or greater degrees the ways in which such expressions had been used in earlier times before scientific knowledge had been so largely lost. But many of the beliefs presupposed by the use of these expressions would have been lost and there would appear to be an element of arbitrariness and even of choice in their application which would appear very surprising to us. What would appear to be rival and competing premises for which no further argument could be given would abound.[4]

MacIntyre contends that in respect to its moral language the actual world we inhabit is very similar to the gravely disordered state of natual science in his imaginary world. "What we possess . . . are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possesss indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have—very largely, if not entirely—lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality."[5] MacIntyre points out that the limit of this analogy between our world and his imaginary one is that we have no record of a similar catastrophe that has left our moral world so fragmented. All we have are its effects.

If MacIntyre is correct we live in a precarious situation. Life in a world of moral fragments is always on the edge of violence, since there are no means to ensure that moral argument in itself can resolve our moral conflicts. No wonder we hunger for absolutes in such a world, for we rightly desire peace in ourselves and in our relations

with one another. Granted the world has always been violent, but when our own civilization seems to lack the means to secure peace within itself we seem hopelessly lost.

Moreover the fragmentation of our world is not only "out there," but it is in our own souls. Amid fragments it is extremely hard to maintain our moral identity. We feel pulled in different directions by our various roles and convictions, unsure whether there is or can be any coherence to our lives. We become divided selves, more easily tempted to violence since, being unsure of ourselves, we are easily threatened by any challenge that might rob us of what little sense of self we have achieved.

Lacking any habits or institutions sufficient to sustain an ethos of honor, we become cynical. By suspecting all, by assuming that behind every cause lies self-interest and behind every act of charity a psychological payoff, we hope to protect ourselves from being misused or lost. Yet cynicism inevitably proves too corrosive. Its acid finally poisons the self, leaving no basis for self-respect because it renders all activities unworthy of our moral commitment.

In such a world the emphasis of Christian ethics on the significance of the qualifier "Christian" appears to many to capitulate to the chaos. We need instead, they say, to reformulate a universal morality that is able to bring order to our fragmentary world, securing peace between and in ourselves. Yet such universality will not come if Christians fail to take seriously their particularistic convictions. We Christians who, as I hope to show, are inextricably committed to a peaceable world, believe that peace is possible only as we learn to acknowledge and serve the Lord of this world, who has willed to be known through a very definite and concrete history. Therefore, Christian ethics holds to the importance of its qualifier, because the peace Christians embody, and which they offer to the world, is based on a kingdom that has become present in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

But faithfulness to such particularities strikes most as far too unreliable, and they continue the quest for a universal ethic that can insure certainty, if not peacefulness. I wish to claim, however, that such a quest only makes us more susceptible to violence. I must now try to show why such is the case.

2.1 *Freedom as Fate*

Our sense that we live in a morally chaotic, fragmented world accounts for two of the dominant characteristics of recent ethical

theory: (1) the stress on freedom, autonomy, and choice as the essence of the moral life; and (2) the attempt to secure a foundation for the moral life unfettered by the contingencies of our histories and communities. As we will see, these are closely related insofar as it is assumed that freedom depends on finding the means to disentangle ourselves from our own engagements.

Caught between the competing interests, we increasingly feel compelled to create or choose our morality. This is variously reflected by moral theories such as emotivism, existentialism, and situationalism, which maintain that moral knowledge is not so much discovered as "created" through personal choice. Therefore the necessary basis of authentic morality is seen as the freedom to choose and willingness to take responsibility for choices.

Such a strong assertion of freedom seems a bit odd when we remember that one of our other dominant assumptions is that we are largely determined by our environment and biology. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of modernity is that we feel ourselves at once both determined and free. Peter Berger suggests an explanation for this glaring incompatibility in his *Heretical Imperative.*[6]

According to Berger, premodern people lived for the most part in a given world. They had little choice about where to live, what vocation to enter, or whom to marry. As a result, they were not hounded by our modern ambivalence. While premodern people may have struggled with the meaning of life, they did not need to question, as we seem required to do, whether their life was sufficiently coherent to legitimately ask its meaning.

Modern people, Berger contends, find themselves confronted not only by many possible courses of action, but also by many possible ways of thinking about the world. As a result all life has become consumer oriented. We choose not only between toothpastes, but between the very "plausibility" structures that give our lives coherence and meaning. Our need to choose even those basic beliefs about why things are as they are and not otherwise, suggests an arbitrariness about them which undermines truthfulness. Finally, the only thing we feel we can be sure of in such a world is the absolute necessity of our own autonomy. In fact, our deepest conviction, our surest "plausibility structure," is that if our lives are to have meaning we must create it.

We have thus been condemned to freedom, or as Berger prefers, the "heretical imperative." "For premodern man, heresy is a possibility—usually a rather remote one; for modern man, heresy typically becomes a necessity. Or again modernity creates a new situation in

which picking and choosing becomes an imperative."[7] Thus our ethical theorizing has led to the notion that freedom is not only a necessity but a moral ideal. Freedom itself is at once the necessary and sufficient condition of being moral.

But is this situation so unique? Haven't almost all moral theories held in different ways that people could only be responsible for what they have the power to do? Has not freedom always been thought crucial to moral behavior? Yet for philosophers such as Aristotle, freedom was not an *end in itself*; we became free only as we acquired the moral capability to guide our lives. To lack such capability was to be subject to the undisciplined desires and choices of the immature. Thus freedom did not reside in making choices but in being the kind of person for whom certain options simply were not open. For example, the courageous could not know the fears of the coward though they were required to know the fears appropriate to being courageous. Only the virtuous person could be free, insofar as freedom was not so much a status as a skill.

In contrast to our sense of "freedom of choice" the virtuous person was not confronted by "situations" about which he or she was to make a decision, rather the person determined the situation by insisting on understanding it not as a "situation" but as an event in a purposive narrative. Character determines circumstance, even when the circumstance may be forced upon us, by our very ability to interpret our actions in a story that accounts for moral activity.

In contrast, the modern conception has made freedom the content of the moral life itself. It matters not *what* we desire, but *that* we desire. Our task is to become free, not through the acquisition of virtue, but by preventing ourselves from being determined, so that we can always keep our "options open." We have thus become the bureaucrats of our own history, seeking never to be held responsible for any decisions, even for those we ourselves have made.

This attempt to avoid our history, however, results in the lack of the self-sufficiency to claim our lives as our own. For as we look back on our lives, many of the decisions we thought we were making freely, seem now to have been more determined than we had realized. We say: "If I only knew then what I know now." Using this as a means to claim nonresponsibility for our past, we imagine that *next time* we will really act "freely." As a result we tend to think the moral life and ethical reflection are concerned with prospective decisions and the securing of the conditions necessary to insure that those "decisions" will be free. We ignore the fact that the more important moral stance is retrospective, because it is in remembering and

accepting that we learn to claim our lives as our own—including those decisions that in retrospect were less than free. Ironically, my freedom turns out to depend on my ability to make my own that which I did not do with "free choice" but which I cannot do without. For what we are, our sense of ourselves, rests as much on what we have suffered as what we have done.

The modern assumption that freedom is the necessary and sufficient condition of morality is not easily changed, for it also determines how we govern our social relations. Our society seems generally to think that to be moral, to act in a responsible way, is to pursue our desires fairly—that is, in a manner that does not impinge on anyone else's freedom. We assume we can do as we want so long as we do not harm or limit anyone else's choices. A good society is one that provides the greatest amount of freedom for the greatest number of people. Although such an ethic appears to be highly committed to the common good, in fact its supporting theory is individualistic, since the good turns out to be the sum of our individual desires.

Even more troubling than this individualism is the price we pay in holding this view of ourselves and others; the price is nothing less than a systematic form of self-deception. Insofar as we are people who care about anything at all, we necessarily impinge on the "freedom" of others. But we act as if we do not, thus hiding from ourselves and others the truth that we are necessarily tied together in a manner that mutally limits our lives. We have taught ourselves to describe our moral convictions as our "personal desires," implying thereby that they need not significantly affect others. In fact, however, there is *no* morality that does not require others to suffer for our commitments. But there is nothing wrong with asking others to share and sacrifice for what we believe to be worthy. A more appropriate concern is whether what we commit ourselves to is worthy or not.

As a result of our self-deception our relations have become unrelentingly manipulative.[8] We see ourselves and others as but pawns engaged in elaborate games of power and self-interest. I do not mean to suggest that there has ever been a time or social order from which manipulation was absent. What is new about our present situation is that our best moral wisdom can conceive of no alternative. We seem able only to suggest ways to make the game more nearly fair. We are unable to provide an account of a morality worthy of requiring ourselves and others to suffer and thus releasing us from the prison of our own interests.

Our stress on freedom and its ethical expression renders us incapable of accounting for certain activities which seem central to the

human project. Consider something as simple as the decision to have children. In an ethics of freedom how can we justify such a decision when it clearly involves an imposition of our will and desires on that new life. No amount of good care and/or love could be sufficient to redress the imbalance of freedom in this situation. We have forced this being into existence to satisfy our desires! In the ethos of freedom the relationship between parents and children cannot help but induce resentment and the resulting bargaining games. We resent the time our children require of us and they resent the burden of guilt they feel for what appears to be our begrudging care for them. We are thus caught in a web of manipulation from which we seem unable to escape.

2.2 *Fragile Foundations*

Equally pervasive as the stress on freedom in modern ethical theory has been the concern to find a foundation for ethics. Indeed the attempt to provide a foundation for ethics is interrelated with the attempt to establish freedom as a prerequisite characteristic of human agents. As MacIntyre suggests, modern philosophers, both analytic and existentialist, have taken the essence of moral agency to be the capacity of the self to evade identification with any particular contingent state of affairs.

> To be a moral agent is, on this view, precisely to be able to stand back from any and every situation in which one is involved, from any and every characteristic that one may possess, and to pass judgment on it from a purely universal and abstract point of view that is totally detached from all social particularity. Anyone and everyone can thus be a moral agent, since it is in the self and not in social roles or practices that moral agency has to be located.[9]

Thus it has become the task of ethical theory to find a foundation free of historical contingencies that can guarantee the availability of such freedom for the agent.

The grand example of this project is, of course, the work of Immanuel Kant, who sought to ground morality in the very necessity of freedom. It was Kant's great enterprise to free morality from the arbitrary and the contingent, in order to secure at least minimal agreement between people of differing beliefs and societies. Moreover Kant tried valiantly to free the realm of morality from the determinism he thought characteristic of the natural world. He sought to guarantee the "autonomy" of morality by grounding morality neither in religious or metaphysical beliefs, nor in any empirical account of humanity, but in rationality *qua* rationality.

Kant contended that the distinctive moral characteristic of the rational creature was the capacity to live by no other law than that of its own making. Thus for Kant the autonomy of reason and the autonomy of morality rested on the same basis. This law, which Kant thought to be inherent in rationality, he called the categorical imperative, which requires we do our duty for no other reason than it is our duty. His first formulation of the categorical imperative was "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[10] While this principle, and its relation to Kant's other formulations of the law, has been variously interpreted and restated, it is generally accepted as the basic statement for justifying moral judgments, whether it is called the "principle of generalization" or, more existentially, "the moral point of view." The force of the principle stays the same: It renders the contingent history of the agent irrelevant in moral judgment and evaluation; it demands that the justification for our decisions be given from the perspective of anyone.

It is not my interest here to evaluate Kant's project or his later interpreters, but to observe how the general project of finding a foundation for morality has gone hand in hand with an aversion to the particular and the contingent. Why has ethics the sudden need for a "foundation" and in particular a foundation that is characterized by universality and necessity, when it seems that such a demand distorts the very nature of moral judgment? As Aristotle reminds us, ethics by its nature deals with matters which can be other—that is, particular matters.[11] Confronted by the fragmented character of our world, philosophers have undoubtedly tried to secure a high ground that can provide for security, certainty, and peace. It is a worthy effort, but one doomed to fail, for such ground lacks the ability to train our desires and direct our attention; to make us into moral people.

Despite enthusiasm of many religious thinkers for this search for a foundation for morality, such a foundation ironically cannot but make religious convictions morally secondary.[12] Here we stumble on a problem at least as old as Plato's *Euthyphro*, namely how do religion and morality relate? Is something right because God commands it, or because it is right? If the latter, then why do we need God to command it? I cannot here give adequate attention to this issue but only note that the discussion of it typically turns on a far too limited understanding of morality. As I will discuss later, those traditions

that have emphasized natural law as one response to the problem have tended to relegate "religious" aspects of the moral life to a "higher" morality or to the motivational component of morality. As a result, not only has the moral force of Christian convictions been lost, but the very nature of moral experience has been distorted.

More significantly, when the particularity of Christian convictions is made secondary to an alleged more fundamental "morality," we lose the means to be a peaceable people. For the attempt to secure peace through founding morality on rationality itself, or some other "inherent" human characteristic, ironically underwrites coercion. If others refuse to accept my account of "rationality," it seems within my bounds to force them to be true to their "true" selves.

As Christians, we must maintain day in and day out that peace is not someting to be achieved *by our power.* Rather peace is a gift of God that comes only by our being a community formed around a crucified savior—a savior who teaches us how to be peaceful in a world in rebellion against its true Lord. God's peaceful kingdom, we learn, comes not by positing a common human morality, but by our faithfulness as a peaceful community that fears not our differences.

3. THE PRIVITIZATION OF RELIGION

Many of the same processes that have shaped our modern understanding of morality have had an equally strong and corrosive effect on our religious convictions and institutions. If religion is no longer considered a matter of truth, it cannot and should not command our attention as something worthy in and of itself. Rather religion's significance is reduced, at best, to the functional. Thus religious belief may be a source of strength in a personal crisis and/or an aid in interpersonal relations. Accordingly, the church has become but one among many voluntary associations of like-minded people from similar economic strata.

The functional character of contemporary religious convictions is perhaps nowhere better revealed than in the upsurge of religious conservatism. While appearing to be a resurgence of "traditional" religious conviction, some of these movements in fact give evidence of the loss of religious substance in our culture and in ourselves. Christianity is defended not so much because it is true, but because it reinforces the "American way of life." Such movements are thus unable to contemplate that there might be irresolvable tensions between being Christian and being "a good American."

At a more sophisticated level, many still seek to use our religious heritage in support of the development and sustenance of democratic government and society. Thus it is said that democracy requires a civil religion—that is, a sense of transcendence that can act as a critical principle against the pretensions of state power as well as a resource to support the development of more nearly just institutions. Such a "civil religion," however, cannot be made up of any particularistic religious beliefs, since that would offend the necessity of religious tolerance. As a result all our more particularistic beliefs must be socially defined as "private" and thus admitting of no social role. This situation creates a special irony, since the culture and political order that the "civil religion" is asked to underwrite requires a disavowal of the public role of religious conviction—thus supporting the assumption that our religious opinions are just that, opinions.[13]

There is no more powerful indication of religion's superfluity in our culture than Christianity's acceptance of itself as one "religion" among others. It reveals an assumption of the priority of so-called "faith" over particular convictions of the Christian faith, e. g., the nature of God, the significance of Jesus, the eschatological fate of the world.[14] As a result, Christianity, both in practice and in its sophisticated theological expression, is reduced to an interpretation of humanity's need for meaning or some other provocative anthropological claim. I do not mean to deny that every theology involves anthropological claims, yet theology today has become particularly adept at beginning and ending there. More than before we substantiate Feuerbach's claim that religion is but the projection of mankind's hopes written large.

Those concerned with the ethical significance of Christian convictions are particularly prone to this kind of anthropologizing of Christian theology. Acting on a suspicion that what is left of Christianity is its ethical component, they abstract the ethical from the religious in an effort to make Christianity relevant. Though such a strategy often appears theologically and ethically radical, it usually results in a restatement of the prevailing humanism in the name of religion.

Behind this form of modern religious apologetics lies the assumption that religion can have no hold on us unless it functions to underwrite our desires and ensure our ultimate happiness. There is, of course, a proper sense in which this is true, since the conviction that the kingdom wrought in Christ is meant to fulfill our deepest and strongest desires is at the heart of Christianity. Insofar as we are God's creatures his redemption is certainly the fulfillment of the

natural. But unfortunately we quickly trivialize this insight by seeking fulfillment without recognizing that in order to know and worship God rightly we must have our desires transformed. They must be transformed—we must be trained to desire rightly—because, bent by sin, we have little sense of what it is that we should rightly want.

A no less serious result of this kind of reductionistic theology is the loss of a clear claim to the truth of Christian convictions. For there is no stronger indication of the modern religious situation than that we no longer know how or what it would mean to claim religious convictions as true. The only choice is between "fideism"—that is, that religious convictions must be held as faith since they are not capable of evidential challenge—or capitulation.[15] We cannot take the time to discover all the reasons for this; however, one central reason is surely the fact that we accord to science the primary status for determining the nature of truth. Subjected to science's verification criteria, religion appears to be merely opinion. While science cannot establish the truth of certan hypotheses, it at least has tests for falsity. But we are by no means sure how we can scientifically test the conviction that God has called a people into the world to testify to the power of the kingdom.

Some make a virtue of this difference by suggesting that religion is different than science and technology and thus does not affect our understanding of the scientific aspect of our world. But according to this account, science still needs religion to show it which human values to serve. The trouble with this strategy is that it makes the truth value of religion merely functional.

Another challenge to questions of religious truth comes from within religion itself. We have become increasingly aware of the historically contingent starting point of the Christian faith. Neither do we know the full historical "truth" about Jesus, nor does there seem any way historically to get to that truth. Thus Gotthold Lessing's question continues to haunt us as we wonder how it is possible to stake our life on a historically contingent starting point.[16] We feel we should risk our lives and the lives of others only on that which is absolutely certain. Historical "truth" simply seems too fragile to build our life upon.

And so the circle continues. The less sure we are of the truth of our religious convictions, the more we consider them immune from public scrutiny. But in the process we lose what seems essential to their being true, namely that we be willing to commend them to others. For the necessity of witness is not accidental to Christian convictions; it is at the heart of the Christian life. Those convictions cannot be learned except as they are attested to and exemplified by others. The essential Christian witness is neither to personal experience, nor to what Christianity means to "me," but to the truth that this world is the creation of a good God who is known through the people of Israel and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Without such a witness we only abandon the world to the violence derived from the lies that devour our lives. There is, therefore, an inherent relation between truthfulness and peacefulness because peace comes only as we are transformed by a truth that gives us the confidence to rely on nothing else than its witness. A "truth" that must use violence to secure its existence cannot be truth. Rather the truth that moves the sun and the stars is that which is so sure in its power that it refuses to compel compliance or agreement by force. Rather it relies on the slow, hard, and seemingly unrewarding work of witness, a witness which it trusts to prevail even in a fragmented and violent world.

4. THE TRUTHFULNESS OF CHRISTIAN CONVICTIONS

The modern moral and religious situation I have reviewed makes the task of Christian ethics precarious at best. The temptations and pitfalls are innumerable. At a time when we are no longer sure our religious beliefs are true, perhaps the most destructive of these temptations is to salvage some significance for religion by claiming it can hold back the moral anarchy that threatens us. Calling on religion to supply those absolute values we think necessary to support the leaking breakwater of our civilization, we train "religious ethicists" to teach courses in business ethics, medical ethics, and value clarification.

But this strategy avoids the most essential question. We should not want to know if religious convictions are functional; we should want to know if they are true. Furthermore such an approach seems to imply that Christian ethics can create a morality when one is missing. Yet this is futile insofar as ethics depends upon vital communities sufficient to produce well-lived lives. If such lives do not exist, then no amount of reflection can do anything to make our ethics fecund.

We cannot assume that ethical reflection will free us from the ambiguity of living among the fragments. In fact, honest and careful ethical reflection will most likely expose more subtle difficulties for

the moral actor in a fragmented world. The task of Christian ethics is not to relieve us of the ambiguity but to help us understand rightly what it means to live in the world we do—that is, to live truthfully in a world without certainty.

Finally, the absolutist strategy misconstrues the meaning and the task of Christian ethics. The task of Christian ethics is to help us see how our convictions *are* in themselves a morality. We do not first believe certain things about God, Jesus, and the church, and subsequently derive ethical implications from these beliefs. Rather our convictions embody our morality; our beliefs are our actions. We Christians ought not to search for the "behavioral implications" of our beliefs. Our moral life is not comprised of beliefs plus decisions; our moral life is the process in which our convictions form our character to be truthful.

To do justice to the way Christian convictions work, we must first develop the conceptual tools to inquire into how those convictions shape the moral life. I hope to do just this in my next chapter, with attention to narrative, vision, and character. I realize that before I try to say what specific convictions Christian ethics entail, I must first give an account of the aspects of our moral experience with which those convictions converge. This is not to say that Christian convictions ever stand apart from the moral life—we have already seen that there is no abstract account of ethics—but in our attempt to unfold the relationship we must move from one to the other. In any case, what must not be abandoned is the inherently practical nature of Christian convictions. Learning how Christian convictions are a morality is crucial for understanding what it means to claim those convictions are true. Too often religious belief is presented as a primitive mythical worldview, or metaphysics, that cannot be considered true in any verifiable sense. It is assumed that religious language describes the world only indirectly, metaphorically, or poetically.

In this book I contend that Christian convictions do not poetically soothe the anxieties of the contemporary self. Rather, they transform the self to true faith by creating a community that lives faithful to the one true God of the universe. When self and nature are thus put in right relation we perceive the truth of our existence. But because truth is unattainable without a corresponding transformation of self, "ethics," as the investigation of that transformation, does not follow after a prior systematic presentation of the Christian faith, but is *at the beginning* of Christian theological reflection.

2. A Qualified Ethic: The Narrative Character of Christian Ethics

1. THE ABSTRACTNESS OF AN UNQUALIFIED ETHIC

The first chapter suggested that there is no such thing as universal "ethics" but that every ethic requires a qualifier. Such a suggestion is deeply at odds with the main direction of modern ethical theory, which seeks a foundation for morality that will free moral judgments from their dependence on historically contingent communities. I have already identified problems in this project; here I will explore them further, focusing primarily on that project's neglect of essential aspects of our moral experience such as narrative and virtue. More importantly, I will begin to show why Christian ethics must insist on the significance of the qualifier "Christian." In contrast to the universalizing tendency, I will argue that Christian ethics reflects a particular people's history, the appropriation of which requires the recognition that we are sinners.

Modern ethical theory has underwritten, often in quite different ways, what Bernard Williams has characterized as the "midair" stance.[1] Desiring to avoid any arbitrary normative recommendation, ethicists have sought to formulate a "metaethics"—that is, a formal account of the nature and basis of moral concepts—which in itself entails no single proscriptive alternative. Such a framework is meant to undergird the nonarbitrary aspects of our actual moralities. Though sometimes criticized as vacuous, metaethical reflection has hoped to defeat any vicious subjectivism or relativism by showing that there exists a high ground which insures moral objectivity and which thus guarantees the constant capacity to "step back" from particular judgments and regard them from anyone's point of view.

However, this supposed objectivity is actually the distorted image of subjectivism. It schools us to assume we can, and perhaps always should, respond to any purported immoral action with "Who am I to say that is wrong?" As Bernard Williams points out, both the

subjectivist and nonsubjectivist have no adequate justification for a response insofar as it is itself a moral thought. In mid air "it tries to stand outside all moral positions (including the thinker's own) and yet still be a moral thought. But this midair place, by subjectivism itself, is not a place in which anyone can have a moral thought" because it forces us to assume a stance external to our commitments and cares, which are the lifeblood of any morality.[2]

Such an account of objectivity has the peculiar effect of alienating the moral agent from his or her projects. It requires one always to look upon one's own projects as if they were anyone's. But by constantly "stepping back" from our projects and evaluating them from an "objective" point of view, we rob the moral life of those characteristics from which it derives its rationale—namely, the close identification of what we ought to do with what we want to be as a concrete moral agent. But we do not, nor should we, live as if we are eternally critics toward ourselves and others. Rather we must and should form our lives by our desires, wants, and cares.

Williams does not think those who wish to assume a "midair" stance are properly able to argue the question "Why should I be moral?" Ethics does not begin (nor is it required to begin) with an attempt to answer that question. A disciplined set of analytic skills, ethics begins with the recognition that we are *already* in the moral adventure. We are able to proceed, not because we share a common rationality, but because we find ourselves to be people who care about something.[3] That we care is enough to ensure intelligible conversation with anyone who thinks he or she can opt out of moral involvement.

From such a perspective the consistent amoralist does not make a rational mistake but a human mistake. As Williams points out, however, it is very difficult for the amoralist to be consistent.

> If he [the amoralist] objects (as he no doubt will) to other people treating him as he treats them, this will be perfectly consistent so long as his objecting consists just in such things as his not liking it and fighting back. What he cannot consistently do is *resent* it or disapprove of it, for these are attitudes within the moral system. . . .
>
> This illustrates, as do many of his activities, the obvious fact that this man is a parasite on the moral system, and he and his satisfactions could not exist as they do unless others operated differently. For, in general, there can be no society without some moral rules, and he needs society; also he takes more particular advantage of moral institutions like promising and of moral dispositions of people around him.[4]

Williams's argument, while powerful, weakens with his reference to "the moral system." There is not one "moral system," but many moral systems. Moreover it is not obvious that such systems are primarily constituted by "moral rules." Indeed, with his reference to rules, Williams gives weight to the assumption that the primary focus of moral reflection should be on principles, rules, and/or promises. Emphasis on principle and rule is part of the metaethical scheme insofar as it is hoped that such rules will provide an objective, rational foundation for morality.

1.1 *Rules and Obligations*

Of course it can be pointed out that there is nothing odd about the emphasis on the centrality of rules for morality. Most moralities are characterized by a stress on the importance of rules, even though they may disagree about content or the scale of priority. For example, consider the process of moral education which begins by schooling the young in rules so that they may later learn to nuance and qualify them.

It is certainly not my intention to deny the significance of rules. Yet I wish to distinguish between the general existence of rules in a society and the marked emphasis upon them in modern morality and theory. Not all societies emphasize rules to the extent ours does. Aristotle seldom mentions them; and although lawlike pronouncements have a prominent place in the Scriptures, they are certainly never treated as an end in themselves or as capable of independent justification. In order to properly understand the significance of rules for our conduct, I must provide a brief analysis of the many kinds and functions of rules.

Our relatively recent fascination with rules draws on the promise they seem to hold for the impersonal justification of our moral behavior. Rules give the appearance of ensuring the objectivity we otherwise find lacking in our individual decisions and judgments. Accordingly, moral reasoning attempts to justify any particular judgment by appeal to a more universal rule or principle to which any rational creature must adhere. Thus morality is thought to acquire the unbiased quality associated, mistakenly perhaps, with legal process and therefore to secure the objectivity necessary for moral agreement.

Such a picture of the moral life fails to do justice to the variety

of rules and their function in our actual morality. While rules are present in many activities, their features in one area may be lacking in another. Thus rules play a different role in games than in scientific investigation and different yet in etiquette, law, and religion. Moreover the force of some rules is quite different from others. Some rules restrict, others regulate, and still others grant permission. We view them differently if enacted by a legislative body or by custom (which changes); still others seem to be so inherent in everyday practices we never think of them as rules. Further, their scope differs. Some, we believe, apply to all (these are not necessarily the most general), while others apply only to those performing certain functions.[5]

Plato and Aristotle considered rules to be secondary to the virtues, which served to direct us to their true end, the human good. In our own day, however, questions concerning our ultimate end ("telos"), or what characterizes "the good life" have been dismissed because they are not subject to rational argument.[6] Rules in our society, therefore, are not derived from some fundamental conception of the human good. They are the basis of morality only insofar as they represent a consensus about what is necessary to ensure societal peace and survival.

As a result of the loss of a telos that would make certain rules intelligible it has seemed we can only choose between two quite different accounts of moral rules—those of Kant and the utilitarians. For Kant, rules are those requirements of action which every rational creature, regardless of his or her aims, must observe. In contrast, John Stuart Mill and the utilitarians argue that moral rules are but generalizations of our experience of what best serves to promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number. In spite of the significant differences between these positions, they share the common assumption that ethics, first and foremost, should embody an adequate theory of moral obligation derived from, or involving in a fundamental manner, rules and principles.[7] They differ only about what single principle best supports and orders our rule-determined obligations.

It has thus seemed to many philosophers that the fundamental task of ethics, given the confusion of our age, is to develop a theory sufficient to account for our primary moral obligations. A theory is needed, it seems, because it is assumed that convention, in and of itself, cannot be sufficient to determine which of our moral principles and rules are objective and nonarbitrary. The primary debate in ethics has thus hinged on whether "teleological" or "deontological" theories best account for our moral experience. Though each theory has many variations, generally the former maintains that the criteria

of what is morally right or wrong is determined by consequences—that is, what produces the best balance of good over evil; the latter, on the other hand, maintains that the rightness or wrongness of certain actions are determined by the act itself—that is, the act is good or bad insofar as it is based on our duty. Thus the teleologists generally feel we ought to keep our promises because by doing so more good than evil obtains. The deontologists maintain we ought to keep our promises because by their very nature promises are meant to be kept. Teleological accounts tend to give a more secondary status to rules, therefore, than deontological theories.

Though these two positions are often depicted as antithetical, in fact they share some fundamental assumptions. Each assumes that moral philosophy gains its primary rationale from acknowledgment of some moral quandary, when, for example, there is a conflict between rules. Little attention is paid, therefore, to how or why a "situation" came to be described as a "moral" problem in the first place. Ethics, it seems, begins with questions such as "Should I or should I not have an abortion?" But then no account is given for why and how we have come to describe a certain set of circumstances as abortion, or adultery, or murder, and so on.

The concentration on "obligations" and "rules" also has the effect of distorting our moral psychology by separating our actions from our agency. Since "obligations" must be determined from the observer's standpoint, actions, it is assumed, can be characterized independently of agents, and their intentions; thus it appears that the agent's intentions are inconsequential in the moral description and evaluation of the action. To argue against this position is not to deny that communities can and do come to agree on certain prevailing descriptions of situations that school us in how we should understand our own behavior as well as that of others. At times particular agents may claim that such a description is insufficient to account for the complexity of their own situation. Such situations are but reminders of the significance of the agent's intentions for all action descriptions. Communities teach us what kind of intentions are appropriate if we are to be the kind of person appropriate to living among these people. Thus questions of what we ought to be are necessary background for questions of what we ought to do. The concentration on obligations and rules as morally primary ignores the fact that action descriptions gain their intelligibility from the role they play in a community's history and therefore for individuals in that community. When "acts" are abstracted from that history, the moral self cannot help but appear as an unconnected series of actions lacking continuity and unity.

Perhaps it is because we sense so deeply the need for unity, for integrity, that we take for granted one of the other assumptions shared by deontological and teleological theories. Each assumes that order and coherence for morality as an institution, and thus for the individual, can only be secured by establishing a single fundamental principle as a criterion from which the various rules and obligations are derived and ranked. Utilitarianism perhaps presents the clearest example of this because of the simplicity of the formula "the greatest good for the greatest number," but deontological systems often seek a similar overriding principle. Such a principle, even if it is highly formal, seems necessary since both theories assume that any apparent moral conflict must ultimately be resolved in the light of some more general principle. As a result neither theory can countenance the idea of moral tragedy—that is, the possibility of irresolvable moral conflict.

Yet we live in a world of such conflicts and we cannot negotiate that world unless we are trained with virtues sufficient to sustain us in that endeavor. But the attempt to develop an unqualified ethic, with the attending stress on rules and obligations, has resulted in a failure to stress exactly those virtues we need to live in such a world. From the perspective of an unqualified ethic it is assumed that only when we can answer the question "What ought we to do?" can we answer "What ought we to be?" While I have no wish to argue that an "ethics of virtue" must be prior to an "ethics of obligation,"[8] it is nonetheless the case that concentration on the latter has left us with too few resources to face the moral dangers of a violent world. In particular, we have failed to see that the virtues needed can only be displayed by drawing on a particular community's account of the good, and that account necessarily takes the form of a narrative.

Moreover in our concern to develop an unqualified ethic in the hope of securing peace between people of diverse beliefs and histories, we have overlooked the most important contribution that Christian convictions make for the moral life. For the accounts of an unqualified ethic make irrelevant for morality the essential Christian convictions about the nature of God and God's care of us through his calling of Israel and the life of Jesus. Our "beliefs" about such matters are relegated to some separate "religious aspects" of our lives, where they make little difference to our moral existence.

1.2 The Travail of Christian Ethics as an Unqualified Ethic

As we shall see in chapter 4, some Christian ethicists have characteristically claimed a universality very similar to that of recent

philosophical ethics. They tend to presume that we have a theological stake in an adequate philosophical defense of an unqualified ethic. Yet, oddly enough, this assumption makes positive theological convictions ethically secondary. For if we know what we ought to do on grounds separate from our religious beliefs, then what are we to make morally of those theological convictions? Usually these ethicists relegate such convictions to a "higher morality" or to the "motivational" aspects of the moral life. Both alternatives entail a moral psychology which artificially severs agents and their actions; what we "ought to do" is abstracted from the question of who we are.

No less distorting for Christian ethics is the assumption that we must choose between teleological and deontological theories of obligation.[9] Of course, there are aspects of the Christian tradition that seem to fit into either theory. Those inclined toward the deontological option tend to emphasize God's commanding presence or the necessity of covenant fidelity.[10] Those more attracted to the teleological alternative often stress love as the overriding aspect of Christian ethics.[11] There is no reason to deny that the biblical record and Christian tradition manifest deontological and teleological tendencies, but it is mistaken to assume that Christian ethics requires us to choose either alternative or some combination of the two. For when we do so we inevitably tend to abstract the Christian "ethic" from its rationale by subordinating theological convictions to prior formal patterns of ethical argument.

For example, many who are convinced that ethics is primarily a matter of rules, assume that Christian ethics must have its primary source in the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount. While both are extremely significant for Christian ethical thinking, they are unintelligible when treated as sets of rules justifiable in themselves. The Decalogue is part of the covenant of God with Israel. Divorced from that covenant it makes no sense. God does indeed command obedience, but our God is the God who "brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Deut. 5:6). Because of this action the demand "You shall have no other god before me" can be made. So too, the commands not to kill, not to commit adultery, and not to steal necessarily make sense only within the particularity of the story of God's dealing with Israel.[12] For this reason each time we receive God's commands we are reminded that:

> We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh

> and all his household, before our eyes; and he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land which he swore to give to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as at this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us. (Deut. 6:21–25)

It is no wonder that this aspect of biblical morality is ignored by those who emphasize an ethic of obligation in the interest of developing an ahistorical ethic. For the Bible is fundamentally a story of a people's journey with their God. A "biblical ethic" will necessarily be one that portrays life as growth and development. In contrast, an emphasis on rule-determined obligations abstracted from this story makes our existence appear to be only "one damn thing after another."

We should not be surprised, then, if the kind of convictions Christians hold are better exhibited by an analysis of the virtues. As MacIntyre has suggested, to develop a

> stance on the virtues will be to adopt a stance on the narrative character of life. Why this might be so is easy to understand. If a human life is understood as a progress through harms and dangers, moral and physical, which someone may encounter and overcome in better and worse ways and with a greater or lesser measure of success, the virtues will find their place as those qualities the possession and exercise of which generally tend to success in this enterprise and the vices likewise as qualities which likewise tend to failure.[13]

Jews and Christians understand themselves to be in such an adventure, a journey capable of being sustained by the moral resources God has given them. The story of this people on a journey and the place of the virtues are inherently interwoven. I shall try to make more clear why and how this is the case.

2. THE NARRATIVE CHARACTER OF CHRISTIAN CONVICTIONS

The nature of Christian ethics is determined by the fact that Christian convictions take the form of a story, or perhaps better, a set of stories that constitutes a tradition, which in turn creates and forms a community. Christian ethics does not begin by emphasizing rules

or principles, but by calling our attention to a narrative that tells of God's dealing with creation. To be sure, it is a complex story with many different subplots and digressions, but it is crucial for us at this point in the book to see that it is not accidentally a narrative.

Too often we assume the narrative character of Christian convictions is incidental to those convictions. Both believer and unbeliever are under the impression that narrative is a relatively unimportant moral category. Specifically, we tend to think of "stories" as illustrations of some deeper truth that we can and should learn to articulate in a non-narrative mode. Thus, when we are children we make do with stories, but when we grow up we want the literal truth—that is, the truth that can be substantiated apart from the story. Augustus Compte even suggested that such a development corresponds to the history of the race, noting that we have now reached the age of science, in which we no longer have the need for stories (myths). Ironically, Compte failed to notice that he told a story to show we have now reached the age in which we no longer require stories!

Moreover we naturally associate stories and narratives with fiction. Stories create a fantasy world that releases us from the burden of having to deal with the real world. The stories of God in Scripture, it is thought, are but attempts to say "mythically" or "symbolically" what might be said directly, but because of the nature of the object being described can only be reached through "poetic" form. Such stories of God, like most stories, are perhaps important to comfort us, but one is mistaken to ask if they are true.

I think this is a dire misreading of the narrative character of Christian convictions. My contention is that the narrative mode is neither incidental nor accidental to Christian belief. There is no more fundamental way to talk of God than in a story.[14] The fact that we come to know God through the recounting of the story of Israel and the life of Jesus is decisive for our truthful understanding of the kind of God we worship as well as the world in which we exist. Put directly, the narrative character of our knowledge of God, the self, and the world is a reality-making claim that the world and our existence in it are God's creations; our lives, and indeed, the existence of the universe are but contingent realities.

Some may think that emphasis on narrative as the primary grammar of Christian belief is a theological mistake. Surely we can talk about God in a more fundamental manner than through stories e.g., through doctrine. Doctrinally we affirm that God is our creator and/or redeemer, or that God's essential nature is that of a trinitarian relationship. But such emphasis ignores the fact that such "doctrines"

are themselves a story, or perhaps better, the outline of the story.[15] Claims such as "God is creator" are simply shorthand ways of reminding us that we believe we are participants in a much more elaborate story, of which God is the author. Doctrines, therefore, are not the upshot of the stories; they are not the meaning or heart of the stories. Rather they are tools (sometimes even misleading tools), meant to help us tell the story better. Because the Christian story is an enacted story, liturgy is probably a much more important resource than are doctrines or creeds for helping us to hear, tell, and live the story of God.

Narrative is not secondary for our knowledge of God; there is no "point" that can be separated from the story. The narratives through which we learn of God *are* the point. Stories are not substitute explanations we can someday hope to supplant with more straightforward accounts. Precisely to the contrary, narratives are necessary to our understanding of those aspects of our existence which admit of no further explanation—i.e., God, the world, and the self.

Actually it is not incidental that knowledge of God, the world, and the self seem to have similar epistemological status. On analysis each appears a strange "object," since it seems that our knowledge of one is dependent on the other. To "know" God requires a rethinking of what and how we know the self and the world. To know one's self, one cannot but make claims about the kind of world in which selves are able to exist. Neither God, the world, nor the self are properly known as separate entities but are in a relation requiring concrete display. That display takes the form of a narrative in which we discover that the only way to "know" God, the world, or the self is through their history.

Narrative plays a larger part in our lives than we often imagine. For example, we frequently introduce ourselves through narrative. To be sure, any story with which we identify "ourselves" can be and should be constantly tested by the history we have lived. But the telling of the narrative is itself a reinterpretation of the history. We see that because the self is historically formed we require a narrative to speak about it if we are to speak at all. One should not think of oneself as exemplifying or being some individual instance of a self, but one understands in what his or her selfhood consists only insofar as he or she learns to tell that particular story.

Just as narrative is a crucial category for the knowledge of the self, so it is for our knowledge of God. "God," we must remember, is a common name, to which we can ascribe attributions only as we learn of God through a history. This, of course, follows from the

basic theological claim that knowledge of God and knowledge of the self are interdependent. But once the formal nature of this claim is fleshed out in terms of narrative, we see its implications for the Christian life. Not only is knowledge of self tied to knowledge of God, but we know ourselves truthfully only when we know ourselves in relation to God. We know who we are only when we can place our selves—locate our stories—within God's story.

This is the basis for the extraordinary Christian claim that we participate morally in God's life. For our God is a God who wills to include us within his life. This is what we mean when we say, in shorthand as it were, that God is a God of grace. Such shorthand can be dangerous if it is mistaken for the suggestion that our relationship with God has an immediacy that makes the journey of the self with God irrelevant. Grace is not an eternal moment above history rendering history irrelevant; rather it is God's choice to be a Lord whose kingdom is furthered by our concrete obedience through which we acquire a history befitting our nature as God's creatures.

To learn to be God's creatures means we must learn to recognize that our existence and the existence of the universe itself is a gift. It is a gift that God wills to have our lives contribute to the eschatological purposes for creation. As creatures we cannot hope to return to God a gift of such magnitude. But we can respond with a willingness to receive. To learn to be God's creature, to accept the gift, is to learn to be at home in God's world. Just as we seek to make a guest feel "at home" in our home, so God seeks to have us feel "at home" by providing us with the opportunity to appropriate the gift in the terms it was given—that is, gratuitously.[16]

The impossibility of reciprocity for God's gift is not without analogies in our common experience. We cannot return our parent's love except as we receive it and love others similarly. Also each of us are recipients of favors strewn through our lives. Some are given anonymously; others we do not even notice. As Kenneth Schmitz notes, "I cannot make use of the simplest technique which did not have to be discovered and brought to excellence by nameless craftsmen; so that most of my benefactors remain unknown to me. Some of us can name a few generations of our ancestors, but before long the chain of those who have helped to give us life fades away into obscurity."[17] Indeed, to gratefully inherit a tradition is but to recognize and honor the chain of actual benefactors who have sustained the skills and stories that provide us with the means to know and live our lives as God's creatures.

Christians and Jews are traditioned people who believe that they

have been invited to share a particular history that reflects the God who has brought us into being. To know our creator, therefore, we are required to learn through God's particular dealings with Israel and Jesus, and through God's continuing faithfulness to the Jews and the ingathering of a people to the church. Such knowledge requires constant appropriation, constant willingness to accept the gift of God's good creation. As Christians we maintain that such appropriation is accomplished in and through our faithfulness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We believe that by learning to be his disciples we will learn to find our life—our story—in God's story. In the process we find our life in relation to other lives; we discover that as Christians our lives are intelligible only as we acknowledge indebtedness to the people of Israel, both in the past and in their continued presence.

To sum up, the emphasis on narrative as theologically central for an explication of Christian existence reminds us of at least three crucial claims.[18] First, narrative formally displays our existence and that of the world as creatures—as *contingent* beings. Narrative is required precisely because the world and events in the world do not exist by necessity. Any attempt to depict our world and ourselves nonnarratively is doomed to failure insofar as it denies our contingent nature. Correlatively, narrative is epistemically fundamental for our knowledge of God and ourselves, since we come to know ourselves only in God's life.

Second, narrative is the characteristic form of our awareness of ourselves as *historical* beings who must give an account of the purposive relation between temporally discrete realities. Indeed, the ability to provide such an account, to sustain its growth in a living tradition, is the central criterion for identifying a group of people as a community. Community joins us with others to further the growth of a tradition whose manifold storylines are meant to help individuals identify and navigate the path to the good. The self is subordinate to the community rather than vice versa, for we discover the self through a community's narrated tradition.

From this it can be understood why the stress on narrative is a correlative to the claim that every ethic requires a qualifier. No ethic can be freed from its narrative, and thus communal, context. To the extent that practical reason seeks to avoid its inherent historical character, it relinquishes any power to enable us to order our lives in accordance with our true ends. We thus become alienated from ourselves; we lose the ability to locate the history of which we are a part.

Third, God has revealed himself narratively in the history of

Israel and in the life of Jesus. While much of Scripture does not take narrative literary form, it is perhaps not incidental that the Gospels do.[19] In any case, Scripture as a whole tells the story of the covenant with Israel, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the ongoing history of the church as the recapitulation of that life. This empirical observation is not merely an interesting one; this notion of the essential nature of *narrative as the form of God's salvation* is why we rightly attribute to Scripture the truth necessary for our salvation.[20]

Of course, we cannot be brought to understanding without training, for we resist at least the part of the narrative which describes us as sinful creatures. We can only know God by having our lives transformed through initiation into the kingdom. Such a transformation requires that we see the world as it is, not as we want it to be—that is, as sinful and ourselves as sinners. Thus the story requires transformation as it challenges the presumption of our righteousness and teaches us why we so badly need to be reborn through the baptism offered by this new community.

2.1 Narrative as a Reality-making Claim

As I have tried to show, emphasis on narrative is not an attempt to beg the question of the truthfulness of Christian convictions by turning them into a provocative account of human existence. On the contrary, attention to the narrative character of God's activity and our life reveals the nature of reality. Since our existence is historically determined, we should not be surprised to discover that our moralities are historical; they require a qualifier. We are unable to stand outside our histories in midair, as it were; we are destined to discover ourselves only within God's history, for God is our beginning and our end.

Christian ethics, therefore, is not first of all concerned with "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not." Its first task is to help us rightly envision the world. Christian ethics is specifically formed by a very definite story with determinative content. If we somehow discover the world is not as that story suggests, then we have good grounds for not believing in, or more accurately, not worshipping the God revealed in the life, cross, and resurrection of Jesus. In other words, the enterprise of Christian ethics primarily helps us to see. We can only act within the world we can envision, and we can envision the world rightly only as we are trained to see. We do not come to see merely by looking, but must develop disciplined skills through initiation into that community that attempts to live faithful to the story

of God. Furthermore, we cannot see the world rightly unless we are changed, for as sinners we do not desire to see truthfully. Therefore Christian ethics must assert that by learning to be faithful disciples, we are more able to see the world as it is, namely God's creation.

But Christians must learn that the world, in spite of God's good creation, is also in fundamental rebellion. Such rebellion includes humanity, but is not limited to it. The revolt reaches to every aspect of our existence, since through humanity's sin all of creation has been thrown out of joint. Any suggestion that the world is sinful cannot be limited to "moralistic" claims about our petty crimes. The Christian story trains us to see that in most of our life we act as if this is not God's world and therein lies our fundamental sin. Moreover, when we so act, we find that our actions have far-reaching consequences, since in effect we distort our own and the world's nature. Therefore sin implies not just a claim about human behavior but a claim about the way things are.

That our existence is sinful adds new perspective to the claim that we must be transformed if we are to see the world truthfully. The new vision afforded us in such a transformation includes the appropriation of a truthful language. If we can see, so we can speak. That does not mean that we do not observe things we sometimes do not know how to describe, but that our *learning* to see them and our ability to interpret and share our vision with others depends on having a language appropriate to what we have seen.

Christian convictions constitute a narrative, a language, that requires a transformation of the self if we are to see, as well as be, truthful. The gospel commands us to submit to a vigorous and continuing discipleship if we are to recognize our status as subjects and properly understand the requirements for participation in the kingdom. Furthermore, to be a Christian is not principally to obey certain commandments or rules, but to learn to grow into the story of Jesus as the form of God's kingdom. We express that by saying we must learn to be disciples; only as such can we understand why at the center of creation is a cross and resurrection.

2.2 On Learning to Be a Sinner

Our lesson is most disconcerting when the narrative asks us to understand ourselves not only as friends of the crucified, but as the crucifiers. We must be trained to see ourselves as sinners, for it is not self-evident. Indeed, our sin is so fundamental that we must be taught to recognize it; we cannot perceive its radical nature so long

as we remain formed by it. Sin is not some universal tendency of humankind to be inhumane or immoral, though sin may involve inhumanity and immorality. We are not sinful because we participate in some general human condition, but because we deceive ourselves about the nature of reality and so would crucify the very one who calls us to God's kingdom.

We only learn what our sin is as we discover our true identity through locating the self in God's life as revealed to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Only when we recognize ourselves as sinners of this kind can we receive the redemption that comes with assurance that because we have beheld God's glory in the cross of Jesus, our perception of ourselves as sinners will not destroy us.

The story Christians tell of God exposes the unwelcome fact that I am a sinner. For without such a narrative the fact and nature of my sin cannot help but remain hidden in self-deception. Only a narrative that helps me place myself as a creature of a gracious God can provide the skills to help me locate my sin as fundamentally infidelity and rebellion. As a creature I have been created for loyalty—loyalty to the truth, to the love that moves the sun and the stars and yet is found on a cross—but I find myself serving any powers but the true one in the hopes of being my own lord. The ironic result is that by seeking to possess I become possessed.

Christian tradition has at various times and places characterized this fundamental sin in quite different ways. Our basic sin has been said to be pride, self-love, infidelity, lust, sloth, all of which have some claim to the doubtful honor of being the father of all sins. I doubt, however, whether there is any one term sufficient to suggest the complex nature of our sin. That is exactly why we see we need the set of stories we find in Scripture and displayed by the church to recognize our sin. As narrative-determined creatures we must learn to locate our lives in God's life if we are to have the means to face, as well as do something about, our infidelity and rebellion against our true creator.

Just to the extent I refuse to be faithful to God's way, to live as part of God's life, my life assumes the character of rebellion. Our sin is not merely an error in overestimating our capacities. Rather it is the active and willful attempt to overreach our powers. It is the attempt to live *sui generis*, to live as if we are or can be the authors of our own stories. Our sin is, thus, a challenge to God's authorship and a denial that we are characters in the drama of the kingdom.

No one has better characterized this rebellion than Reinhold

Niebuhr. Niebuhr saw that sin results from our inability to live as creatures—as contingent. Our unwillingness to face our contingency breeds insecurity which we seek to overcome by a

> will-to-power which overreaches the limits of human creatureliness. Man is ignorant and involved in the limitations of a finite mind; but he pretends that he is not limited. He assumes that he can gradually transcend finite limitations until his mind becomes identical with universal mind. All of his intellectual and cultural pursuits, therefore, become infected with the sin of pride. Man's pride and will-to-power disturb the harmony of creation. The Bible defines sin in both religious and moral terms. The religious dimension of sin is man's rebellion against God, his effort to usurp the place of God. The moral and social dimension of sin is injustice. The ego which falsely makes itself the centre of existence in its pride and will-to-power inevitably subordinates other life to its will and thus does injustice to other life.
>
> Sometimes man seeks to solve the problem of the contradiction of finiteness and freedom, not by seeking to hide his finiteness and comprehending the world into himself, but by seeking to hide his freedom and by losing himself in some aspect of the world's vitalities. In that case his sin may be defined as sensuality rather than pride. Sensuality is never the mere expression of natural impulse in man. It always betrays some aspect of his abortive effort to solve the problem of finiteness and freedom. Human passions are always characterized by unlimited and demonic potencies of which animal life is innocent.[21]

While this brief quotation cannot do justice to the intricacy of Niebuhr's extraordinary analysis of the relation between pride and sensuality, it is sufficient to suggest that both result in distortion of our existence. Moreover, we live a lie when we tell a false and deceitful story about ourselves and others. Indeed, we conspire deceitfully to make our lies more powerful by structuring them so as to command consensus. The resulting "objectivity" of the majority makes our deception all the more destructive because it allows us to assume that those who challenge our consensus are not only wrong but immoral. It is not far, then, to the use of force in defense of what we think to be the truth, so our sin becomes the root and branch of violence.

If this is not a comprehensive account of sin, it is at least enough

to make the point that seeing the world as sinful already includes a moral claim about reality, a claim about how the self should be situated in the world to understand properly the nature of its existence. Ethics, as we have said, is not primarily about rules and principles, rather it is about how the self must be transformed to see the world truthfully. For Christians, such seeing develops through schooling in a narrative which teaches us how to use the language of sin not only about others but about ourselves.

Of course, Christians are not just asked to see themselves as sinners. We are to do something about our sin. We are called to be disciples and even to count ourselves among the righteous. Our call is not a general admonition to be good, but a concrete and definite call to take up the way of life made possible by God's redemptive action for us in the cross. To be redeemed, as I suggested above, is nothing less than to learn to place ourselves in God's history, to be part of God's people. To locate ourselves within that history and people does not mean we must have some special experience of personal salvation. Redemption, rather, is a change in which we accept the invitation to become part of God's kingdom, a kingdom through which we acquire a character befitting one who has heard God's call. Now an intense personal experience may be important for many, but such experiences cannot in themselves be substitutes for learning to find the significance of our lives only in God's ongoing journey with creation.

We Christians locate our lives in relation to the history of a people. The gospel is not a "truth" or philosophical theory that can be appropriated by an individual in the hope of giving some meaning to his or her life. On the contrary, we find ourselves part of a community with a very particular kind of citizenship. As citizens our self-understanding may change, but this occurs only as we acquire the virtues necessary to sustain a community of peaceable people through history. Likewise, Christian ethics must serve and be formed by the Christian community, a community whose interest lies in the formation of character and whose perduring history provides the continuity we need to act in conformity with that character.

I will say more about the nature and importance of character later. However, in this context it is sufficient to note that Christian ethics is concerned more with who we are than what we do. This is not to suggest that our actions, decisions and choices are unimportant, but rather that the church has a stake in holding together our being and behaving in such a manner that our doing only can be a

reflection of our character. The ongoing history of the church requires persons—characters, if you will—who are capable of living appropriate to God's activity in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

To return to an earlier point, we can now see that the insistence on the qualifier in Christian ethics is not just of formal use but is required by the material content of our convictions. That those convictions take the form of narrative and are displayed ethically by a certain character and/or particular virtues means that Christians cannot pretend to do ethics for anyone. Yet that does not mean Christian convictions are of significance only for the church, for Christians claim that by learning to find our lives within the story of God we learn to see the world truthfully. Christians must attempt to be nothing less than a people whose ethic shines as a beacon to others illumining how life should be lived well.

3. On Being Historic: Agency, Character, and Sin

1. ON BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR CHARACTER

I have repeatedly stressed that there is no neutral starting point from which reflection on the nature of the moral life can begin. Christian ethics, though it claims truthfulness and therefore a certain universality, must begin and end by taking seriously the qualifier "Christian." It cannot avoid beginning with affirmations about God made by a specific community in this time and place. Christians claim such affirmations are true and objective in that they give us the skills rightly to see and act in the world, not as we want it to be, but as it is, namely, as God's good but fallen creation.

But part of what it means to recognize the world as it is, rather than as we want it to be, is to see that all existence, and in particular the human self, is narratively formed. Put differently, it is our nature to be historic beings. Reflection upon the historic, and therefore narrative, character of our existence is an enterprise integral to understanding what it means to claim as true the story Christians tell of God. For we must show that in fact our existence, our nature, corresponds to that story—namely, that we are beings whose life requires narrative display.

In the classical tradition, being human means standing between nature and spirit, between finite limits and infinite possibilities. Our ability to be spirit—that is, to be more than our physical or biological nature—is exactly what is necessary for us to be historic. But it is also the case that we cannot be historic without our physical and biological nature. It is because nature anchors us so resolutely in the concrete that we are actors capable of forming a history.[1]

But what does it mean to be capable of forming a history? It certainly does not mean that we must be able to shape "history" in the grand sense—that is, to make a mark that cannot be ignored by our descendants (although, as we shall see in our discussion of sin, we

often assume that our existence *does* depend on making such a mark). To be historic means, rather, that I must be able to make my past my own. I must learn to say, "I did that." To be historic means that I must be capable of making a succession of "events" a narrative —not just any narrative, but a narrative that is sufficient to give me a sense of self, one which looks not only to my past but points to the future, thereby giving my life a telos and direction.

Yet this emphasis on the historic character of our existence seems to qualify in a decisive way what many assume is essential to our status as free beings. In their view our ability to be historic depends on our first having a freedom that always, at least in principle, guarantees our ability to step back from our engagements and thus is prior to our history. My insistence that our historic nature is prior to our being free seems to rule out the freedom necessary to claim our history as our own.

In this respect it is significant that we associate and often confuse two different senses of being historic. When we say we are "historic" we sometimes mean that we are the "products" of history. That is, we are determined by our biology, by our biographical context, by accidents of birth, by the time and place in which we grew up, and by our own past. We are what we have been made to be. But at other times we mean that we are capable of interpreting and forming our history; that by our own decisions we can take the "givens" of our life and shape them to take on the character of our wishes and desires.

To be historic involves both of these meanings, although it is not easy to see how they can both be true. Just to the extent that we are *products* of history it seems that we are thwarted, or at least severely restricted, in our attempt to *make* history. For example, when we look back over our lives many of the things we thought we were *doing* at the time now appear to have been *done* to us. Retrospectively, our own "decisions" seem more determined than manifestations of our freedom.

Even a momentous decision like deciding to marry, which I assumed to be clearly my decision at the time, appears later to have been an event that has happened to me. At the time of marrying it seemed I was making all kinds of decisions—who, when, how it would affect other plans—but as I look back on these "decisions" I cannot remember any that I can claim were fully "mine." Indeed I suspect that this is true of most "important" decisions, such as what profession we enter and where we settle. We always feel that if we had just known more at the time we would have made a better decision and been less determined. This feeling often leads to what I

regard as the most basic modern deception, namely that to be free means not to be held to those "decisions" I made in the past which were less than fully mine.

One of the assumptions behind this view of freedom is the idea that the greater our awareness, the greater our freedom. Thus, the more I understand my situation, the more I know about the long-term effects of my decision, the more likely it is that I will make a free and non-determined decision that I can gladly claim as "mine" in the future. But it is by no means clear that awareness brings freedom. While it is not a decisive objection to this notion, the very fact that those who are most "aware" are often least capable of action should at least make us think twice about the notion's validity. Joseph Conrad's fiction, for example, is full of people who, because they see too much, are rendered incapable of action, and when they finally act they often do the worst possible thing.[2]

In what follows, I will try to provide an alternative account of freedom without the assumption that freedom depends primarily on the extent of our awareness of what we are doing. Rather, I will argue that freedom is a quality that derives from having a well-formed character. Put in traditional terms, only the truly good person can be the truly free person. In this view, freedom follows from courage and the ability to respond to a truthful story.

2. CHARACTER AND FREEDOM

In order to make these claims intelligible I must try to explain in more detail what I mean by character and why it is the source of our freedom. We usually associate freedom with actions, not character. We assume that the question of whether we are to be held accountable for a certain action depends on whether there were any external or internal impediments preventing us from doing what we wanted or felt we needed to do. We are concerned with impediments because we feel we can be held responsible for our actions only if they are something we have done. Put simply, we assume that only if we have a choice are we free.

Dissenting from such a view, Frithjof Bergmann has argued that to say someone has a choice says little about the whole nexus of constraints operating in a situation, or about the totality of factors that were beyond one's control.[3] To use an extreme example, I may be free to choose to die by starvation or torture, but that is hardly to be free. Of course most cases are more complex. For example, I have a friend

who, after failing to get tenure at a university as a philosopher, decided to go to law school. He is now an extraordinarily able lawyer and is quite happy he "decided" to go to law school; but in another sense he hardly decided at all. He was forced to go to law school because his teaching career was blocked. The fact that he is now happy as a lawyer means that he has learned to make a virtue out of necessity.

If freedom is just making a virtue out of necessity, then Bergmann suggests we must reconsider our assumption that the essence of freedom consists in having a choice. He argues that the essence of freedom consists rather in my ability to identify with my choices as well as my ability to claim my life as my own. But if freedom is more a matter of identity than of choice, then what is this "I" that seems to constitute what I am? Put in the language of character, if freedom is a dependent on our character, then how did I acquire the freedom to acquire character in the first place? Surely I must first be free to develop my character as my own, hence the assumption that my freedom is a correlate of my character seems wildly mistaken.

Aristotle worried over this issue but it is not clear that he was ever able to provide a satisfactory solution. He says,

> if the individual is somehow responsible for his own characteristics, he is similarly responsible for what appears in him (to be good). But if he is not so responsible no one is responsible for his own wrongdoing, but everyone does wrong through ignorance of the proper end, since he believes that his actions will bring him the greatest good. However the aim we take for the end is not determined by the choice of the individual himself, but by a natural gift of vision, as it were, which enables him to make correct judgments and to choose what is truly good: to be well endowed by nature means to have this natural gift.[4]

But what if we do not have such a natural gift? Can we be held responsible for not having it?

2.1 Character and Agency

One way of trying to break this circle is to understand the self fundamentally as agent. Exactly what it means to be a self is to act on the world. To claim that we are agents means that our first-person avowals—"I did that"—can never be reduced to third-person descriptions. In emphasizing agency, moreover, it does not seem necessary

to posit a self free from all determination. Agency encapsulates our sense that we are responsible for what we are. It is therefore not something added to the self.

Moreover, agency seems quite compatible with the notion of character. Thus, in another context, I have described the idea of character as the "qualification or determination of our self-agency, formed by our having certain intentions (and beliefs) rather than others."[5] Our character is not merely the result of our choices, but rather the form our agency takes through our beliefs and intentions. So understood, the idea of agency helps us see that our character is not a surface manifestation of some deeper reality called the "self." We are our character. But many feel that is not enough. If we are to be genuinely free, a transcendental "I" is required that ensures that we will never be completely contained by our character. The difficulty with this, however, is that such an "I" must be impersonal, free from my history, which is exactly what makes us what we are.

"Agency" may not be the best notion in which to ground my idea of character, in that it may continue to draw on an ahistorical view of the self, a transcendental self somehow always "behind" my character, to which I have objected in my criticism of non-qualified ethics. "Agency" as an abstract power may still carry with it the assumption that the self exists in "midair" above history. For example, Gene Outka has suggested that even if there is no inherent contradiction between freedom and determinism, the appeal to agency as the source of our self-determination fails to do justice to the kind of determinism that in fact constitutes some people's lives. For example, he asks us to consider "those who receive in childhood largely negative judgments from others [and thus] may find it difficult to avoid dependency on others in later life. Such negative judgments are not regarded as a 'passive' element whose influence we can simply allow or disallow, receive and interpret, as we please. Their influence is much too pervasive for that. Each of us in fact is so molded by the communications we receive from others that we can never disentangle with confidence what we are given and what we do."[6] In the light of our inability to so disentangle our lives, it remains difficult to maintain that we are agents, that is, that there is a fundamental distinction between what happens to us and what we do.

Nevertheless an account of agency is indispensable. It is necessary, however, not to ensure that I can always "act," but rather to show how I am not without the resources to make my life my own. As Alasdair MacIntyre suggests,

> What is crucial to human beings as characters in enacted narratives is that, possessing only the resources of psychological continuity, we have to be able to respond to the imputation of strict identity. I am forever whatever I have been at any time for others—and I may at any time be called upon to answer for it—no matter how changed I may be now. There is no way of *founding* my identity—or lack of it—on the psychological continuity or discontinuity of the self. The self inhabits a character whose unity is given as the unity of a character.[7]

In my accounts, agency but names our ability to inhabit our character.

This understanding of agency is in stark contrast to those which would try to anchor our "freedom" in a transcendental self. For example, Timothy O'Connell defends what he calls an "onion peel view of the self." He asks us to think of persons as analogous to onions—that is, as comprised of layers. No layer stands by itself, but each has its own identity.

> At the outermost layer, as it were, we find their environment, their world, the things they own. Moving inward we find their actions, their behavior, the things they do. And then the body, that which is the "belonging" of a person and yet also *is* the person. Going deeper we discover moods, emotions, feelings. Deeper still are convictions by which they define themselves. And at the very center, in that dimensionless pinpoint around which everything else revolves, is the person himself or herself—the I.[8]

O'Connell notes that this "I," this dimensionless pinpoint, cannot be an object, since if it were it would need another subject to know it as object. He suggests this mysterious entity must be the "condition of the possibility" of all we consider.[9] Thus he concludes that as agents, as doers, we are changeable, but as "be-ers," as subjects, we must necessarily stay the same.[10] If such is not the case, then there exists no guarantee that we are not simply the product, a complex product to be sure, of our biology, environment, and particular biographical situation.

According to O'Connell, our freedom can only be grounded in the fact that "we experience ourselves as men and women who are free, not only as agents but also as persons." This latter,

> central core of myself, the "I" which is my personhood, is confronted with a reality that transcends all categories. It is confronted with the reality of my world, my situation, by body, my feelings, my attitudes and prejudices. In fact it is confronted even by the condition of the possibility of that reality: namely, God. And from the perspective of my own core, the subjectivity that I am, this cosmically inclusive objectivity presents itself for decision. A simple, singular decision: yes or no. The freedom of the human person, then, is not categorical freedom at all. Rather it is a freedom that transcends all categories, it is "transcendental freedom."[11]

O'Connell is never clear, however, on the relation between this "transcendental freedom" and "categorical freedom." One begins to suspect that this distinction involves all the virtues and problems of Kant's distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds. O'Connell says "the cosmic exercise of transcendental freedom occurs only in and through the exercises of categorical freedom,"[12] but it is not clear what he means by that. It seems that we cannot be what we do (or do not do)—for if we are what we do, then we are not free. In order to be free we must always have an "I" that somehow stands behind what we do, an "I" not determined or affected by what we do.

From O'Connell's perspective, and I might add it is shared by many, our real identity is not our history, but the "fundamental stance" or "option"—that is, a stance by which we exercise that transcending kind of freedom in order to define ourselves as persons.[13] This seems to imply that fundamental option is but the name given to the *moment* in which that stance is assumed or emphatically renewed. It is that deeper meaning and significance some of the decisions we make in our lives seem to have. But, ironically, such a "moment" cannot be "in history," as its power lies exactly in its ability to transcend history.

One cannot help but be sympathetic to the kind of problem to which O'Connell speaks in his language of "fundamental option," but this view results in a distorted account of the self that is conceptually confusing. For example, O'Connell says that the "fundamental option" is not really something we "do"; rather it is the term we use to describe what is "really going on" within the rich activity of our lives.[14] Why, then, is it called an *option?*

Given the difficulty of crediting an account of our sense that we are not simply the sum of what has happened to us or what we have done, the language of agency is of considerable help. For to say that we are agents is an attempt to avoid transcendental appeals while rightly claiming that we have the power to be one thing rather than another, in short, to be persons of character. There is no way, how-

ever, to guarantee agency metaphysically, the way O'Connell tries to guarantee his fundamental option. Appeals to the irreplaceability of first-person avowals cannot "prove" we must be agents; such arguments can only show that attempts to deny agency involve extraordinary language-transforming proposals.

Nor do I think that the distinction between what we do and what happens to us is decisive for establishing the possibility of our agency. This is particularly the case if we must allow, as Outka suggests, that our very doing often includes—perhaps even depends upon—what has happened to us. However, the distinction between what I do and what happens to me is still important insofar as it calls attention to the inevitability of describing behavior intentionally. The language of agency reminds us that our behavior cannot be satisfactorily analyzed in terms of inanimate behavior. That is, any attempt to describe human behavior completely in terms of random causation—causally relating our actions as one random event to another—is doomed to failure. Although such descriptions cannot be shown in principle to be false, what we see is that, exactly to the extent they are intelligible, they all implicitly employ purposive and intentional categories.[15]

In terms of the account I have tried to develop to be an agent means I am able to locate my action within an ongoing history and within a community of language users. Even what has happened to me, my habit of dependency, becomes mine to the extent that I am able to make it part of my story. I am not an agent because I can "cause" certain things to happen, but because certain things that happen, whether through the result of my decision or not, can be made mine through my power of attention and intention. The "causation" proper to agents and their actions is not rendered by cause and effect, but by the agent's power of description. My act is not something I cause, as though it were external to me, but it is mine because I am able to "fit" it into my ongoing story. My power as an agent is therefore relative to the power of my descriptive ability. Yet that very ability is fundamentally a social skill, for we learn to describe through appropriating the narratives of the communities in which we find ourselves.

It is crucial to note, however, that the power of description that a narrative provides is not to be understood only as an intellectual skill. For "description," while often verbal, is just as importantly a matter of habit—indeed most verbal skills are also habits. That is why our freedom is literally carried by a community that sustains us in the habits of self-possession—not the least of which is learning to depend

on and trust in others. Thus our freedom is not correlative to our self-awareness; rather it depends on the kind of habits we have acquired that are only occasionally brought to awareness. For example, the refusal to use violence for resolving disputes, or perhaps better, the attempt to avoid persistent violent situations, becomes for some so routine they never think about it. It is simply "who they are." But the formation of that habit does not make it any less, but all the more, a resource of and for their freedom.

Appeals to agency as a characteristic of the self cannot in principle guarantee our "freedom" from all determination, since our very ability to know what we have done and to claim our behavior as our own is dependent on the descriptions we learn. There is no contradiction between claims of agency and our sociality, since the extent and power of any agency depends exactly on the adequacy of the descriptions we learn from our communities. Our "freedom," therefore, is dependent on our being initiated into a truthful narrative, as in fact it is the resource from which we derive the power to "have character" at all. Put simply, our ability to "have character" does not require the positing of a transcendental freedom, rather it demands a recognition of the narrative nature of our existence. The fundamental category for ensuring agency, therefore, is not freedom but narrative.

Outka is probably quite right to suggest that some of us may be more "psychologically determined" than others. I know of no satisfactory way to assess degrees in that matter. I wonder, sometimes, if the language of "psychologically determined" is not more determining than the supposed dependency itself. However, the crucial point is that claims of agency are not meant to guarantee absolute freedom or independence. Freedom, or agency, is not a name for some real or ideal state in which we have absolute control of our lives. Rather "agency" is but the word we use to remind us that we are beings who have the capacity to claim our lives by learning to grow in a truthful narrative. Such a capacity is not guaranteed by our having a "truer" self than our character. For our character is exactly that which grants us freedom, as it is constituted by those skills of description which allow us to make both what we have done and what has happened to us part of an ongoing narrative.

Such skills are not just "intellectual" but also moral. To face our lives truthfully requires trust and courage, for if we are to be free we must learn to see what we have done without illusion and deception. So the formation of courage is even greater than the power of choice, as we must be trained to face our destiny of death, not with denial, but with hope. Short of such courage no amount of transcendental

freedom or fundamental option can provide the necessary basis for our ability to make our lives our own.

3. FREEDOM AS THE PRESENCE OF THE OTHER

But it may still be objected that some people's capacity for agency, their ability to respond to a truthful story, is so buried by accidents of their history, so crippled by their past, or so determined by a story that has taught them to despise themselves, that they have lost (or never found) the ability to participate in the forming of their character. More plausibly, their lives are so complex, their responses shaped by so many different stories, that the unity of character which seems necessary to order the multiplicity of loyalties in their lives may well seem unattainable.[16]

No guarantee can be given to insure any one person from being so "determined." Yet it is the Christian claim that no one is so completely determined that he or she lacks all means to respond to the story of God and thus find some means to make his life his own. Such a claim is not based on optimistic assumptions about our goodness or our innate ability. Rather it is an affirmation of God's unrelenting desire to have each of us serve in the kingdom. The call to such service we find only in the presence of another, whose need is often the very occasion of our freedom. For it is through the need of another that the greatest hindrance to my freedom, namely my own self-absorption, is finally not so much overcome as simply rendered irrelevant. It is through the other that I am finally able to make peace with myself and thus have the power to make my life my own.

As Christians we believe that peace is most perfectly realized as we learn to find our role in God's story. That is, the peremptory story of peace as peace, the sense of being at home, comes only as we learn to live true to our nature as God's creatures. Moreover God has charged us with the particular responsibility of being his representatives to attract others to that story of peace by manifesting it in our common life. That is why Christians feel such an urgency to witness, to offer the stranger hospitality, so that God's peace might be possessed by all.

It is the privilege of Christians, as well as their responsibility, to tell God's story to those who know it not. But "to tell God's story" is to put the matter far too simply. For God's story is not merely told; it must be lived. We do not respond to the story simply in itself, rather the story grasps our attention through the form of another person. The "freedom" provided by that narrative thus comes only in the form of someone external to me; it must come in the presence of another. I am an agent just to the extent I have the capacity to be called from myself by another.

We acquire character through the expectations of others. The "otherness" of another's character not only invites me to an always imperfect imitation, but challenges me to recognize the way my vision is restricted by my own self-preoccupation. Thus the kind of community in which we encounter another does not merely make *some* difference for our capacity for agency, it makes *all* the difference. From this perspective we are not the creators of our character; rather, our character is a gift from others which we learn to claim as our own by recognizing it as a gift. Our freedom is literally in the hands of others. I am free just to the extent that I can trust others to stand over against me and call my own "achievements" into question. It is from them that I learn the story that gives my life a purpose and direction.

Our ability to have character and our capacity to recognize our existence as a gift go hand in hand. The narrative that provides us with character is not one that depicts one clear end that we must pursue at the cost of all others. Rather it is a story that we must continually learn from the presence of others as we learn through them and their pursuits better to understand what it is we are pursuing. To be sure, some sense of the telos of the narrative is needed to set us on our way, but, as MacIntyre reminds us, such a quest is "not at all that of a search for something already adequately characterised, as miners search for gold or geologists for oil. It is in the course of the quest and only through encountering and coping with the various particular harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which provide any quest with its episodes and incidents that the goal of the quest is finally to be understood. A quest is always an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge."[17]

Our initiation into a story as well as the ability to sustain ourselves in that story depends on others who have gone before and those who continue to travel with us. "What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognise it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition."[18] Given this, the crucial question becomes whether the tradition is more or less truthful. At least one of the conditions of a truthful tradition is its own recognition that it is not final, that it needs to grow and change if it is to adequately shape our futures in a faithful manner. For, again, as MacIntyre suggests,

> A living tradition . . . is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition. Within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations. Hence the individual's search for his or her good is generally and characteristically conducted within a context defined by those traditions of which the individual's life is a part.[19]

The Christian tradition holds us accountable, not to an abstract story, but to a body of people who have been formed by the life of Jesus. By learning to make his life our life we see we are free just to the extent that we learn to trust others and make ourselves available to be trusted by others. Such trust is possible because the story of his life, by the very way we learn it, requires that we recognize and accept the giftedness of our existence: I did not create myself but what I am has been made possible by others. Our dependence on others, of course, has as much potential for evil as it does for good—that is exactly why the gospel is so remarkable, as it requires that we transform our distrust to trust on the basis of our knowledge and experience that God's providence is working in all our trusts and distrusts.[20]

God is not necessary, therefore, to ensure the existence of a transcendental "I," nor is God but a correlate to such an "I." Rather God is the ultimate given whom we can confidently trust as the basis of our freedom. By becoming a part of the people who carry the story of Jesus, we are initiated into an adventure through which we learn the disciplines and virtues necessary to make our lives our own. For to continue that story, the life of Christ, is the source of our freedom. We are finally no self, no agent, until we are the self that God has called us to be.

4. OUR SINFUL CHARACTER

The recognition that we are most free when we are formed by a story that helps us live appropriate to the reality that our life is a gift is also the context for rightly understanding what it means to be a sinner. Earlier I suggested that sin is not a natural category, that we have to be taught we are sinners. Moreover sin is not just an error or the doing of certain prohibited actions, but sin is the positive attempt to overreach our power as creatures. It is manifested in our pride and sensuality, but its fundamental form is self-deception.

We are now in a position to develop this understanding of sin further, for we can see that the very claim of freedom as a possession, as our achievement, is but a manifestation of our sin. We are rooted in sin just to the extent we think we have the inherent power to claim our life—our character—as our particular achievement. In other words, our sin—our fundamental sin—is the assumption that we are the creators of the history through which we acquire and possess our character. Sin is the form our character takes as a result of our fear that we will be "nobody" if we lose control of our lives.

Moreover our need to be in control is the basis for the violence of our lives. For since our "control" and "power" cannot help but be built on an insufficient basis, we must use force to maintain the illusion that we are in control. We are deeply afraid of losing what unity of self we have achieved. Any idea or person threatening that unity must be either manipulated or eliminated. We fear others because they always stand as an implicit challenge to our deceptions. Thus it seems the inherent necessity of all people to have or create an enemy.

This helps us understand why we are so resistant to the training offered by the gospel, for we simply cannot believe that the self might be formed without fear of the other. Such a formation of course is indeed extraordinary, for it is only possible if in fact we receive our true self from God. There has always been something right about the traditional understanding that the unity of the self and the knowledge of God are correlates. Such a unity does not come automatically. It is a slow achievement as we work day in and day out to locate ourselves within God's story. We inherently resist such a locating because we have come to love our sinfulness—and we fear losing it.

In this respect the emphasis in recent theology on sin as a fundamental orientation of self, rather than sin being associated with certain wrongful acts, is essentially correct. For example, O'Connell tries to provide this kind of interpretation of sin by utilizing the notion of "fundamental option."

> Mortal sin as an act is nothing else than a synonym for fundamental option. A mortal sin . . . is the act by which we substantially reject God and assume instead a posture apart from and in alienation from God. Mortal sin is the moment in which we deny the God who calls us through and in creation and thus, paradoxically, deny our deepest selves. Mortal sin is the act of sin by which we take upon ourselves the state of sin.
>
> But if mortal sin is nothing else than a negative fundamen-

tal option, it follows that, like that option, it is a transcendental act. That is, mortal sin is not precisely the doing of any particular categorical act. Rather it is the act of self-disposition occurring *through* and *in* that concrete categorical act.[21]

One can appreciate what O'Connell is trying to say. He rightly wants to emphasize that sin reaches and determines the fundamental orientation of the self, that is, it determines our very relationship with God. Yet he wants to avoid the idea that sin is a given, but then neither is it a matter of choice. What then is it? It seems he needs an account of the self in which our actions are rooted in what most nearly makes us what we are, so that sin becomes the qualification of the self rather than of actions. But the language of "fundamental option" does not really serve his purpose, since to protect self-freedom the "fundamental option" must be free of determination by our actions or history. He thus seems caught on the horns of a dilemma by locating sin in "transcendental freedom," for it is not clear how sin can reach to the depths of who we are and still be something we do.

But if there is no self more fundamental than our character, problems like this do not arise. Rather our sin consists in our allowing our character to be formed by the story that we must do everything (pride) or nothing (sloth).[22] There are so many different forms that pride and sloth take that we can use a bit of both of them in the complex stories that become ourselves. Indeed, as we look back on our lives our sin is more like something we discover than something we have done.

For our sin lies precisely in our unbelief—our distrust that we are creatures of a gracious creator known only to the extent we accept the invitation to become part of his kingdom. It is only by learning to make that story—that story of God—our own that we gain the freedom necessary to make our life our own. Only then can I learn to accept what has happened to me (which includes what I have done) without resentment. It is then that I am able to accept my body, my psychological conditioning, my implicit distrust of others and myself, as mine, as part of my story. And the acceptance of myself as a sinner is made possible only because it is an acceptance of God's acceptance. Thus I am able to see myself as a sinner and yet to go on.

This does not mean that tragedy is eliminated from our lives; rather we have the means to recognize and accept the tragic without turning to violence. For finally our freedom is learning how to exist

in the world, a violent world, in peace with ourselves and others. The violence of the world is but the mirror of the violence of our lives. We say we desire peace, but we have not the souls for it. We fear the boredom peace seems to imply. Even more we fear the lack of control a commitment to peace would entail. As a result the more we seek to bring "under our control," the more violent we have to become to protect what we have. And the more violent we allow ourselves to become, the more vulnerable we are to challenges.

For what does "peace with ourselves" involve? It surely does not mean that we will live untroubled—though it may be true that no one can really harm a just person. Nor does it mean that we are free of self-conflict, for we remain troubled sinners—indeed, that may well be the best description of the redeemed. To be "at peace with ourselves" means we have the confidence, gained through participation in the adventure we call God's kingdom, to trust ourselves and others. Such confidence becomes the source of our character and our freedom as we are loosed from a debilitating preoccupation with ourselves. Moreover by learning to be at peace with ourselves, we find we can live at peace with one another. And this freedom, after all, is the only freedom worth having.

4. On Beginning in the Middle: Nature, Reason, and the Task of Theological Ethics

1. THE TASK OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

It seems a little odd at this point to ask what the task of Christian ethics might be. Surely that should have been first on the agenda. In fact I have already started to do some Christian ethics insofar as I have argued that Christian ethics has a peculiar stake in narrative, vision, the virtues, and character as constituents of the moral life. For, as we saw, it is impossible to delineate the central concepts of an ethic without exposing the material content, the particular convictions, of that ethic. So in a sense one can ask about the task of Christian ethics only after it has begun.

But the matter is even more complex than this. For example, it seems straightforward enough to suggest that the primary task of Christian ethics is to understand the basis and nature of the Christian life. Yet a phrase like "understand the basis and nature of the Christian life" is filled with ambiguity. Does "understand" imply that the task is primarily descriptive? Is the chief concern to map the relation between Christian belief and behavior? Or does "understand" involve a normative task? Is the task of Christian ethics to recommend what we ought to do?

While I hope to show that Christian ethics is at once descriptive and normative, the interrelation between these tasks is complex and not easily stated. However, before such questions can even be investigated we need to remind ourselves that Christian ethics is not any distinct discipline but varies from time to time and from one to another ecclesial tradition. As we shall see, how Christian ethics is understood has always been dependent on its context in a specific tradition.

The development of moral theology in Roman Catholicism through the centuries became tied to the penitential system. Moral theologians aided confessional practice as they developed the casuistical detail necessary to sustain and inform the priestly function. Thus the study of moral theology was primarily a task performed by priests and through their preaching and confessional practice they helped the community determine minimum standards of behavior. Such an approach was not minimalistic in principle but became so precisely because the primary concern of the confessional was with avoiding evil.[1]

Although moral theologians served an ecclesial function, their work was thought to be based primarily on "natural law." This may well suggest that the alleged transparency of the natural law norms reflects more the consensus within the church than the universality of the natural law itself. I suspect that "natural law," rather than indicating agreement between Christian and non-Christian, served to note agreements within a widely scattered and pluralistic Christian community. This is substantiated by the fact that the power of natural law as a systematic idea was developed in and for the Roman imperium and then for "Christendom." Thus, ironically, "natural law" became the means of codifying a particular moral tradition.

Because of the very problems it was asked to address, this form of Christian ethics tended to be act-oriented. Though it was often systemized in the language of the virtues, it evidenced little concern for or analysis of the actual development of virtue but instead concentrated on the fulfillment of specified duties. Moral theologians came to look more like lawyers than theologians. They were people skilled in adjudication of cases for the troubled conscience (no mean or small skill).

Moreover, even though they were called "theologians," these moralists seldom were required to make direct theological appeals. Theological claims set the backdrop that made their work intelligible —e.g., God is the creator of a rational universe and moral law can be thus known without the aid of revelation. Beyond that, little theological reflection was required for explicating the nature of the Christian moral life. Thus "theology" in the phrase "moral theology" denoted an unquestioned ecclesial assumption rather than an enlivening practice.

In fairness it should be said that Catholicism included other ways of thinking about the moral life, for example, spiritual and ascetical theology. Yet these forms of literature were not considered "ethics" since they did not deal with specific judgments of right and wrong. Moreover, much of the ascetical literature was devotional in character and, thus, was not meant as a means to explore systematic issues.

In contrast, theological issues always have been at the forefront of Protestant ethical reflection. In fact Protestants did not develop any specialized discipline called "Christian ethics" until recently. Of course they did not have the confessional, as did Catholics, but that was not the decisive reason for their lack of any explicit discipline called Christian ethics. Rather the Protestant emphasis on God's free grace made "ethics" an inherently doubtful enterprise, since "ethics," from such a perspective, appeared as an attempt to presumptively determine God's will or to substitute works for faith. Indeed some could go as far as to suggest that ethics is sin insofar as it tries to anticipate God's will.[2]

This is not to say that there was no concern for ethics in the Protestant tradition; rather it was included as part of the theologians' task. Thus "ethics" involved discussion of the relation of law and gospel, creation and redemption, faith and works, the status of the orders of creation, and the nature of man as sinner and redeemed. While such problems are central to the ethical task, theological discussions of this sort often failed to deal with the kind of moral concerns and issues that constitute how men and women in fact live. Certainly individual theologians often provided compelling accounts of human existence, but they were more likely to be interested in the systematic relations between the theological concepts than in the practical force such concepts might have for directing lives. Interestingly enough, the more concrete form of analysis undertaken to guide behavior among Protestants tended to be done pastorally and, as a result, was often not informed by explicit theological convictions.

Therefore, even though Protestant ethical reflection seemed richer theologically than Catholicism's, it tended to be as culturally assimilationist as the natural law tradition. In the absence of any disciplined and practical form of ethical reflection, Protestants could only assume that "Christian ethics" was little different from the consensus of whatever culture they found themselves a part. This is most strikingly illustrated by Protestantism's inability to be more than national churches.

In fairness it ought to be said that Christian ethics appears in a more distinct light in Calvinist, Anabaptist, and Anglican traditions, due to their stress on sanctification. Each of these traditions assumes that God's activity on our behalf entails a particular way of life that can be spelled out in some detail. Yet although such an assumption often produced reflection on the moral life meant to inform Christian consciences, it rarely produced a disciplined study called "Christian ethics" in any way comparable to Catholic moral theology.

In fact the very idea of Christian ethics is a relatively new phenomenon. In America it seems to have been primarily an outgrowth of the Social Gospel movement. It occasioned courses in Protestant seminaries dealing with "Christian sociology." Soon internal criticism of some of the enthusiasm of the Social Gospel required such courses to take a more reflective and critical standpoint. Thus the work of H. R. Niebuhr represents the attempt to make Christian ethics a discipline whose task is to clarify the moral implications of Christian theological convictions.[3] Such work is seen to be primarily analytical and descriptive, but without explicit normative prescriptions.

This brief and inadequate attempt to characterize Christian ethics in Catholic and Protestant traditions is meant only to make us aware that the activity we call "Christian ethics" is anything but singular or clear. For example, it is very interesting that we have no "Christian ethics" in the early church. Nowhere in Scripture do we get a distinction between religious belief and behavior. The Sermon on the Mount is hardly Jesus' "ethic," but is part and parcel of his proclamation of the coming kingdom. Paul's "ethics" is not really concerned with the status of the law. Scripture creates a problem in that its integration of belief and behavior makes it difficult to describe a "biblical ethic," let alone to discover in what manner it is still relevant for our current reflection.[4]

Neither is there much evidence that any of the church fathers thought it necessary to do ethics as an explicit task. Their explicit ethical reflections were primarily occasioned by their pastoral concerns. Thus they seldom give systematic presentations of the Christian life but engage in a sort of ad hoc reflection, since their primary concern was to respond to the needs of a particular community. Indeed, there is something to be said for still labeling ethics a pastoral discipline.

Nor do we get "ethics" as separate treatises in the highly systematic Middle Ages. Aquinas never stopped to say: "Now I am going to do a little ethics." The "ethics" he does in the Prima Secundae and Secunda-Secundae of the *Summa Theologica* is but the continuation of his theological portrayal of God's extension of himself to man so that man might have a way to God.[5] "Ethics" is not done as an independent discipline, but because such considerations are necessary to depict our journey with God.

So what are we to make of the fact that we now have a discipline called Christian ethics, that practitioners are armed with Ph.D.'s in the subject and are ready to apply their skills? Why should this be the case? Not every tradition feels the need to develop a distinct

discipline called "ethics." Perhaps part of the reason for the concern with Christian ethics has to do with the cultural situation depicted in chapter 1. Because many of the "natural" relations that people used to assume between religious belief and behavior have been broken, we hope that if we think hard enough about those relations we can again reestablish their essential connection. Such a task is unfortunately doomed to failure. For finally these relations are not conceptual, but practical. Christian ethics, as a critical and reflective discipline, cannot restore what only a community can hold together. Christian ethics, insofar as it is an intelligible discipline at all, is dependent on a community's wisdom about how certain actions are prohibited or enjoined for the development of a particular kind of people.

That such is the case, however, helps us understand better the task of Christian ethics. For it makes clear that Christian ethics is not an abstract discipline primarily concerned with "ideas." Rather it is a form of reflection in service to a community, and it derives its character from the nature of that community's convictions. Theological claims are fundamentally practical and Christian ethics is but that form of theological reflection which attempts to explicate this inherently practical nature.

1.1 Christian Ethics Is Theology

As should be obvious from the above I have little interest in trying to claim that Christian ethics is a coherent subdiscipline within the wider discipline of theology. Indeed, I think in many ways the separation of ethics from theology has had unfortunate consequences. Ethics is but one aspect of the theological task and little hangs on whether it has integrity as a specifiable discipline.

Yet it is important not to be too humble about this. For at the same time it is crucial that Christian ethics not be understood as an afterthought to systematic theology. If theological convictions are meant to construe the world—that is, if they have the character of practical discourse—then ethics is involved at the beginning, not the end, of theology. Theological discourse is distorted when portrayed as a kind of primitive metaphysics—a view all too common among Protestants as well as Catholics. That is, Catholics often assume that one must start with fundamental theology, which investigates the conditions of truthfulness, the metaphysical presuppositions (natural theology) which make theology at all possible. Then one proceeds to systematic theology, which deals with revelational claims such as trinity, creation, redemption, Christology, church, and so on. Finally,

when that work is done, one turns to ethics on the assumption that only when one's basic beliefs are clear and well-founded can one consider their moral implications. Ironically this picture usually results in a theological justification for basing ethics on a natural law methodology, with the result that theological convictions about Jesus are not directly relevant to concrete ethical analysis.

Even though Protestants have been less confident in natural theology or a natural law ethic, they also assume theology begins primarily with prolegomena. Also, especially since the nineteenth century, they have tried to prepare the way for doing theology with anthropology, attempting to show the intelligibility of theological claims. Often what was done in that respect was "ethical" insofar as ethics is understood to involve accounts of human existence, but this often resulted in theology being no more than, in Karl Barth's memorable phrase, "talking about man in a loud voice."

In contrast to both these approaches I wish to show that Christian ethics is not what one does after one gets clear on everything else, or after one has established a starting point or basis of theology; rather it is at the heart of the theological task. For theology is a practical activity concerned to display how Christian convictions construe the self and world.[6] Therefore theological claims concerning the relation of creation and redemption are already ethical claims, since they situate how one works methodologically. Put more strongly, ethics has been artificially separated from the central theological task exactly because of the abstract way in which the relation between creation and redemption, nature and grace, has been understood.

1.2 Nature and Grace: Why Being Christian Is Not Equivalent to Being Human

The abstractions "nature" and "grace" in particular have distorted how ethics has been undertaken in the Catholic tradition. This is true despite the fact that there is a concern afoot in the Catholic Church that moral theology be more explicitly theological. For example, the "Decree of Priestly Formation" of Vatican II explicitly charged: "Its [moral theology's] scientific exposition should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching. It should show the nobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world."[7] Yet the theological presuppositions on which the structure of Roman Catholic ethics is built assume that is exactly what cannot be done. Unfortunately, much of contemporary Catholic ethics, while often beginning with some theo-

logical rhetoric, continues to rest finally on an anthropological foundation. For example Timothy O'Connell says,

> . . . the fundamental ethical command imposed on the Christian is precisely to be what he or she is. "Be human." That is what God asks of us, no more and no less. Imitate Christ, and do this by seeking to be as faithful to the human vocation as he was. Love your neighbor as yourself. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Christian ethics is human ethics, no more and no less. . . . Christians are unconditionally humanists; that is our pride and our privileged vocation. . . . Thus in a certain sense, moral theology is not theology at all. It is moral philosophy, pursued by persons who are believers. Moral theology is a science that seeks to benefit from all the sources of wisdom within our world.[8]

Such a position is bound to use Christ to underwrite the integrity of the "natural," since he is seen as epitomizing the fulfillment of the human vocation. Again O'Connell says, "It is the faithful articulation of the meaning of Jesus' call that we should 'be what we are.' "[9] Apart from the fact that this seems to be very bad advice—as Mark Twain observed, the worst advice you can give anyone is to be himself—such an approach jeopardizes the attempt to make theological convictions more ethically relevant.

In fairness it should be noted that O'Connell has a chapter dealing with "elements" of a biblical morality. The covenant, kingdom, repentence, discipleship, law, and love each receive brief treatment and review. But these "elements" are not methodologically decisive for how O'Connell does ethics.[10] That such is the case, however, is not accidental, but structured into the way O'Connell understands what Christianity is about. Christian ethics is human ethics because the particularity of Jesus, his historicity as God's decisive eschatological actor, has been lost. Thus, according to O'Connell,

> What must not be debated is the fact that incarnation *could* have taken place apart from original sin. Inasmuch as this world was created as a potential receptacle for the divinity of God's Word, incarnation was possible from the first moment of creation. Therefore, even if the *function* of incarnation was (at least in part) the rectification of the evil situation of mankind, such was not the *essence* of the incarnation. No, the essence of incarnation was simply the self-gift of God to his people, the union of God, through his Word, with the good world which had come from his creative hand.[11]

Apart from the dubious wisdom of talking about the *"essence* of the incarnation," the problem with such Christology is that it results in making the events and actions of Jesus' life seem accidental. Incarnation is not an adequate summary of the story. Rather "incarnation" is but one of the conceptual reminders that the church has developed to help us tell well the story of the man who was nothing less than the God-appointed initiator of the new kingdom.

This kind of theological abstractionism is a characteristic of both Catholic and Protestant ethics. Theological concepts are reifications; they are taken as the "meat," the point, of Christian convictions. But as abstractions both "nature" and "grace" require more determinative narrative display.[12] There is no creation without the covenant with Israel, there is no redemption that does not take its meaning from Jesus' cross.[13] Neither are they general concepts that straightforwardly describe or gain their meaning from human existence per se; rather the concepts of both creation and redemption are aids to train us to be creatures of a gracious God who has called us to be citizens in a community of the redeemed.

When nature-grace, creation-redemption are taken to be the primary data of theological reflection, once they are abstracted from the narrative and given a life of their own, a corresponding distortion in moral psychology seems to follow. Since the material content—that is, the rightness or wrongness of certain behavior—is derived from nature, Christian convictions at best only furnish a motivation for "morality." As Joseph Fuchs says,

> The specific and *decisively Christian* aspect of Christian morality is not to be sought first of all in the particularity of categorical values, virtues, and norms of various human activities. Rather it resides in the believer's fundamental Christian decision to accept God's love in Christ and respond to it as one who believes and loves, as one who assumes the responsibility for life in this world in imitation of Christ, that is, as one who has died with Christ and is risen with him in faith and sacrament thus becoming a new creation.[14]

Fuchs calls this "Christian intentionality" the "deepest and most challenging element of morality, which addresses the whole person, and not only the individual deed."[15] Such intentionality "pervades"

particular categorical conduct, but it does not determine its content. "This means that truthfulness, uprightness, and faithfulness are not specifically Christian, but generally human values in what they materially say, and that we have reservations about lying and adultery not because we are Christians, but simply because we are human."[16] Thus the meaning of the "Christianum" for our concrete living is to be found in its "motivating power."[17]

But to reduce the "Christianum" to the motivational distorts our moral psychology since it presupposes that virtues such as truthfulness can be "objectively" characterized abstracted from how agents must learn to be truthful. Therefore the very integrity of self, the character required for moral agency, is lost. For, as we saw in the preceding chapter, our very ability to be moral agents is dependent on our having a character that forges a link between what we do and what we are.

Likewise, when Christian convictions are relegated to the "motivational" part of our lives the historical dimension of the self is irretrievably lost. We have character just to the extent that we can claim our history as our own, but when our actions are separated from our history, when we are only the "causes" of certain pieces of behavior, we lose exactly what is necessary to be historic. There is, perhaps, a correlation between Christian ethicists' penchant for theological abstractions divorced from their narrative context and the tendency to develop a "natural law" ethic that is free from historic communities.

But it may be objected that surely I am too hard on this attempt to reinterpret natural law in terms of "humanity," for it is surely a step in the right direction. What possibly could be wrong with the claim that to be Christian is to be fully human? No one wants to maintain that there is an essential discontinuity between God's creating and redeeming work, between nature and grace. Surely what it means to be Christian is but an intensification, not a denial, of what it means to be human.

Of course that is correct, but at issue is the methodological significance it has for ethical reflection. To be Christian is surely to fulfill the most profound human desires, but we do not know what such fulfillment means on the basis of those desires themselves. It is certainly right that life in Christ makes us more nearly what we should be, but that is not to say we must start with the human to determine what it means to be a disciple of Christ. While the way of life taught by Christ is meant to be an ethic for all people, it does not follow that we can know what such an ethic involves "objectively" by looking at the human.

Moreover such a view optimistically assumes that in fact we know morally in what such a universal or objective ethic consists. As we saw above, Fuchs has an extraordinary confidence that we are, in fact, in possession of common moral intuitions and values such as truthfulness, uprightness, and faithfulness. But he does not provide a concrete analysis of those "values" sufficient to indicate why the understanding of "truthfulness" differs from society to society. I have no reason to deny that human nature may well require a fundamental orientation to truth, but I do not think it possible to abstract such truthfulness from its various narrative contexts in order to make it the basis of a "universal" and "objective" ethic.

1.3 Church and World: The Ethics of a Critical Community

The affirmation that Christian ethics is human ethics contains yet another dubious assumption, this time about the relation of church and world. Richard McCormick, a Catholic moralist like O'Connell and Fuchs, says:

> Love and loyalty to Jesus Christ, the perfect man, sensitizes us to the meaning of persons. The Christian tradition is anchored in faith in the meaning and decisive significance of God's covenant with men, especially as manifested in the saving incarnation of Jesus Christ, his eschatological kingdom which is here aborning but will finally only be given. Faith in these events, love of and loyalty to this central figure, yields a decisive way of viewing and intending the world, of interpreting its meaning, of hierarching its values. In this sense the Christian tradition only illumines human values, supports them, provides a context for their reading at given points in history.[18]

But McCormick does not tell us what, if anything, such an illumination adds to the ethical; in effect he assumes that the primary task of Christian convictions is to "support" human values. But this assumption presumes that Christians will never be radically anti-world —that is, aligned against the prevailing values of their cultures. In fact behind the emphasis on the "human" character of Christian ethics is a deep fear that there might be a radical discontinuity between Christians and their culture. The result, I fear, is that too often natural law assumptions function as an ideology for sustaining some Christians' presuppositions that their societies—particularly societies of Western democracies—are intrinsic to God's purposes.[19]

McCormick says, "If Christian faith adds new material (concrete,

behavioral) content to morality, then public policy is even more complex than it seems. For example, if Christians precisely as Christians know something about abortion that others cannot know unless they believe it as Christians, then in a pluralistic society there will be problems with discussion and decision in the public forum."[20] But why does he assume that the public forum is shaped by "human" values? Why does he assume that Christians should be able to contribute to the "public forum" on its own terms? What, for example, would have been the result if Christians had approached their entry into Roman society with McCormick's presuppositions? Isn't it possible that Christians, because of the ethos peculiar to their community, might find themselves in deep discontinuity with the ethos of a particular society?

Therefore the question of the distinctiveness of Christian ethics—or as I have put it, the insistence on the significance of the qualifier—also involves questions of the relationship of church to world. Indeed, how the task of Christian ethics is to be conceived is as much an ecclesiological issue as an issue having to do with nature and grace, creation and redemption. In fact, the issues are closely interrelated, since often how church is understood in relation to world follows from how nature and grace are thought to be related.

Of the two, however, the issue of the relation of church and world is more primary.[21] By virtue of the distinctive narrative that forms their community, Christians are distinct from the world. They are required to be nothing less than a sanctified people of peace who can live the life of the forgiven.[22] Their sanctification is not meant to sustain the judgment that they are "better" than non-Christians, but rather that they are charged to be faithful to God's calling of them as foretaste of the kingdom. In this sense sanctification is a life of service and sacrifice that the world cannot account for on its own grounds.

Therefore, claims for the distinctiveness of the church, and thus Christian ethics, are not attempts to underwrite assumptions of superiority or Christian dominance. Rather they are meant to remind Christians of the radicalness of the gospel. For the gospel cannot be adequately summed up by appeals that we should love our neighbor as ourselves but is meant to transform us by teaching us to be God's peaceable people.

Emphasis on the distinctiveness of Christian ethics does not deny that there are points of contact between Christian ethics and other forms of the moral life. While such points frequently exist, they are not sufficient to provide a basis for a "universal" ethic grounded in

human nature per se. Attempts to secure such an ethic inevitably result in a minimalistic ethic and often one which gives support to forms of cultural imperialism. Indeed, when Christians assume that their particular moral convictions are independent of narrative, that they are justified by some universal standpoint free from history, they are tempted to imagine that those who do not share such an ethic must be particularly perverse and should be coerced to do what we know on universal grounds they really should want to do.

I do not mean to imply that adherents of a "natural law" ethic are inherently more violent, but rather that violence and coercion become conceptually intelligible from a natural law standpoint. The universal presumptions of natural law make it more difficult to accept the very existence of those who do not agree with us; such differences in principle should not exist. For example, natural law is often expressed today in the language of universal rights—the right to be free, to worship, to speak, to choose one's vocation, etc. Such language, at least in principle, seems to embody the highest human ideals. But it also facilitates the assumption that since anyone who denies such rights is morally obtuse and should be "forced" to recognize the error of his ways. Indeed, we overlook too easily how the language of "rights," in spite of its potential for good, contains within its logic a powerful justification for violence. Our rights language "absolutizes the relative" in the name of a universal that is profoundly limited and limiting just to the extent that it tempts us to substitute some moral ideal for our faithfulness to God.

To reiterate a point, recent attempts to identify Christian ethics with a universal human ethic fail to recognize that all accounts of the moral life are narrative dependent. We must recognize that, in MacIntyre's words, "action itself has a basically historical character. It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others. Stories are lived before they are told—except in the case of fiction."[23] Moreover, we must recognize that we live out our lives in the light of certain conceptions of a possible shared future. As a result I am not a self born with no history. Rather the story of my life "is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships. The possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide."[24]

Christian ethics involves the extraordinary claim that by learning

to be faithful to the way of life inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth we have, in fact, become part of the shared history that God intends for his whole creation. But that such an eschatological view is inherent in our morality does not mean that we can assume that the "universal" inclusion of all people in God's kingdom is an accomplished fact. Rather it means that as Christians we have been given the means to recognize ourselves for what we are—historic beings who must begin our ethical reflection in the midst of history.

There is no point outside our history where we can secure a place to anchor our moral convictions. We must begin in the middle, that is, we must begin within a narrative. Christianity offers a narrative about God's relationship to creation that gives us the means to recognize we are God's creatures. Thus it is certainly true that the God we find in the story of Jesus is the same God we find in creation—namely, the God who wills us to share in his life. We have a saving God, and we are saved by being invited to share in the work of the kingdom through the history God has created in Israel and the work of Jesus. Such a history completes our nature as well as our particular history by placing us within an adventure which we claim is nothing less than God's purpose for all of creation.

This implies, moreover, that Christian ethics does not, methodologically, have a starting point. The dilemma of whether we must do Christian ethics out of a doctrine of God or of man is a false one. For Christian ethics begins in a community that carries the story of the God who wills us to participate in a kingdom established in and through Jesus of Nazareth. No matter where it begins theologically, if it tries to do more or less than remind us of the significance of that story it has lost its way. Theology has no essence, but rather is the imaginative endeavor to explicate the stories of God by showing how one claim illuminates another.

Where does this leave the issue of how best to understand the relation of creation and redemption, nature and grace? Do I mean to defend a Christian ethic that stresses redemption and grace as in essential discontinuity with creation and nature? Decidedly no! God has never been other than a saving God. That is as true of God as creator as it is of God as redeemer. By emphasizing the narrative character of our knowledge of God I mean to remind us that we do not know what it means to call God creator or redeemer apart from the story of his activity with Israel and Jesus. The language of creation and redemption, nature and grace, is a secondary theological language, that is sometimes mistaken for the story itself. "Creation" and "redemption" should be taken for what they are, namely ways of helping us tell and hear the story rightly.

Moreover, if creation and redemption are assumed to be intelligible in themselves—that is, apart from the story—the kind of "saving" that we find in the life and death of Jesus Christ is distorted. That God "saves" is not a pietistic claim about my status individually. Salvation is not fundamentally some fresh and compelling insight about my life—though such insight may be included. Rather, the God of Israel and Jesus offers us salvation insofar as we are invited to become citizens of the kingdom and thus to be participants in the history which God is creating. This does not mean that nature is only "saved" as it becomes historical, but reminds that both nature and history are abstractions. What is redeemed is this or that creature who combines aspects of nature and history.

1.4 Summary of the Argument

Thus far I have tried to argue that the "natural law" starting point for Christian ethics, even in the updated form of "Christian ethics as human ethics" has the following difficulties: (1) It creates a distorted moral psychology, since the description of act is thought to be determined by an observer without reference to the dispositions of the agent. This leads to concentration on judgments about action from an observer's standpoint that the "new Catholic moralists" at least claim they want to avoid. (2) It fails to provide an adequate account of how theological convictions are a morality, i.e., that they are meant not just to describe the world but to form the self and community. (3) It confuses the claim that Christian ethics is an ethic that we should and can commend to anyone with the claim that we can know the content of that ethic by looking at the human. (4) It fails to appreciate that there is no actual universal morality, but that in fact we live in a fragmented world of many moralities. (5) Because it seems to entail a strong continuity between church and world, natural law ethics fails to provide the critical perspective the church needs to recognize and deal with the challenges presented by our societies and the inherent violence of our world. (6) It ignores the narrative character of Christian convictions by forgetting that nature-grace, creation-redemption are secondary theological concepts only intelligible in relation to the story of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. (7) It tempts us to coerce those who disagree with

us, since its presumptions lead us to believe that we always occupy the high ground in any dispute.

2. REASON AND REVELATION

Many would argue there is another more serious problem with my defense of a qualified ethic against natural law approaches. To emphasize the revelation within the Christian community seems to be anti-rational. For example, Richard McCormick says "if Christian faith and revelation add material content to what is knowable in principle by reason, then the churches conceivably could teach moral positions and conclusions independently of the reasons and analyses that recommend these conclusions. This could lend great support to a highly juridical and obediential notion of Christian morality."[25] At the very least his claim seems doubtful in light of the history of the use of "natural law" by church authorities to support authoritarian positions. Indeed, I would suggest that part of the difficulty with the moral reasoning supporting some of the church's sexual ethics is that by attempting to give them a "natural law" basis devoid of their theological basis they appear arbitrary and irrational—thus requiring authoritarian imposition.

Yet the question McCormick raises is an important one since it rightly concerns the questions of the kind and place of authority in Christian ethics and of the relation of that authority to reason. In his *Authority in Morals* Gerard Hughes gives a careful account of how these questions might be approached from a natural law perspective.

> [The] most obvious court of appeal in moral theology is the teaching of Christian moral tradition, as this finds expression either in the Bible or in later documents of that tradition. In harmony with this approach is the view that there is a specifically Christian ethic, which it is the task of moral theology to expound by reflection on the data of the specifically Christian revelation. In so far as this revelation is taken to be authoritative in ethics, it is taken to be in some sense an ultimate, which is not open to further criticism from sources external to itself. Against this view, I propose two basic types of difficulty. The first is theological in character. I argue that the picture of God which inevitably emerges from this kind of approach is one which Christians are themselves unwilling to accept consistently. On this model, I argue God must emergy as an arbitrary figure who would have no legitimate claim on our belief or our allegiance; yet one of the clearest themes of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in the Bible is that God is someone whom man can accept as the ultimate answer to his legitimate aspirations. Any theory of revelation which denies this must in the end leave revelation itself deprived of its credentials. In particular, God must be seen as morally acceptable if we are to have any reason for believing that it is indeed God who is speaking to us. Secondly, I propose some more philosophical objections to this position. It is characteristic of the Christian religion that God reveals himself in history, and therefore in a particular culture at a particular time and place. The texts of Christian tradition in which that revelation is communicated to us are, by the same token, texts of a particular human community at different periods of its development. As such, these texts raise all the philosophical problems of interpretation and translation raised by any text. It follows that the meaning of these texts cannot simply be read off automatically from the texts themselves. In order to establish their meaning we have to have recourse to other assumptions and arguments which the texts themselves do not provide.[26]

Interestingly, Hughes advances his argument with confidence that he knows what "morality" involves. He says,

> The distinctive, and objectionable, contention of the voluntarist is that even given the creation of man, what is right and wrong for men to do depends on a *further* act of God's will; God could have placed us under different, incompatible, obligations while leaving us unaltered. In thus severing the connection between the nature of man and the moral obligations under which God could place him, the voluntarist renders man's moral perfection unintelligible, because it is no longer related to any other facet of man's development. He therefore runs the risk of making his God arbitrary. In the main, Christian tradition has rejected this picture of God as inconsistent with his character that has been revealed to us and with the ways in which his moral concern for us has been shown.[27]

Now Hughes's argument against arbitrariness works only when we assume we know the nature and content of morality prior to our knowledge of God. Hence, it is odd that Hughes appeals to revela-

tion in order to deny that Christian ethics is based on revelation—i.e., that revelation which "has been revealed to us and with the ways in which his moral concern for us has been shown." Clearly Hughes must have two different senses of revelation at work, and this is but an indication that we need to know better what he means by "revelation." In one form he seems to identify revelation as a category of knowledge that cannot be rationally justified—but that is surely a mistake.

It is a mistake because first of all the word "revelation" is not a qualifier of the epistemic status of a kind of knowledge, but rather points to the content of a certain kind of knowledge. We call knowledge about God "revelation" not because of the rationality or irrationality of such knowledge, but because of what that knowledge is about. It certainly is true that our knowledge of God may challenge certain accounts of what counts as rational, but that does not mean that revelation is thereby irrational. Revelation is properly a description of that knowledge that bears the stamp of God and God's saving intentions, but that stamp is not thereby necessarily discerned in a mysterious manner, though knowledge of revelation may well be knowledge of a mystery. To say knowledge is "revealed" marks it as being about God, in contrast to so much of our knowledge that makes no attempt to tell us about God.

It has become popular to say that revelation is not concerned with propositions, but is instead the self-disclosure of God. Thus many speak of "revelatory events"—the "Exodus event" or the "resurrection event." They often wish to suggest that revelation does not make claims about what happened, but about the meaning of what happened. In contrast, it is my contention that revelation involves propositional claims, none of which can be isolated by themselves, but are intelligible only as they form a coherent narrative.

From this perspective I find the traditional distinction between natural knowledge of God and revelation to be misleading. All knowledge of God is at once natural and revelatory. But like all knowledge it depends on analogical control. Analogies, in turn, derive their intelligibility from paradigms that draw on narratives for their rational display.[28] Our narratives of God's dealing with us inspire and control our attempt to test how what we know of God helps us understand why the world is as it is—i.e., finite.

But our knowledge of God is also moral. For example, our avowal of God's perfection is that of a being with complete integrity. Put simply, there is no underside to God's intentions. God is what God does in a manner unlike anyone or anything else. God's goodness therefore is not like our goodness, for a perfect faithfulness is God's very nature. That God is moral in this sense is the basis for our confidence that we are more nearly ourselves when we are like God. Christian morality, therefore, cannot but require us to become faithful imitators of God.

This in fact is a familiar biblical concern. For example, consider the language of *Leviticus* 19:1–4:

> And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods. I am the Lord your God."

Or again *Leviticus* 19:11–12:

> "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. And you shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord."

The biblical Commandments do not command us arbitrarily; rather they call us to be holy as God is holy, as we have learned of holiness through God's faithfulness to us. Therefore, like God we are called to be what we are and to do what we do (e.g., we leave part of our fields unharvested for the poor) because God is that kind of God. Such a morality requires no "foundation"; it is enough that we know it to reflect the very nature of God.

It may be objected that the sense of "holiness" in these verses is rather abstract, but such a charge can only be sustained by ignoring the narrative displays of God's holiness in Scripture: it is God who has brought us from the land of Egypt, who has given us the judges, prophets, and priests. As Christians we claim we learn most clearly who God is in the life and death of Jesus Christ. By learning to "imitate" Jesus we in fact become part of God's very life and therein find our true home. We become holy by becoming citizens in God's kingdom, thereby manifesting the unrelenting love of God's nature.

If we have a "foundation" it is the story of Christ. "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Here Paul speaks not of some form of individualistic perfection, but rather of the building of a community—a body of people. But such a people can survive only if their commitments to one another are built on commitment to Christ.

Such a foundation is not extra-rational; indeed, it is a claim

about reality—namely, that our existence is God-given and -formed. Such a claim is properly interpreted, as are all claims, within a community that seeks to understand its world. At least the beginning of wisdom in human communities is the recognition that our lives are narrative dependent, that we are pilgrims on a journey, even if we are not sure what that journey entails. That we Christians witness to a man's life, a man called Jesus, who is the heartbeat of our life and the meaning and form of our existence becomes intelligible (and therefore rational) in the light of such narrative dependency.

It is our conviction that we are provided with a truthful account of reality that enables us to see our life as more than a succession of events when we learn to locate our story in God's story. That does not mean our life has a singular goal or meaning; rather, the story of God we learn through Christ gives us the skills to go on even when no clear goal is present. We rightly seek neither happiness nor pleasure in themselves; such entities are elusive. Rather we learn happiness and pleasure when we find in a faithful narrative an ongoing and worthy task that is able to sustain our lives.

By learning to understand ourselves as creatures, as beings open to the redemption made possible by Jesus' preaching of the kingdom, we are able to place ourselves within God's story. As creatures we learn to understand our lives as a story God is telling:

> a story which begins in the primeval creative utterance and which will one day, having reached its appointed conclusion, end. Only the Author of the drama is in a position to specify clearly the ultimate significance of the roles which particular creatures are called upon to play. Only he may finally see how the various roles make up a coherent whole. The creature who plays his role may be very uncertain whether the story is now in its final chapters or whether the plot is really just beginning to get off the ground. In short, the creature is not responsible for the whole of the story or for all the consequences of his action. Rather, he is responsible for playing well the role allowed him. To understand ourselves as creatures is to believe that we ought not step out of the story and think of ourselves as author rather than character. We are not to orchestrate the final denouement; we are simply to be responsible.[29]

Put simply, we Christians are not called on to be "moral" but faithful to the true story, the story that we are creatures under the Lordship of a God who wants nothing more than our faithful service. By such service we become not "moral," it seems, but like God, holy.

Thus those who claim we must choose between revelation and reason in order to characterize our knowledge of God and his moral will for us are imposing foreign abstractions on the way we see the scriptural narrative work. Revelation is reasonable if we place it within the ongoing story of God's calling of Israel and his redemption wrought in Christ. The affirmation of God as creator is not the basis for establishing a "natural knowledge of God"—though certainly I would not deny that such knowledge may exist. Rather, "God as creator" is a reminder that we are creatures who are participants and actors in his world. We are such actors exactly because we have a nature that is open to historical determination.

To return to Hughes, the dichotomy between reason and revelation is particularly distorting when it is used to force claims of a "specifically religious morality" into a position of arbitrariness. He thinks that a specifically religious morality implies that we worship and serve a God who arbitrarily issues commands for no reason. Yet, as we have seen, that is not the God whom we find in Scripture calling us to be holy. To be sure God issues "commands," but God's commands make sense within his purpose of creating a people capable of witnessing in the world to the kingdom.[30]

Nor is such a God, as Hughes suggests, "someone whom man can accept as the ultimate answer to his legitimate aspirations." God's ways are not our ways. God commands us so in order to train our aspirations and desires, for we do not know what we should rightly desire. God trains us to desire rightly by calling us to be partakers and citizens in a kingdom through which we learn to be creatures, to have characters appropriate to God's Lordship, to be redeemed.

The task of Christian ethics is imaginatively to help us understand the implications of that kingdom. Or as I have said elsewhere: Christian ethics is the disciplined activity which analyzes and imaginatively tests the images most appropriate to orchestrate the Christian life in accordance with the central conviction that the world has been redeemed by the work of Jesus Christ.[31] Christian ethics as such is not in principle methodologically different from other ethics, for I suspect all accounts of the moral life require some appeal to the virtues, principles, and the narrative display of each. What makes Christian ethics Christian is not our methodology, but the content of our convictions.

Hughes is right to say that those convictions, especially as we find them in Scripture, require interpretation. But that is not, as he alleges, because we have become particularly aware of the cultural limits of the texts. Rather the texts require interpretation because

they do not pretend to be self-interpreting. Scripture itself initiates us into this activity, for so much of it is interpretation on itself. For example, the New Testament is in many ways a midrash on the Hebrew Scriptures through which we Christians try to understand better what it means to be part of God's people in the light of God's presence to us in Jesus of Nazareth.[32]

But the New Testament is hardly self-interpreting. We have, after all, four Gospels, each with its own particular emphasis. These differences are not necessarily incompatible, but neither is their interrelation clear. They must be interpreted, and that requires not only careful historical research, but, even more, our willingness to be morally formed in a manner appropriate to the claims of those texts. Indeed, the diversity of Scripture is at the heart of the Christian life insofar as it requires that we be a community, a church, capable of allowing these differing texts be read amongst us with authority.

We Christians must recognize, by the very fact that we are a people of a book, that we are a community which lives through memory. We do not seek a philosophical truth separate from the book's text. Rather, we are a people of a book because we believe that "the love that moves the sun and the stars" is known in the people of Israel and the life of a particular man, Jesus. Such "truth" is inherently contingent; it can only be passed on from one generation to another by memory. We test our memory with Scripture as we are rightly forced time after time to seek out new implications of that memory by the very process of passing it on.

So memory is a moral exercise. We must be the kind of people capable of remembering our failures and sins if we are rightly to tell the story we have been charged to keep, for a proper telling requires that we reveal our sin. To acknowledge the authority of Scripture is also to learn to acknowledge our sin and accept forgiveness. It is only through forgiveness that we are able to witness to how that story has formed our lives.

Therefore, Christians claim or attribute authority to Scripture because it is the irreplaceable source of the stories that train us to be a faithful people. To remember, we require not only historical-critical skills, but examples of people whose lives have been formed by that memory. The authority of Scripture is mediated through the lives of the saints identified by our community as most nearly representing what we are about. Put more strongly, to know what Scripture means, finally, we must look to those who have most nearly learned to exemplify its demands through their lives.

I suppose Hughes could say—"Ah! But you see you still need a criterion of reason separate from the Scripture to prevent arbitrariness, for how do you know who the saints are?" There is some truth to this: we do need to try to say why some exemplify God's story better than others. However, the "reason" required is not "extra-theological." It comes from the very community formed by the memory of God's promises to us. Thus the "criterion" is not so much like a principle as it is like a story that the saints' lives exhibit. Through the lives of the saints we begin to understand how the images of Scripture are best balanced so that we might tell and live the ongoing story of God's unceasing purpose to bring the world to the peace of the kingdom.[33]

Notes

1. CHRISTIAN ETHICS IN A FRAGMENTED AND VIOLENT WORLD

1. This way of putting the matter is misleading in itself, for to insist on a qualifier seems to assume the "ethics" is an identifiable activity prior to the qualifier. Yet that is certainly not the case for religious traditions. The Western philosophical tradition, however, has developed a relatively coherent account of "ethics" as the investigation and analysis of the good. However, that tradition is marked by deep disagreements that certainly defeat any attempts to make ethics an integral discipline.

2. Thus the very interesting development of courses in medical ethics, business ethics, legal ethics, professional ethics in our colleges and universities. While not a bad thing in themselves, such courses cannot pretend to supply an adequate "ethic" for the various activities, much less ensure that the practitioners will act "ethically" as the result of such courses. This is not because of a lack of good will but because the very meaning of "ethics" is an essentially contested concept.

3. For a critique of quandary ethics see Edmund Pincoff's "Quandary Ethics" in *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 92–111.

4. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 1.

5. Ibid., p. 2. For a more extended analysis of MacIntyre's important book see my and Paul Wadell's review in *The Thomist* 46/2 (April 1982), pp. 313–322.

6. Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1979).

7. Ibid., p. 25. Though I find Berger's analysis provocative, I do not agree with some of his methodological presuppositions—such as the very concept of "plausibility structure."

8. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 22.

9. Ibid., p. 30.

10. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1959), p. 39.

11. Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), 1094b15–27.

12. For a discussion of these issues see *Religion and Morality*, ed. Gene Outka and John Reeder (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1973).

13. John Coleman exemplifies this tension in his recent and very fine book, *An American Strategic Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982). Coleman sees better than most that Catholicism's contribution to the American polity requires the maintenance of a disciplined community, but just to the extent that American Catholics become assimilated within American society the basis of that discipline is undermined.

14. I do not mean to deny the significance of faith for understanding religious belief and practice. For example, see Wilfred Smith's *Faith and Belief* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), and David Burrell's insightful review of Smith's work, "Faith and Religious Convictions: Studies in Comparative Epistemology," *Journal of Religion* 63 (1983), 64–73. What I am objecting to is the tendency of modern theology to handle its theological program apologetically by attempting to show that faith is an unavoidable aspect of human experience such that religious convictions, whether true or not, are unavoidable.

15. For example, see *The Significance of Atheism* by Alasdair MacIntyre and Paul Ricoeur (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).

16. As Lessing put it, "If no historical truth can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truths. That is: accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason." And, of course, it is only the latter that we think capable of sustaining a true morality. Like Lessing, we fail to see that almost all "necessary truths of reason" are fundamentally uninteresting or illusory. "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power," in *Lessing's Theological Writings,* translated with an Introduction by Henry Chadwick (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1956), p. 53.

2. A QUALIFIED ETHIC: THE NARRATIVE CHARACTER OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

1. Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 29–39.

2. Ibid., p. 29.

3. Ibid., p. 11. For a similar argument see my "Learning to See Red Wheelbarrows: On Vision and Relativism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45 (June 1977), 644–655.

4. Williams, *Morality*, pp. 3–4.

5. See David Solomon, "Rules and Principles," *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, Vol. I., ed. Warren Reich (New York: The Free Press, 1978), pp. 407–413. See also G. J. Warnock's *The Object of Morality* (New York: Methuen, 1971) for an analysis of rules and their relation to the virtues.

6. See Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 12.

7. For example, William Frankena simply assumes in his widely influential *Ethics* that the question "What ought I (or we) to do?" is primary. *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 12.

8. For example, see the exchange between Frankena and me in the *Journal of Religious Ethics* 3 (Spring 1975), 27–62.

9. For a more complete account of these alternatives than that given above see Frankena's *Ethics*, pp. 14–20.

10. See, for example, Paul Ramsey's stress on covenant in his book, *The Patient as Person* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969).

11. The classical statement of this position, for all its oversimplification, remains Joseph Fletcher's *Situation Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966). Ramsey, of course, began his work stressing love as the central, if not overriding, concept for Christian ethics. However, he was forced to employ the conceptually clumsy device of "rule inprincipled love" to distinguish his position from Fletcher's. For example, see Ramsey's *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), pp. 117–144. Ramsey's development of the theme of covenant fidelity, while present from the beginning, in his later work provided a more appropriate expression for his basic insights.

12. See, for example, Anthony Phillips's treatment of the decalogue in his, *Ancient Israel's Criminal Law* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970).

13. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 135. Also see his discussion on pp. 163ff.

14. For a fuller analysis of the place of narrative in theology see Michael Goldberg's *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982).

15. The creeds are often attempts to discriminate between various accounts of the story. They thus act as a critical guide to help us to know better which of the accounts are insufficient. But the creeds do not determine *the* story, as if it is a single story, but rather they mark the stories that should rightly command our attention in our attempt to be faithful to God.

16. Kenneth Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette

University Lectures, 1982), pp. 47–48. Schmitz uses this point to suggest that the gifted character of our existence is what is at stake in the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo*.

17. Schmitz, p. 56.

18. I am indebted to Philip Foubert for helping me distinguish these.

19. For example, Paul Ricoeur insightfully argues that "No biblical narrative works merely as narrative. It receives not only its theological but even its original religious meaning from its composition with other modes of discourse. I have underlined elsewhere the unbreakable conjunction between narratives and Laws within the Torah. Laws transform narratives into instruction and narratives transform Law into gift. Then we are led to acknowledge that the Hebraic tradition is prevented from becoming a mystifying ideology, thanks to its dialectical relation to prophecy. Prophecy, on the one hand, reveals within the narratives themselves the potential of unfulfilled promises which re-orient the story of the past toward the future. Narratives, on the other hand, provide the eschatological anticipation of the 'new' era with images and types. This typological use of past stories for the sake of the projection of the future gives to the narratives themselves a meaningfulness which is quite alien to ordinary story-telling. Furthermore, we have to take into account the deep impact of the wisdom literature on the narratives themselves which henceforth display the imprint of perpetuity characteristic of the wisdom sayings. This transfiguration of narratives through wisdom, added to the typological use of past stories for the sake of the anticipation of the era to come, puts biblical narratives outside the stream of popular story-telling. Finally, the re-enactment of the narratives in the cultic situation and their recounting through the Psalms of praise, of lamentation and of penitence, complete the complex intertwining between narrative and non-narrative modes of discourse. The whole range of modes may thus be seen as distributed between the two poles of storytelling and praising. This dialectic between narrative and non-narrative expressions of the faith is neither weakened nor simplified in the New Testament writings. On the contrary, the 'new utterance'—to use Amos Wilder's phrase—generates new polarities such as the new and the old, the already there and the not yet, whose tensions give to the New Testament narratives a special style. These tensions become conspicuous when we compare the minimal narratives of the purely Kerygmatic expressions of faith and the extended narratives of the synoptic tradition. In this tradition the relation between proclamation and narrative may appear as a retrieval within the New Testament of the Old Testament polarity of praise and narration." "Toward a Narrative Theology," Address given at Haverford College, Spring 1982, pp. 16–17.

20. For an extraordinary account of the narrative character and art of the Hebrew scripture see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). Alter argues that there is an intrinsic connection between Israel's monotheism and the narrative art displayed in Hebrew Scripture, as the former necessarily creates the space that makes necessary the display of intentional activity. Though Alter's insistence on monotheism as the hallmark of the conception of God in Scripture is overdrawn, his essential point seems to me right.

21. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), pp. 178–179.

3. ON BEING HISTORIC: AGENCY, CHARACTER, AND SIN

1. The importance of our nature for the moral life has generally been overlooked in modern ethics because of its stress on freedom. Yet it is our nature, particularly in the form of our desires, that forces us to be moral. Lust, for example, certainly can be chaotic, but it can also set us on a way of life that makes us care about something. It is therefore a precious resource which we cannot do without.

2. Conrad's depiction of Martin Decoud in *Nostromo* is one of his most compelling portraits in this respect.

3. Frithjof Bergmann, *On Being Free* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), p. 57. I am indebted to Bergmann's analysis for the argument of this chapter, for reasons that should be obvious.

4. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* trans. Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), 1114b1–7.

5. Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1975), p. 115.

6. Gene Outka, "Character, Vision, and Narrative," *Religious Studies Review* 6/2 (April 1980), p. 112.

7. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 202.

8. Timothy O'Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality* (New York: Seabury, 1978), p. 59.

9. Ibid., p. 60.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., p. 62.

12. Ibid., p. 63.

13. Ibid., p. 64.

14. Ibid., p. 65.

15. Charles Taylor's *Explanation of Behavior* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1964) still seems to me to be one of the best defenses of these points.

16. Richard Bondi, "Fidelity and the Good Life," Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Notre Dame, 1981, p. 162. I am indebted to Bondi's criticism of some of my earlier formulations of the relation between character and agency.

17. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 204.

18. Ibid., p. 206.

19. Ibid., p. 207.

20. In his *Struggle and Fulfillment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), Donald Evans has provided a particularly compelling account of the pervasiveness of distrust in our lives. For an appreciative, but critical review of Evans's position, see Richard Bondi's and my "Language Experience, and the Life Well-lived: A Review of the Work of Donald Evans," *Religious Studies Review* 9/1 (January 1983), pp. 33–37.

21. O'Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality*, p. 71.

22. Karl Barth's account of pride and sloth is unsurpassed in contemporary theology. The kind of pride and the kind of sloth that is our sin Barth rightly argues is only exposed in terms of Jesus' true humility and work as God's messiah. See his *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1 trans. G. M. Bromiley (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), pp. 413–478 and *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, trans. G. M. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), pp. 378–498.

4. ON BEGINNING IN THE MIDDLE: NATURE, REASON, AND THE TASK OF THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

1. We still lack a good history of the development of Catholic moral theology. Though often deserving many of the criticisms made of it, the critics usually attack more a caricature rather than the practice. However, this is partly due to the fact that Catholic moral theology so often presented itself in caricature, because it lacked the means to describe its richer activity. For a short history of moral theology see Timothy O'Connell's *Principles of Catholic Morality* (New York: Seabury, 1978), pp. 10–19. James Gustafson's *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) is an irreplaceable source for understanding the issues between Catholic and Protestant ethics.

2. For example, see Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, II/2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961). There Barth maintains "that general conception of ethics coincides exactly with the conception of sin" (p. 518).

3. For a more detailed treatment of the development of Protestant Christian ethics see my article, "On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological" in *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 16–42.

4. Indeed, the very phrase "biblical ethic" is as misleading as "biblical theology," for each of these phrases denotes a unity that the Scripture simply does not possess. For an important attempt to show the theological significance of the diversity of Scripture see Paul Hanson, *The Diversity of Scripture: A Theological Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

5. On the structure of the *Summa Theologica* see M. Dominigu Chenu, O.P., "Introduction to the *Summa* of Saint Thomas," in *Theorist Reader: Texts and Studies* (Washington, D.C.: The Thomist Press, 1958).

6. I first learned this way of putting the matter from Julian Hartt. In particular see his *Christian Critique of American Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). The emphasis on the practical nature of Christian convictions is not meant to deny that metaphysical claims are also involved. Certainly, theological claims involve metaphysical drafts on reality—e.g., that the world is finite. By emphasizing the practical nature of languages, however, I hope to remind us that finiteness is not just an ontological, but also a moral, claim.

7. "Decree on Priestly Formation," *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott (New York: American Press, 1966), p. 452.

8. O'Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality*, pp. 39–40.

9. Ibid., p. 40. Some may feel I have unfairly singled out O'Connell for criticism since he represents a widely shared position particularly among Catholics. I have, however, concentrated on O'Connell because he has said so well what many others only imply or say in a confused manner. Moreover the popularity of his book suggests that his position rings true to many and thus it is important that I try to state my differences with him.

10. Ibid., pp. 20–29.

11. Ibid., p. 35, his italics. O'Connell's claim in this respect is widely shared in contemporary theology. Jesus is thus the "man for others" or the paradigm of "self-giving love." The problem with such claims is that it makes it extremely hard to understand Jesus' death, since he was not put to death just because he wished to be self-giving. Surely the Romans (and some Jews) saw that he was a political threat. To place all the emphasis on Jesus as a "Christ figure" or an example of God's eternal graciousness is to lose the eschatological framework of the Gospels without which Jesus' preaching of the kingdom is unintelligible.

12. Charles Curran, in particular, tends to such abstractions by isolating what he calls the "fivefold Christian mysteries of creation, sin, incarnation, redemption, and resurrection destiny." *Moral Theology: A Continuing Journey* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), p. 38. Curran seems to assume that the meaning of these abstractions is clear

and that the theologian's task is basically to see that some are not emphasized to the expense of others—thus it is said, "some Protestant theologians deny the goodness of creation," p. 39. But the issue is what is meant by creation, or sin, and how such notions derive their intelligibility from Christian tradition. Curran's use of these terms turns them into lifeless abstractions.

This is not to deny that "nature" is an essential category for theological reflection. But that it is so does not mean that nature has an integrity sufficient to sustain an autonomous ethic. We are "natural" to the extent that God has created us capable of receiving his grace. We thus are by nature—that is, by God's will—beings independent of God. Yet our nature must remain incomplete, since by nature we are not sufficient in ourselves. Nature as a theological concept will always be ambiguous, since it is necessary for theological reflection, yet it cannot ever be intelligibly displayed or analyzed in itself. This way of putting the matter I owe to Professor Nicholas Lash.

13. It is interesting to note that when creation-redemption, nature-grace are made primary in order to underwrite a universal ethic there is a tendency to justify violence as a legitimate form of Christian behavior. For it is alleged that Christians must take responsibility for "creation" even if it means the use of violence. Moreover the "redemption" wrought becomes an ideal that is explicated in abstraction from Jesus' life and teaching. Thus Jesus' redemption is affirmed but not in a manner that we must take his teachings seriously for the guiding of our lives. But Jesus' "redemption" is not in discontinuity with his teaching, for unless we take the latter seriously we cannot know the meaning of the former.

14. Joseph Fuchs, "Is There a Specifically Christian Morality?" in *Readings in Moral Theology, No. 2: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, ed. Charles Curran and Richard McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 5–6.

15. Ibid., p. 7.

16. Ibid., p. 8.

17. Ibid., p. 15.

18. Richard McCormick, "Does Faith Add to Ethical Perception," in *Readings in Moral Theology, No. 2: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, ed. Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, p. 169.

19. For example, see my response to Richard Neuhaus's statement, "Christianity and Democracy" in the *Center Journal* 1/3 (Summer 1982), pp. 42–51.

20. McCormick, p. 157.

21. This is an issue largely overlooked in most Christian systematic theology. John Howard Yoder has done more than anyone to reestablish the significance and primacy of church-world categories. For example, see Yoder's *Christian Witness to the State* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1977).

22. The command to forgive our enemies should surely be the most provocative reminder of how misleading is the claim that Christian ethics is human ethics. Human ethics is built on the assumption of the legitimacy of self-defense—as are also most accounts of natural law ethics that legitimate survival as the source of moral principles. On the other hand, Christian ethics severely qualifies that "desire."

23. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 197.

24. Ibid., p. 205.

25. McCormick, p. 157.

26. Gerald Hughes, *Authority in Morals* (London: Heythrop College, 1978), pp. v–vi.

27. Ibid., p. 5 (italics mine).

28. For example, see David Burrell's account of analogical argument in his "Argument in Theology: Analogy and Narrative" in *New Dimensions in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Carl Raschke (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982). Burrell argues, "The difference between ambiguous and analogous expression lies in using them systematically—that is, so as to show how the many uses can be related to one. We accomplish this, quite simply, by giving an example. Yet since examples are not ordinarily produced—as in kindergarten show-and-tell—but narrated, what we in fact do when we give an instance is tell a story."

See also Nicholas Lash, "Ideology, Metaphor, and Analogy," in *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology*, ed. B. Hebblethwaite and S. Sutherland (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), for an extremely nuanced account of the relation between narrative and metaphysics.

29. Gilbert Meilaender, "Against Abortion: A Protestant Proposal," *The Linacre Quarterly* 45 (May 1978), 169.

30. For some reason those concerned with the validity or invalidity of the "Divine command theory" insist on ignoring this simple fact.

31. Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (reprint, Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 2.

32. I am acutely aware that the issues raised here require a much fuller discussion of hermeneutics than I am able to supply. However, for a position with which I have much sympathy see Charles Wood, *The Formation of Christian Understanding: An Essay in Theological Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981). Wood's discussion of the nature of canonicity seems to me to be particularly fruitful. For example, he suggests, "The form of the canon itself may indicate something of its mode of functioning. When one regards the biblical canon as a whole, the centrality to it of a narrative element is difficult to overlook: not only the chronological sweep of

the whole, from creation to new creation, including the various events and developments of what has sometimes been called 'salvation history,' but also the way the large narrative portions interweave and provide a context for the remaining materials so that they, too, have a place in the ongoing story, while these other materials—parables, hymns, prayers, summaries, theological expositions—serve in different ways to enable readers to get hold of the story and to live their way into it. This overall narrative character of the canon, together with its designation as Word of God, suggests that the canon might plausibly be construed as a story which has God as its 'author.' It is a story in which real events and persons are depicted in a way that discloses their relationship to God and to God's purposes; a story that finally involves and relates all persons and events, and which, as it is told and heard in the power of God's Spirit, becomes the vehicle of God's own definitive self-disclosure. God is not only the author of this story but its chief character as well; so that as the story unfolds we come to understand who God is. And because God is not only the chief character but also the author, the story's disclosure is God's self-disclosure. We become acquainted with God as the one who is behind this story and within it. The canon, thus construed, norms Christian witness not by providing sample statements by which to test other statements, nor by providing ideals of some other sort, but by reminding the community of the identity of the one whose word they bear" (pp. 100–101).

33. For a fuller working out of this suggestion see Patrick Sherry, "Philosophy and the Saints," *Heythrop Journal* 18 (1977), 23–37.

5. JESUS: THE PRESENCE OF THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM

1. For just one example see A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), p. 84.

2. Jesus' emphasis on the Kingdom in itself was not unique. As Sean Freyne suggests, "According to Acts 5:33–39 such an influential Pharisaic scribe as Gamaliel I, Paul's teacher, was prepared to let the new movement take its course and attempt to authenticate its claims that it was from God. At Qumran the teacher of righteousness and his followers clearly experienced the presence of the new age in their own community which they can describe as 'the covenant which God established with Israel forever in the land of Damascus.' Throughout the whole first century a series of Zealot leaders presented themselves as messianic figures who were about to launch the final holy war against evil. . . . In itself then, there was nothing startlingly new in the proclamation of God's kingly rule, even in its final phase, as present and operative." *The World of the New Testament* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1980), p. 139.

3. See Gerza Vermes's cautions about the language of Christology for analysis of the Gospels. Gerza Vermes, "The Gospels without Christology," in *God Incarnate: Story and Belief*, ed. A. E. Harvey (London: SPCK, 1981), pp. 55–68. It may be objected that the Pauline writings stand as clear evidence against the claim made here. However I would argue that though Paul's letters do not provide the details about Jesus' life as do the Gospels, they in fact presuppose those details. Moreover Paul's scheme of redemption, his eschatology, is nothing less than the story of God that makes Jesus' life from birth to the resurrection essential for that scheme's coherence.

4. Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word of God* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 34.

5. I am indebted to Dr. Rowan Greer for this interpretation of the Patristic understanding of the incarnation.

6. E. J. Tinsley, *The Imitation of God in Christ* (London, S.C.M. Press, 1960), p. 31.

7. Ibid., p. 35.

8. Ibid., p. 55.

9. Here, Tinsley is quoting from H. H. Rowley's *The Unity of the Bible*, p. 25.

10. Ibid., p. 61.

11. Ibid., pp. 86–87. The strong emphasis on the continuity between Jesus and Israel may be felt to be misleading exactly in terms of the central theme of this book—namely, nonviolence. For the depiction of war and violence in the Hebrew Scriptures continues to underwrite the crude, but still powerful picture held by many, that the God of the Old Testament is one of wrath and vengeance compared to the New Testament God of mercy and love. Yet those who hold this picture often, ironically, appeal to the Hebrew Scriptures to justify Christian approval of war. It is beyond the scope of this book to attempt to challenge this understanding of war in the Hebrew Scripture. However see Millard Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1980), for a carefully developed argument that makes views such as the above exigetically doubtful. Lind argues that "Yahweh the warrior fought by means of miracle, not through the armies of his people; 'it was not by your sword or by your bow' (Josh. 24:12). By miracle we mean an act of deliverance that was outside of Israel's control, beyond the manipulation of any human agency. This conviction was so emphatic that Israel's fighting, while at times a sequel to the act of Yahweh, was regarded ineffective; faith meant that Israel should rely upon Yahweh's miracle for her defense, rather than upon