

PART 1 : ESTABLISHING MORAL NORMS

1. The Nature of Ethics

Even for a good cause, Christians have recognized for millennia that lying is sinful. God miraculously avoided both the border guards and the moral dilemmas.

There are three levels that Ethics operate. The first level, descriptive ethics, simply portrays moral actions or virtues. A second level, **normative ethics**, examines the first level, evaluating action or virtues as morally right or wrong. A third level, **metaethics**, analyzes the second, normative ethics. It clarifies the meanings of ethical terms and assesses the principles of ethical argument. All three levels are important to ethics. Keeping them distinct is also important.

God is the ultimate ground of the good for traditional Christian ethics. Because God grounds ethics either by his will or by his nature. Traditional Christians often believe that the ethical principles that guide human interactions are absolute because God is the creator of all human life.

The existence of moral absolutes enters into discussions of the existence of God at several levels. Objective moral values which are real and true for all men regardless of whether any person or culture believes them to be true. Many people reject the existence of moral absolutes, opting for some form of moral relativism. In turn, moral relativism elicits arguments by absolutists defending the existence of objective morality.

Cultural relativism is the descriptive, factual thesis, often made by anthropologists and sociologists have disparate views on basic ethical judgments. Two things should be pointed out about cultural relativism. First, cultural relativism is not a moral thesis at all. It is not a

statement of morality, but a statement about morality. Second, cultural relativism may even be weak as a descriptive thesis. When due consideration is given to factual clarification, cultures exhibit a widespread agreement in basic ethical values.

Normative relativism is a substantive moral thesis which holds that every one ought to act in accordance with his own society's code. What is right for one society is not necessarily right for another society. The act is right if it is in keeping with the code of the agent's society.

Several things can be said against normative relativism. First, it is difficult to define what a society is, and even if that can be done, it is difficult in many cases to identify the morally relevant society. Second, moral agents can be members of more than one society at the same time. Third, normative relativism suffers from an objection called the reformer's dilemma. Fourth, some acts are wrong regardless of social conventions. Fifth, it is difficult to see how one society could blame another one. Finally, if one asks about the moral status of the principle of normative relativism itself, then it seems that normative relativism is really an absolutist position and not a genuine relativist one.

Metaethical relativism is an even more radical thesis than is normative relativism. According to metaethical relativism, the *meanings of moral terms of appraisal* such as right and wrong are themselves relative to one's society. Metaethical relativism suffers from some of the same problems that were raised against normative relativism. Problems of defining a society and determining the relevant society for the act and the agent and the fact that some acts are wrong regardless of what societies mean by *right or wrong*.

Ethical skepticism is the thesis that no one's ethical beliefs are true or rational. There are two main varieties of ethical skepticism an epistemological version and an ontological one. The epistemological version does not state that there are no objective moral values which are true.

The principle of tolerance has been defined in several ways, but the sense of the principle common to most definitions is this: Morally, I ought to tolerate the moral opinions and behavior of others who disagree with me. I should not try to interfere with their opinions or behavior.

It is often thought that the principle of toleration follows from some form of moral relativism and that it is inconsistent [with] moral absolutism. The principle of toleration does not follow from cultural relativism, for cultural relativism is a mere factual claim that entails no ethical claim whatever.

We must now move from these generalities to a more detailed account of the nature of the Kingdom of God. First, the Kingdom or society of God consists in harmonious relations between God and humans, between individual humans, between groups of humans, between humans and the creation order both animate and inanimate, and between each individual human and himself or herself. Second, the Kingdom of God is not a collective in which the individual is sacrificed for the group. Third, it is important to recognize that the Kingdom of God has a historical dimension. Fourth, we may ask what forms of harmonious relationship are typical of the Kingdom of God. Fifth, the church is meant to provide a picture of the kingdom "before the watching world."

Sixth, from the standpoint of the Christian teleological view, harmonious relations between the various levels of being are also aspects of the kingdom.

A central feature of relationships is the fact that persons place demands expectations, requests, commands upon each other. These demands are the raw materials out of which relationships are constructed. Demands can create obligations if relationships are valued, because there can be no worthwhile relationships if we entirely ignore the demands (expectations, requests, etc.) of others. Normally, the demands of one's society, as expressed in its convention, create moral obligations provided they do not conflict with the demands of God.

One can describe the Kingdom of God as a tapestry of lives in which the weave is determined by the particular vocations of individuals. One demand God places on each person is unique to that person. Some of God's demands are general, applying to all humans, but others are directed at individuals.

It is popular today to describe Christian ethics as 'alien' to the non-Christian. To many writers it seems that Christian ethics are unrelated to reality—a set of norms imposed on the Christian by virtue of his obedience to Christ, and for no other reason than that God says so.

The traditional answer to this view of Christian ethics has been in terms of a doctrine of 'natural law'. Unfortunately, this is an ambiguous term, but basically the 'natural law' approach argues that Christian ethics are firstly, 'natural' to man or correspond to man's true nature, and secondly, can be shown by a process of natural reason unaided by revelation.

The Christian approach we want to make is in terms of what may be called *creation* ethics as opposed to *natural* law. Natural law has to start with experience—what is—and to try to get from there to what ought to be. Creation ethics start with God and his will for living in his creation. Natural law starts with the world and tries to work to moral imperatives. Creation ethics start with God and his revelation and, looking at the world as his creation, works toward moral imperatives that are both divine commands and also good sense.

The idea of a creation for ethics is associated with the concept of creation ordinances. It is important to see these also not as mere divine artifacts imposed upon an amorphous humanity. They are rather the divinely given structures which are a part of God's creation.

Christians believe they will in time, how alarmingly inferior the modern, secular alternatives are. But the truth begins to emerge increasingly clearly.

The Christian has *insight* into reality that should enable him to apply the commands properly. The commands have a different and far richer aspect when they are known to be 'wise'

and not merely expedient, i.e. to embody true insight and to be set in a context of which that insight is a part.

It could be argued that the Fall or equally the present sinfulness of man has so massed things up that the ideal is now unrealistic. Sin in the world and in human nature has chiefly the effect that we have to have an order of priority of moral values because the ideal cannot always be reached. We are sometimes faced with a decision as to what is the *lesser evil* of the choices now left open to us.

The Christian is bound to declare that Christian morals are for all men just because all men are made by God in his image and Christian morals are his prescription and his loving command for all his intelligent creatures.

Therefore, Christian ethics are for the good of all men and can be seen in considerable detail to be so. They are also part of a package deal of revealed ethics and finally, as we have argued. They are to a remarkable extent the same in detail as the ethics that even the nations without the Christian revelation acknowledge. This being particularly true of those people who have thought out an ethical system most carefully.

It seems that ethics are more than just a matter of culture and opinion. There are ethical truths which are part of the way in which things are made. They are part of the reality of life, of creation. We can't altogether escape them unless we throw out so much that we are reduced to almost complete skepticism. Even if philosophically there remains much debate, the Christian can with confidence ask all men to accept that the basic ethical duties are some of the 'facts of life' and should be personally accepted by all men as a result.

The Christian claims all this is because Christian ethics are the duties that are man's in view of his being a creature in God's world.

There has been renewed interest on the part of philosophers and theologians in an ethics of divine command during the last several decades. Most basically, a divine command moralist holds that the standard of right and wrong is the command and prohibitions of God. According to a divine command moralist, it is not the case that God commands a particular action because it is right, or prohibits it because it is wrong, rather, an action is right or wrong because God commands or prohibits it.

It is by no means the only aspect of the divine nature to which this ethical position has been related while the appeal to God's causal powers represents one strain in the defense of the divine command theory. One can find yet other historical arguments which have the form of showing that an ethics of divine commands is compatible or consistent with some established attribute of God whereas rejection of this theory is not.

In this category of arguments is the contention that there cannot be anything which is independent to God. The suggested contention that a divine command theory must be adopted in the realm of ethics because there cannot be anything independent of God may be seen. We believe, as an attempt to capture the religious insight of the *absolute centrality* which God is to enjoy.

The strategy of establishing an analogy between what obtains in metaphysics and what obtains in ethics is employed and indeed ingeniously exploited. Peter of Ailly is taking the familiar medieval cosmological argument for the existence of God and constructing an analogue of it supporting an ethics of divine commands. The cosmological proof is divided into three stages: firstly, an argument that it is necessary to reach one first efficient cause; secondly, establishment of the contention that no created thing can serve this function; and thirdly, an argument that the first efficient cause is to be identified with the divine will. The analogous proof of divine command ethics likewise involves three steps.

One of the purposes of studying the history of philosophy is to gain insight into problems we are still grappling with today. An ethics of divine commands has not infrequently been perceived as a theory which reduces ethics to a matter of *power*.

It cannot be denied that the divine omnipotence has entered into the articulation and defense of an ethics of divine commands. Study of the historical literature does serve to indicate that the notions of God's omnipotence and of his power over us have not constituted the only considerations offered in support of the divine command theory. The theory has also been related to other divine attributes, such as God's impeccability. It has been related to the religious insight of the absolute centrality of God, expressed as the view that there cannot be anything which is independent of God.

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2. Grounding Moral Norms

Knowledge of human nature, according to the natural law theory, provides a foundation for understanding moral values and obligations. For a Christian natural law view, God created human life for certain purposes, and identifying these can help us develop and justify a Christian ethic.

Today natural has at least two connotations. First, it means that a true ethic is nature. This raises a problem for some. Critics argue that a natural-law ethic is only as good as the psychological theory on which it is based. Unfortunately, these theories are notoriously controversial. Second, "natural" can mean that human reason can discover a natural ethic without using special revelation. This sense of natural raises a significant difficulty: an association with the outdated epistemology of modernism.

However, evangelical ethicists adopt a characteristically Protestant stance toward the Bible. The Bible is the unique authority for conservative Protestants, so even those who adopt some form of the natural ethic will carefully protect the Scripture. In theory, evangelicals consistently resist the tendency to let presuppositions control the biblical message even though in practice.

Unlike personal choices, moral judgments belong to the public domain of reason. We evaluate other people's moral stances and we expect them to evaluate ours. We argue about them, even get angry about them, all of which presupposes some public criterion of right and wrong. This second account of moral disagreement is as inadequate as the first.

The natural ethic offers us this account of moral disagreement. When men look on the world as a whole they see different things. On the bare facts they may agree, but the structure of reality behind the facts they see quite differently. This affects the way they describe and understand the facts.

At the end of the Middle Ages, philosophers of science often stress that the Western scientific enterprise was born in an intellectual milieu marked by two parallel movements in philosophy, 'voluntarism' and 'nominalism'.

'Voluntarism' was the belief that good and evil are determined, not by God's intellect but by his will. A sharp distinction was made between fact and value. Nature, as the expression of God's mind, was value-free; questions of good and evil turned on what it was God's will from time to time to command.

'Nominalism' on the other hand was the contention that 'kinds' of things do not have any real existence in nature, but are simply interpretations that the mind imposes on particular phenomena. The particular is real, the universal is a construct of the mind.

The first principle of the natural ethic is that reality is given to us, not simply in discrete, isolated phenomena, but in kinds. Things have *a natural meaning*. The second principle is that these given kinds themselves are not isolated from each other, but relate to each other in a given pattern within the order of things. To know what that thing is, and to know what kind of thing is is to know how it fits into the whole, that it is for. Things have *a natural purpose*. In understanding the natural purpose of a thing, we attend to its claims on us, and so are able to deliberate on our response to that claim.

The understanding of fact and value was already implicit in the Old Testament conception which we call 'salvation history', the idea that meaning and worth were not to be found in the stabilities of nature but in the dynamisms of history. This conception reappears in Christianity in

two forms. On the one hand it underlies the notion of a historical revelation of the meaning of the universe in the incarnation of the Son of God. On the other hand it underlies the belief that all history is to reach its goal at the final intervention of God and the establishment of his kingdom.

To take the point about revelation first. Revelation in history is certainly the lynchpin of Christian epistemology. But epistemology is not the same thing as ontology, however often the Protestant world may have confused the two.

Christian eschatology, too, to take up the second point, has to be seen in the light of the doctrine of creation. Christianity is an eschatological faith, having as its central theme the experience and hope of redemption from evil. It is because God is the creator of nature that he does, and will, redeem nature from its state of corruption.

It is at the mercy either of a static naturalism or an indeterminate belief in progress, when thought fails to keep the Christian balance between meaning given in the natural order and meaning revealed in the course of history. The natural order makes claims upon us, which we must recognize and attend to; but the claims, are generic, and in some situations we confront more than one of them. Man, too, is a creature with his own natural meaning and purpose, and part of that purpose is to exercise authority over the rest of nature.

We have to proclaim the gospel in different cultural and philosophical contexts. Many of us have deep sympathy with the problems of the Third World. Others of us are concerned chiefly with the problems of the Western world. No doubt there is a temptation here: it is easy for the one group to think of the other as 'conservative' or 'radical'. But whenever we do this we exclude one side of the nature-history balance, and condemn our own stance to being less Christian for lack of that balance. We can make the mental and spiritual effort required of us to think beyond the issues that are all important to ourselves at the moment and to learn to appreciate each other's

proper concerns. As we do so we will approach nearer the point where we can grasp the Christian metaphysic in its wholeness and realize its significance for ethics.

There is a suggestion that a recovery of Christian doctrine is fundamental to a recovery of Christian ethics. In other words, Christian doctrine is what sets Christian ethics apart from the ethics of the world around us. It defines what is distinctive, what is Christian, about Christian ethics. To lose weight of the importance of doctrine is to lose the backbone of faith and to open the way to a spineless ethic.

Since it exposes these hidden doctrinal assumptions, the study of Christian doctrine is thus profoundly liberating. Every version of Christianity that has ever existed rests upon doctrinal foundations, but not every version of Christianity has grasped this fact. The genuine question of importance is quite simple; Which of those doctrinal foundations are the most authentic and reliable?

Christian doctrine is concerned to declare that Christian morality rests upon a secure foundation. An obedience response to truth is a mark of intellectual integrity. It marks a willingness to hear what purport to be truth, to judge it, and -if it is found to be true-to accept it willingly. Truth demands to be accepted because it inherently deserves to be accepted and acted upon.

Christian doctrine aims to describe the way things are. It is concerned to tell the truth in order that we may enter into and act upon that truth. It is an expression of a responsible and caring faith, a faith prepared to give an account of itself and to give careful consideration to its implications for the way we live. To care about doctrines is to care about the reliability of the foundations of the Christian life.

So there is a need to be able to develop a foundation for ethics. No longer need we pay excessive attention to the fictional of a universal framework of morality. Instead we may

concentrate upon what ways of thinking and what ways of acting are appropriate to the Christian community of faith.

Let us think of ourselves, our seminaries, our churches and our families as colonies of heaven, as outposts of the real eternal city, who seek to keep its laws in the midst of alien territory. There are many helpful ways of thinking about the Christian life, and one of the most helpful is that of the world as enemy territory, territory occupied by invading forces. In the midst of this territory, as resistance groups, are the communities of faith. We must never be afraid to be different from the world around us. It is very easy for Christians to be depressed by the fact that the world scorns our values and standards. But the image of the colony sets this in its proper context. Indeed, if a new dark age does indeed lie ahead of us, if it is already upon us, then it is vital that the Christian moral vision, like the torch of liberty, is kept alight. Doctrine gives us the framework for doing precisely that. It can be done-and it must be done.

We had best begin by trying to get into clear focus what we mean by authority, both in general and specifically in Christianity; then perhaps we shall be able to raise a little more enthusiasm for the idea of life under authority than we can muster now.

(1) Authority is a relational notion; it signifies superiority or dominance. To have authority is express in directives and acknowledged by compliance and conformity.

(2) Authority is a chameleon term, changing its quality, nuance and tone-its color, one might say-according to the frame of reference in which it appears.

(3) Authority-meaning here, moral authority in particular-is a teleological concept, one that relates to the finding and fulfilling of all that is involved in being human.

(4) Authority-meaning, still, moral authority in particular-is **increased by love** on the part of the authority-figure in the authority-relationship.

(5) Authority-meaning here, executive authority in particular-must be distinguished from authoritarianism. The distinction is crucial, for most complaints about authority in the human community turn out to be against authoritarianism in fact.

Our theme, the reconstitution of authority, presupposes that authority has broken down. Indeed it has; we know that all too well. Once the Christian outlook had authority for the entire Western world, giving purpose, perspective, and coherence to all branches of human endeavor and imparting a positive value to each individual's personal life.

First, the authority of Christian faith cannot possibly be restored unless the full content of that belief is put forward.

a) We should proclaim the God whom Paul announced at Athens and delineated more fully in Roman- eternal, sovereign, and free; wholly independent of his creation, though every creature depends on him entirely for everything, in every moment of life; omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.

(1) We should urge the **incompetence** of our minds, partly because of our creaturehood and partly because of our fallenness, to disagree with or improve upon, the account of God that is given in the biblical record and spelt out in the mainstream Christian tradition.

(2) We should insist on the **supernaturalness** of the Christian life and the Christian church. We should challenge the all-too-common assumption that there is no more to new birth than new behavior, no more to entering the new life than turning over a new leaf.

(3) We should point to the personal reappearance of Jesus Christ to renew all things as the one sure and certain hope for the Christian, the church and the world.

Second, the Christian faith cannot possibly be restored unless **the full Christian principle of authority** is put forward.

Third, the authority of Christian faith cannot possibly be restored save as **the full interpretation of Scripture** is welcomed. Broadly speaking, there are nowadays in the theological world three main types of interpreters.

(1) There are those, Protestant and Catholic, who uphold the church's historic belief in biblical inspiration. These conservatives mean by interpretation applying to ourselves the doctrinal and moral instruction of the Bible, read as a historically structured, self-authenticating and self-interpreting organism of revealed truth.

(2) There are those, Protestant and Catholic, who view Scripture as witness to God by godly men, who, though they thought wrongly of him at some points, thought rightly and profoundly of him at others.

(3) There are those, mainly, though not invariably, Protestant, for whom the New Testament (the Old is a separate problem) is a culturally determined verbalizing of ineffable existential encounters with God.

Faithfulness, fruitfulness and authority depend on the church adhering to the first method- which means, among other things, that we all must stop retreating from the bugaboo of an untheological inerrancy and once more embrace the whole Bible as the written word of God, to be interpreted on the assumption that is neither misinforms nor misleads. Only so, in my view, can our testimony carry the full authority of God, and gain full authority with men.

Effort to relate the Bible to ethics primarily as communal praxis have gathered significant momentum since Gustafson's "methodological study." First, the concerns of ethicists have moved from trying to assimilate biblical morality to the model of deductive argumentation to an interest in Scripture as foundational to the formation of communities of moral agency. Second, biblical scholars have become more explicitly aware of the social repercussions of discipleship as portrayed in the New Testament, and also more interested in drawing social and moral analogies

between the biblical world and our own. Recent commentators make it clear that Christian communities always give meaning and content to discipleship within specific social situations.

Although contemporary ethicists recognize the importance of grounding moral agency and evaluation in community, they still have not reached precision about the ways in which the biblical literature functions as an authority for that community. Most ethicists have found historical criticism helpful in the ways suggested by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza: It reminds us of the meaning of the original witness, over against later "usurpations"; it deters the assimilation of the text to self-interest; it challenges our own assumptions; and it limits the number of interpretations that can credibly be offered for a text.

Even if we set aside the multiple references of "Christian community," a huge remaining question for ethicists is how to guarantee the truth of the interpretations by the community. The more confessional ethicists as well as much recent biblical work take an "immersion" approach to the normative character of Scripture for ethics: Within the life of the faithful community moral orientations and actions are tested in experience or practice.

To summarize, community and praxis have become key in connecting Bible to ethics, and the ethical "message" of the Bible has clear socioeconomic overtones. (1) As revealed by historical and sociological studies, the New Testament itself emerges from, makes sense of, and forms a community of discipleship and moral practice. (2) The contribution of the Bible to ethics is at the level of community-formation, not primarily at that of rules or principles. (3) Both historically and normatively, the connection between the moral "meant" and "means" is the community, which seeks analogous expressions of its life. (4) Christian solidarity and equality challenge exploitative socioeconomic relationships that cause some to be deprived of basic necessities of life. (5) Praxis is the criterion or verification of ethical claims and injunctions (epistemology is grounded in praxis). (6) This approach makes a defense against relativist self-

enclosure by noting that in reality there never have been nonpolitical, nonperspectival criteria of truth and by recognizing that Christian community overlaps and interacts with other communities both in identity formation and in social transformation.

PART 2 : APPLYING MORAL NORMS

3. Moral Dilemmas

A moral dilemma is a situation in which there is a conflict between absolutes, that is, between several God-given moral norms that allow no exceptions. Ethicists frequently call these quandaries **moral dilemmas** or **conflicts of duty**.

We should acknowledge that morally ambiguous situations abound whatever we believe about moral dilemmas. It is certainly not true that ethical questions are neat and tidy. Real-life situations present many complex factors. Failing to recognize this complexity can lead to a simplistic and rigid legalism or to a loss of Christian compassion. Since Christians value Christlike virtue, this is as much a danger as making a wrong choice. In future chapters, we can explore further the connection of ethical principles to moral contexts. This is a significant question, one which any normative ethic must face and answer.

Non-conflicting absolutism builds its entire structure upon the foundational principle that there are numerous ethical absolutes given by God. These are moral norms and standards, such as "speak the truth," "do not murder," "enjoy sex only with your spouse," which admit of no exceptions or exemptions, and are binding upon all people at all time. But non-conflicting absolutism insists that these absolutes are given by God, are based (directly or indirectly) upon scriptural revelation, and are able to be discerned through reverent and objective study.

We desire automatically to love our neighbor when we seek to love God supremely, because this is commanded by the God we love above all else (John 14:15). However, our concern for our neighbor is never to be actualized at the expense of loving God. In all of our

service to people, love for God and obedience to his revealed truth must be kept paramount, otherwise our "love" for others can easily degenerate into sentimentality, carnality, and avoidance of responsibility. Neighbor-love is best defined as that virtue of mind, emotions, and will which seeks another person's highest good, according to scriptural standards.

Although there are occasions when they appear to conflict. divinely-given moral absolutes never truly conflict. Non-conflicting absolutism holds that there will never be a situation in which obedience to one absolute will entail disobedience to or the setting-aside of another absolute. Non-conflicting absolutism holds that all relevant absolutes can and must be followed in situations of apparent conflict.

Non-conflicting absolutists pay close attention to the definition and scriptural basis of each moral absolute. To suggest that non-conflicting absolutists can be termed "unqualified absolutism" is not really accurate, because non-conflicting absolutism does recognize qualifications and even exceptions, but these are always within the absolute itself. They are part of the absolute and are therefore not exceptions to the absolute in which case they would be external to the absolute. An exception or qualification built into the absolute itself is not an exception to the absolute for then it could no longer qualify as an absolute, but is an integral part of the absolute.

Advocates of non-conflicting absolutists realize how harsh, unfeeling, simplistic, and naive their position sometimes appears to be, yet we maintain that God is most honored and people are most loved when we follow God's moral absolutes.

Non-conflicting absolutism is primarily and essentially deontological rather than teleological. Deontological ethics stresses that the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined ultimately by an established, obligatory standard of conduct, whereas teleological ethics considers the rightness or wrongness of an action to be determined ultimately by the

anticipated consequences of the action. Non-conflicting absolutism stresses duties rather than results. We follow a given norm first of all because it is good in itself to do so, not primarily because it appears that it will produce good effects.

There are times when the principle of double effect, used judiciously, can be helpful in the application of moral absolutes. This centuries-old principle teaches that in cases of ethical conflict where it appears that a given action will produce two effects, one desirable and one undesirable, it may be permissible to perform the action as long as the undesirable effect is not directly intended. We do recognize that there is some validity to the principle in general, while non-conflicting absolutism does not necessarily endorse every detail of the principle of double effect.

The very definition and nature of absolutes argues for non-conflicting absolutism. If, as we believe, an absolute is a universally-binding moral norm or directive which admits of no exceptions or exemptions outside of the absolute itself, then we must maintain that when a conflict situation arises in which specific absolutes are brought to bear upon the decision, whatever else we may do, we cannot disobey, lay aside, or transcend any of these divine absolutes.

The God who issued his moral law to his people did so with infinite wisdom and understanding of them and their sinful world. His wisdom ensures that the absolutes he has given are to be followed absolutely. He knows what is best for humankind. As a compassionate God he ordained absolutes that would not leave his people in confusion by really conflicting. As a God of power which he imparts to his people, God has given absolutes that can actually be obeyed as we rely upon his grace. The character of God as a wise, compassionate, and powerful lawgiver is called into question by the notion of conflicting absolutes.

The position of non-conflicting absolutism is the most natural way to understand the Scriptures. When we read that we are forbidden to lie, steal, commit adultery, and are to tell the truth in love, feed the hungry, and love our neighbor as ourselves, we most naturally assume, as finite and dependent children of our wise and trustworthy God, that God means what he says and intends for us to do exactly that. The distinct and natural impression from the Scriptures (Psalm 119 is an excellent example) is that God's moral directives can be and ought to be followed consistently, without true conflict.

Theological ethics usually makes the mistake of taking the "normal case" as its standard for measuring reality. The result is the illusion that by providing certain Christian directives we have actually solved the problems. Thus a doctrine of the orders will receive its inner movement and depth from the very fact that it deals with concrete disorders.

The borderline situation is characterized above all by the fact that in it one is confronted by an opponent who is known to be bent wholly on the exercise of power, and who is obviously on the side of evil. The best examples of such a situation are thus to be found in countries which have been occupied by the representatives of an ideological tyranny.

The ambiguity of the situation is manifested in the fact not merely that decisions are required, but also the criteria which must underlie such decisions are also equivocal. However, no matter how we proceed or fail to proceed, there can be no doubt that here decisions do have to be made. The situation is in the true sense problematical that it is not unambiguous, and that it consequently involves real distress of conscience.

All moral laws are not of equal weight. Perhaps the clearest indication of higher and lower moral laws comes in Jesus' answer to the lawyer's question about the "greatest commandment" (Matt. 22:34-35). Jesus clearly affirms that the "first" and "greatest" in over the

"seconds, " that loving God is of supreme importance, and then beneath that comes loving one's neighbor.

Some personally unavoidable moral conflicts exist in which an individual cannot obey both commands. The arguments in support of this observation come from many sources from both inside and outside of the Bible. Several of them will suffice to establish this point.

First, the story of Abraham and Isaac (Gen 22) contains a real moral conflict. "Thou shalt not kill" is a divine moral command (Exod. 20:13), and yet God commanded Abraham to kill his son, Isaac. Second, the story of Samson contains a conflict of two divine commands. Samson committed a divinely approved suicide (Jud. 16:30) despite the moral prohibition against killing a human being, including oneself. Third, the passage detailing Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter (Jud. 11) shows a real moral conflict between a vow to God which is inviolate Eccles. 5:1-4 and the command not to kill an innocent life. Fourth, there are several biblical illustrations in which individuals had to choose between lying and not helping to save a life that is not showing mercy. Fifth, there is a real moral conflict in the cross, one so great that many liberal theologians have considered the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement to be essentially immoral. Sixth, there are numerous cases in Scripture in which there is a real conflict between obeying God's command to submit to civil government and keeping one's duty to some other higher moral law.

There are many other biblical examples of genuine, unavoidable moral conflicts, but the foregoing examples suffice. Even one clear case of an unavoidable conflict is enough to prove the point.

God provides man keeps the higher law, He does not hold the individual responsible for personally unavoidable moral conflicts. There are a number of ways of seeing the truth of this point. First, logic dictates that a just God will not hold a person responsible for doing what is

actually impossible. Second, one is not morally culpable if he fails to keep an obligation he could not possibly keep without breaking a higher obligation. This is evident to all, even to those who hold opposing ethical views. Third, the Bible includes many examples of persons who were praised by God for following their highest duty in situations of conflict.

God does not hold a person guilty for not keeping a lower moral law so long as he keeps the higher, therefore, in real, unavoidable moral conflicts. God exempts one from his duty to keep the lower law since he could not keep it without breaking a higher law. Similarly, when a person enters an ethical intersection where two laws come into unavoidable conflict, it is evident that one law must yield to the other.

The most obvious and basic of all divisions or levels of duty is between the command to love God and the command to love one's neighbor. The former always takes precedence over the latter.

In Matthew 22:36-38, Jesus explicitly declares the commandment to love God to be the "first" and "greatest." Further, he teaches that one's love for God should be so much more than his love for parents that the love for the latter would look like hate by contrast in Luke 14:26.

God commands the Christian to "submit" to and "obey" those in authority, even if they are evil men because He ordained human government. (Rom 12:1-2; Titus 3:1). The attempt of some to differentiate between submission and obedience-and thus claim that Christians need only submit but not obey government-fails for several reasons. First, it is plainly opposed to the spirit of the passages which enjoin Christians to follow the laws of their land. Second, the passage in First Peter demands submissions to "every ordinance," not merely to the consequences of disobeying an ordinance. Third, the word submission as used in the New Testament implies obedience. Finally, the words submission and obedience are used in parallel in Titus (3:1); thus Christians are told "to obey" governmental authorities.

Obviously, Christians are commanded of God to obey government. Several biblical instances illustrate this point. First, worship of God is higher than any command of government (Dan. 3). Second, no governmental law against private prayer should be obeyed (Dan 6). Further, if a government commands a believer not to preach the gospel (Acts 4-5), or if it decrees participation in idolatry (Dan. 3) or even the murder of innocent victims (Exod. 1), it should not be obeyed. In each case the moral obligation to pray, worship God, preach the gospel, and so forth, is a higher duty than the one to obey government.

There is no question that the Bible commands Christians to not "give false testimony" (Exod. 20:16). We are also told to "put off falsehood and speak truthfully with his neighbor" (Eph. 4:25). Indeed, deception and lying are repeatedly condemned in Scripture (Prov. 12:22; 19:5) On the other hand, the Bible indicates that there are occasions when intentionally falsifying or lying is justifiable.

It should not be surprising that mercy is considered to be higher than truth. It is the Christian's obligation in every morally conflicting situation to search Scripture for an answer. If one does not know what to do in certain situations, he should heed Jesus' words.

PART 2 : APPLYING MORAL NORMS
4. Moral Situations and Cultural Contexts

Moral guidance comes from the concrete commandment of God in the given situation, it does not come from general principles, biblical laws as such, logical calculation, self-realization, intuition, or subconscious desire. If the Word of God in the community of faith informs our conscience, we will hear the divine command that leads us to act. We cannot know ahead of time, either by deliberating rationally or by applying a direct biblical statement, whether lying to save a life is right in some context. Instead, we receive an "inner light" from God in the midst of the particular situation.

Situationism is actually an umbrella-word for all views which reject the idea that the way to decide what to do is always to apply rules, positive and negative, concerning types of action, although it is usually thought of as a term referring specifically to one view of Christian morality. Thus, the 'situationism' is a term of negative classification, clear only in what it excludes and covering many positive conceptions that are intrinsically different.

Neo-orthodox situationism may be called 'pure' as distinct from 'principled'. Its main thesis is that as one faces each situation, taking its measure and noting its complexities, God will speak, in some sense of that word, directly.

The principled situationism offers a constant method of deciding in each case what love demands. We may state it as: a) Neighbor-love is God's absolute and only demand in each situation. b) Old Christian morality lapses into Pharisaic legalism and so sins against love, because in determining how to act it begins from the deductive, the transcendent and the

authoritative. c) Love may dictate the breaking of accepted moral rules of the do this, don't do that type. d) No situation ever faces us with a choice of evils; the traditional view to the contrary is one more product of the mistaken intrinsic theory.

When situationists detect provincialism, shallowness, negativism, thoughtlessness and lovelessness in our ethical thought and practice, we must humbly take the criticism, and be grateful for it. But when they treat God's revealed directives as working rules only, and invite us to hail as good what God calls evil, a different response is called for.

The love and law should be related in the Bible as follow: First, no doubt ever appears about the universal applicability and authority of laws commanding and forbidding particular things. Second, love of God has priority over neighbor-love. Jesus categorizes love of God as the great commandment, which comes first (Mt. 22:37). Third, neighbor-love is to be directed by law. The point is confirmed by John's striking reasoning in 1 John 5:2: 'By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.' Neighbor-love fulfils the law.

Evangelical contextualism is associated in our time. It has an unmistakable continuity with the Reformation, Pietism, and Puritanism. Because, like the others, this is an ideal type, it does not represent any of the aforementioned scholars completely.

This kind of ethics is best described as one of evangelical obedience and is to be sharply distinguished from both prudential calculation and self-realization. First, we must also search Holy Scripture for possible analogies to our situation. In addition, we should consult the witness of the fathers of the church, even though this witness in and of itself cannot be the last word. Finally, we should seek to discover the will of God in importunate prayer. One of these activities can procure the divine commandment, but they can enable us to recognize it when it is revealed.

The goal in evangelical contextualism is to glorify God in every area of life. We glorify God when we seek the welfare of our neighbor even above our own. We glorify God when we work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). We glorify God when we put off the old nature and put on the new (Eph. 4:22-24).

Christians are committed to abiding by ethical standards approved by God. And we are often quite certain that we understand what those standards are. Often, however, we have not pondered the implications for our ministries of the anthropological fact that there are in different societies different definitions of ethicality. Instead we tend to identify our own culturally conditioned understanding of what is and is not ethical with what we believe to be God's standard.

We seldom ask questions such as "Why are we doing this?" or "What right have we to assume that our efforts to help others will be really helpful?" We simply go out and help them as best we can. Yet very genuine moral and ethical problems arise in every instance in which attempts are made to change the way of living of others.

Other basic assumptions stemming from western worldviews have also been prevalent, both within and outside of Christian circles. Among them is the assumption that western societies have learned how to make progress happen and that such insight is suitable for export. Large numbers of those who work cross-culturally share with perhaps the majority of North Americans the belief that "in their heart of hearts" all peoples really want to live and be like us.

As Foster notes with regard to technological matters: It is wrong to assume that a method, because it is modern, scientific and western, is better than a traditional one. We may assert the same thing with regard to spiritual matters and contend, with Forster, that until we are sure they are wrong on a particular point, it is unwise and morally wrong to try to improve them.

Transcultural morals, then, are the guidelines for correct behavior established by God. Discerning what these ethical and moral ideals are, however, is quite another matter from merely postulating them.

These are the small moral ideals principles, standards, values of a society that the members of that society are taught and expected to live up to. Culture-specific morals are the guidelines for right, correct behavior generally accepted, approved and sanctioned by a social group.

We contend that there is a real ethical above and beyond the cultural perceptual real ethical. Of course, the problem is that if such a real exists, humans can only see it through their cultural perceptual lenses. We are, therefore, guessing at what that real might be. However, the fact of cultural limitations and distortions, makes the question of how to discover that real a very large one.

The underlying reason for differing understandings of ethicality lies in differences in the deep level of culture, here called worldview. Worldview is defined as the structuring of the deep-level assumptions basic to cultural behavior. These are taught and acted upon, though seldom proven, and provide the perspective through which a society views reality. Ethical judgments are thus a form of interpretation. They are based on worldview assumptions and are made automatically as a part of our interpretational reflexes.

Communication theory alerts us to the fact that though messages pass between humans meanings do not. Meanings are in people, not in the messages themselves. Meanings are attached to message symbols by the users of those symbols, they are not inherent in the symbols themselves. One implication of this fact is that the meanings understood by the receptors of a given message are likely to be at least slightly different to the meanings intended by the

communicator of the messages. Yet it is the receptor, as the end point of the communicational process who plays the crucial part in determining whatever the outcome of the interaction will be.

A key to this approach is to attempt to look at things from the point of view of the receptors. This is called a receptor-orientation. This orientation is defined as an attitude on the part of those who communicate messages both via words and behavior that is primarily concerned to do whatever necessary to enable the receivers of the messages to understand their intentions as clearly as possible within the receivers' frames of reference.

Since interpretations and evaluations are grounded in worldview assumption, cultural insiders can be expected both to understand and to judge the activities of an outsider wholly from their own point of view. Then, outsiders must be prepared to have their motivations and intentions evaluated purely on the basis of the insider's perception of their overt behavior.

Humans are conditioned to expect their society to provide for the meeting of all of the needs. The people are conditioned to have certain expectations. Many of these seem to be rooted in basic human needs. Others seem to be socioculturally constructed.

People are conditioned to expect satisfaction of biological needs such as those for food, housing, safety, health and the like; of psychological needs such as meaning, communication, love and belongingness relationships with other humans, esteem, security and structure; and of spiritual needs such as a positive and beneficial relationship with benign supernatural beings and powers and protection from evil supernatural beings and power.

Westerners regularly assume that people of other societies want the same things we want, including material prosperity, individualism, comfortable housing, schooling, clothing, rapid and effortless transportation, physical health, long life, equality of women by our definition, even our religion. Furthermore, we assume others are willing to pay the same social price that we pay.

Most of the things we seek to provide, therefore, fall into the category we define as good in terms of our values and aims. As with those who are receiving, so with those giving-all activities are likely to be understood and evaluated according to home culture reflexes. Donor culture participants will from the best of motives, therefore, regularly attempt to provide such things as fit in with the goals and ideals of their own society.

A belief in the validity of every culture predisposes us to take seriously the goals and aspirations of each people. There is plenty of evidence that many of the cultural structures that people have been taught are not well-suited to handle today's problems. Even without the complications of rapid social change, there may often be latent dissatisfactions among the people with certain of the ways in which their lives are structured by their cultures.

To the extent that the goals of a people can be ascertained, there were suggestions of a few candidates for transculturally ethical principles of intervention in another society along with a suggestion of some of the difficulties in their application.

Whether on a religious or a non-religious basis, the Golden Rule be regarded as a transculturally ethical principle of intervention. We are to treat others as we would ourselves like to be treated were we in their position. This means we are to seek to understand, respect and relate to a people and their way of life in the same way that we would like them to understand, respect and relate to us and our way of life if the tales were turned.

This principle recommends a primary concern for persons as organized in groups and what I will call person factors that lie at a level deeper than culture. For at this deepest level, people are more alike than cultures. This emphasis is in contrast to a primarily structural emphasis, such as that to preserve a culture simply because cultures are believed to be good in and of themselves.

Any intervention in another society should give careful attention to helping the people to maintain what Tippet calls their ethnic cohesion—a combination of pride in one's cultural heritage and determination to survive, no matter what. Even though we are to focus on person/group over cultural structures as such, it is clear that persons/groups require both effective sociocultural structuring and a measure of pride in their way of life.

Westerners are easily tempted to use power and prestige to achieve what they believe to be worthy ends in somebody else's territory. Whether it is the power of political relationships or of wealth or simply of cultural prestige. A major problem in this area is the fact that as Westerners with an egalitarian perspective we often fail to perceive ourselves as more powerful than those we work among.

PART 3 : INTERPRETING THE BIBLE ETHICALLY

5. The Use of the Bible in Ethical Judgments

During the past several decades, many people recognize that the use of Scripture in Christian ethics has changed. The emerging consensus among many scholars gives decreasing legitimacy to the prescriptive uses of Scripture and places increasing emphasis on the descriptive nature of biblical ethics.

Discerning these moral norms from the pages of the Bible is difficult, and several different approaches are possible. First, some view the New Testament as a book of laws. Christians ought to follow the rules of God recorded in the New Testament. Second, others look for principles. They may not consider the particular commands and practices of the New Testament as being normative, but they do see the general principles behind them as being binding. Third, some advise the reader of Scripture to seek unique divine illumination for particular decisions. Fourth, others recommend using Scripture only loosely. The believer takes into account a particular situation and then makes a decision based on what is the most loving thing to do in that situation.

Christians have even more difficulty using the Old Testament as a guide for ethics than they do the New Testament. Even though Paul wrote that "everything that was written in the past was written to teach us" (Rom. 15:4), the various Old Testament laws, narratives, prophecies, and wisdom passages are bewildering.

A Christian ethical study of the self will proceed in the light of Scripture and with a recognition of the world as our God-created environment. As in the existential tradition, a

Christian will seek an ethic that realizes human nature and human freedom at their best. But through Scripture he will be able to judge what in human nature is the result of sin and what expresses God's images. This sort of ethical study I describe as coming from the "existential perspective." It is existential in focus, but it does not seek to isolate the self from other sources of God's revelation. Rather it treats the self as a "perspective," a vantage point or angle of vision, from which to view the full range of ethical norms and data. It does justice to the subjective side of human life, particularly our sense of the direct presence of God in his Holy Spirit, recreating us to know and to reflect his holiness. But it does not result in skepticism, because it is anchored in the objectivity of God's Word.

Similarly, a Christian may study the created world, observing the patterns of cause and effect that produce pleasures and pains of different sorts. He must not be blind to that, for Christ calls him to love others as himself. He cares whether people are in pain or having pleasure. But he will carry out this study in the light of scriptural norms thus escaping the problems of the naturalistic fallacy and of cruelty to minorities, which trap the secular utilitarians and of his own subjectivity.

And of course a Christian may study God's law in a more direct way, focusing on Scripture itself. But to determine what Scripture says about a particular ethical problem, we must know more than the text of Scripture.

In each perspective, then, we study all the data available, all the revelation of God. It is not that we study some under the existential perspective, other data under the situational, and still something else under the normative. Rather, in each sort of study we study everything, but with a particular emphasis or focus. The term perspective describes well this concept of emphasizing or focusing.

There are four ways in which Christians use the New Testament in ethical decision-making and practice. Each has its own advocates, who generally are so enamored with their own approach that they identify it alone as worthy of the name "Christian." Yet each position needs to be set out and evaluated so that we might be better able to make a proper start in our ethical thought and action.

The first of these positions is that which takes the New Testament as a book of laws or a summation of codes for human conduct. A second way of using the New Testament for ethical guidance is that which places all of the emphasis on the universal principles which can be found to underlie the New Testament accounts. A third way of using the New Testament in ethical decision-making is that which places all the stress on God's free and sovereign encounter through his Spirit with a person as he or she reads Scripture, and the ethical direction given for the particular moment in such an encounter. The fourth way of using the New Testament in ethical decision-making and practice arises largely out of the third approach, and shares with it an opposition to prescriptive laws and principles.

The most common method of deriving contemporary relevance from particular laws of another time and culture is to seek out middle axioms, or principles which underlie these specifics. However, this search for principles or axioms must not be imposed as a grid over Scripture; Scripture itself must supply them. Moreover, these principles must not be so general and so all-embracing that they give very little guidance in dealing with specific applications.

In order to solve this problem, several hermeneutical procedures can be recommended. These may be listed as follows:

There seem to be four levels of generality and particularity in the Bible: First, the

greatest commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength" (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37). Second, "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18; Matt 22:39). Third, the Ten Commandments, which carry out the previous two levels in ten parts; and Fourth, case laws that relate to one or more of the Ten Commandments.

We can translate the particularity, say of the case laws, to the generality of middle axioms or universal principles by observing the morality and theology that undergirds or informs each law. Such informing, or undergirding, theology and moral law can be found: 1) by noting if a theological or moral reason is explicitly given either with the special case law or in the context of similar laws found in that section; b) by observing if direct citations, indirect allusions, or historical references are made to incidents or teachings that had occurred earlier in the Scriptures and prior to the time when this legislation was given; c) by comparing this text by analogy with a similar text where the same conditions and problems exist but where the informing theology, or clearer dependence on moral law and theology, the solution suggests itself more easily; and d) by using the principle of legitimate inference or implication to extend what is written into a series of parallel commands, where the moral or theological grounds for what is written and what is inferred remain the same.

Thus, interpreters must exercise great care when they use this method of analogy or where they move up or down the ladder of abstraction. Therefore, the law is not antithetical to the promise of God, nor is its specificity a roadblock to the Christian's profitable use even of its case laws.

The following guidelines are suggested for distinguishing between items that are culturally relative, on the one hand, and those that transcend their original setting, on the other hand, and have normativeness for all Christians of all times.

1. One should first distinguish between the central core of the message of the Bible and what is dependent upon or peripheral to it.
2. Similarly, one should be prepared to distinguish between what the New Testament itself sees as inherently moral and what is not.
3. One must make special note of items where the New Testament itself has a uniform and consistent witness and where it reflects differences.
4. It is important to be able to distinguish within the New Testament itself between principle and specific application.
5. It might also be important, as much as one is able to do this with care, to determine the cultural options open to any New Testament writer.
6. One must keep alert to possible cultural differences between the first and twentieth centuries that are sometimes not immediately obvious.
7. One must finally exercise Christian charity at this point. Christians need to recognize the difficulties, open the lines of communication with one another, start by trying to define some principle, and finally have love for and a willingness to ask forgiveness from those with whom they differ.

These are some of our hermeneutical suggestions for reading and interpreting the Epistles. Our immediate aim is for greater precision and consistency; our greater aim is to call us all to greater obedience to what we do hear and understand.

PART 3 : INTERPRETING THE BIBLE ETHICALLY

6. Love and Justice

God is both loving and just. His children, therefore, should live out both love and justice.

All who understand the Bible to be the primary source of guidance for normative ethics agree that love is the supreme virtue and chief good in Christian ethics. They base this conviction primarily on the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament authors. A legal expert in Jewish ethics asked Jesus, "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" He replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. " This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22:35-40)

Love's connection with grace is important for an understanding of its biblical meaning. The deepest significance of the love upon which our Christian faith is based is not its ethical quality, but the fact that the lover was God, the sovereign lord of life.

Love is the "new commandment" of Jesus. " A new commandment I gave to you that you love one another; even as I loved you, that you also love one another "(John 13:34). This passage, set at the time of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples, provides a bridge between love as grace and the central place of love in Christian ethics.

A Christian ethic, in the light of such instructions and with it a Christian basis for social action, obviously must be established in love.

We assume that we have particular moral obligations to certain individuals: spouses, children, parents, members of the church. How can these relationships be affirmed in terms of

love" How can love take into account the special needs of particular people? It is justice which aids love in these considerations because it deals with the individual needs of my neighbor as a member of the community, in the context of his or her special claims, for example as a child or a parent, as impoverished or a victim of discrimination.

Our justice corresponds to God's justice just as our grace corresponds to God's grace and our love to God's love. We are able to give because God gives to the poor through us, equipping us for this purpose. God's grace flowing through us is manifested in the form of justice.

Grace is closely related to God's distributive justice accordingly. As people who are weak and oppressed seek the justice of God to establish their rights, so they seek God's favor on the basis of their weakness and distress.

Love raises justice above the mere equal treatment of equals; biblical justice is the equal treatment of all human beings solely for the reason that as human they possess bestowed worth from God. God's people are commanded to do justice on the basis of what they themselves have received in the gracious acts of God. In a passage in which justice and love are parallel, it is stated.

In fact, the Bible guides us in doing what it requires-justice in our real world. Thus we have to test the broad rules for justice recommended by common sense. We do not have to claim that these are drawn directly from the Bible, but we must test each of them in the light of biblical perspectives on human rights and human needs.

Every person bears the image of God and is in that sense equal to any other person, and from this equality of being equal rights would seem to follow. But common sense tells us that treating everyone the same is no guarantee of justice for all.

But the equal treatment rule not only cannot guarantee justice for all; it will create unfairness. Some people need more than other people do merely to get a little closer to equality with them.

The rule of equal treatment is not absolute, but it is perhaps the fundamental assumption we must make before considering rules for treating some people differently from others. The burden of proof always falls on those who treat persons unequally.

Meritocracy also gets support from the Bible. The scriptural authors knew the difference between a person who deserves what he get and one who does not. If you won't work, says Paul, don't expect to be fed (2 Thess. 3:10). The Bible is realistic about our inequality, but it does not tell us what sorts of merits entitle us to claim special treatment. We can make a simple distinction between two kinds of merits.

Justice does not bow down to anyone who claims to deserve better treatment than others on the ground of being better born than they are. Indeed, we believe that justice calls us to bridge some of the gaps that differences in birth arbitrarily create between people

1. *The merits people are given.* The claim that persons have rights because of accidents of genes or geography usually rests in self-interest.

2. *The merits people earn.* Most people would agree that we have some rights only because we earn them.

It seems reasonable for a person to claim some rights on the ground of merit. It is just as clear that in other situations, merit has no relevance. No one is wise enough to spell out ahead of time the sorts of things we deserve to have only because we earned them. Our common sense for that counts as merit shifts, and so does our sense for the things we need to earn by our merits.

People's needs are of different kinds. We can distinguish first of all between "survival"

needs and "flourish" needs. A second distinction is between the right to have what we need and the right not to be prevented from earning what we need. Third, we must see that needs differ according to the people who have them. By itself, none of our three criteria for distributing the goods of the human community—equality, merit, and need—is the right way. In its place, each of them is partly the right way.

There are at least three basic concepts which require clear delineation as to what is meant in the contemporary evangelical dialogue regarding matters political. These three are *power*, *love* and *justice*.

We can talk about the "power of God to transform lives," but we are no longer talking about the political power of the state, which by definition refers to instituted social authority which enables the state to force compliance upon its subjects regardless of their volitional relationship to the state's demands.

That is not to say that such talk is useless or unnecessary. Indeed, beliefs relative to the sovereignty of God, Christ's conquering of the principalities and powers, or the transforming power of God in individual lives have profound implications for the way in which we must think about politics.

The acceptance of political powerlessness creates the basis for the manifestation of the power of God as transforming agent. And thus the Christian community bears witness to the world, not only standing in judgment upon it but also prophetically pointing to the path of the world's redemption.

But what must be recognized is that such thinking provides political critique and judgment while rejecting political involvement and practice as a corrective strategy. For all of its political relevance and all of its political language, it is in the end an apolitical strategy rejecting power, and thus rejecting politics as well.

We have nonetheless thus far not answered the question as to whether love and power are compatible, while insisting that one cannot speak of politics without also speaking of power. Therefore, it is imperative that we distinguish the characteristics of love so that we can examine its compatibility with the exercise of political power.

First, we must acknowledge that love is something voluntarily given. Love can not be forced against one's will.

Second, love is something that must be personally mediated. Since the voluntary nature of love necessitates the existence of a will by which it can become activated, love is always personal.

Third, love is always sacrificial. That is to say that love is always a voluntary noncompulsory act in which one wills to allow something to happen at one's own expense for the well-being of another.

Forth, since love is freely given, it does beyond ordinary moral obligation. To fulfill moral obligation is to respond to moral necessity, and therefore, it is an act of duty rather than of free moral will.

In summary, It is suggested that love is voluntary and freely given; that since it involves moral volition, it must be personally mediated; that love is sacrificial.

To use the power of the state as a means of effecting love among its citizens is therefore not only contradictory, insofar as love cannot be forced or coerced; it also destroys the distinction of moral obligation by which the difference between a limited and a totalitarian government is marked.

It is the concept of justice which creates other alternatives by which the concepts of loveless power and powerless love can be reconciled. And it is justice which enables us to be servants of both power and love.

If they are to become operational in a political society, the claims of justice must be defined with some meaningful degree of particularity. Justice as an abstraction is not enough, it requires discriminate judgments between conflicting claims. We must work out an understanding of justice in particulars, lest we fall into the trap of moralizing about politics while having nothing to offer in terms of a moral critique that speaks to particular situations in time and space.

Several dangers are pointed out in the thinking of those who reject the concept of justice based on creation ordinances known to all persons, regardless of their religious persuasion and revelational systems.

First, to reject creation ordinances out of hand places our reason as creature bearing the image of God (however fallen) onto conflict with revelationally bases knowledge.

Second, this position has very serious practical consequences for strategies of political involvement.

Many neo-orthodox thinkers, subsuming redemption ordinances have uncritically and equally inconsistently sought to apply the love ethic of Jesus with little regard for the objectifying norms of justice which must inform the spirit of love. And many Anabaptist and revolutionary thinkers, subsuming redemption ordinances to eschatological ordinances, have uncritically and equally inconsistently sought to apply the ethic of the Christ who makes all things new.

While the conquering power of God has indeed been visibly and dramatically revealed in the resurrection of our Lord, we are told that Satan's power shall be unleashed in new fury before the final consummation of God's kingdom.

The following criteria is suggested in establishing the character of justice. First, justice must be based on universal claims of right. To establish justice on the basis of sectarian authority alone is to do violence to our very confession that all persons carry a knowledge of the good. Second, justice must be defined within the context of a given social order, and it must be

enumerated in terms of specifics. Third, given the universality of the norms of justice and the universality of the consciousness of justice, one can derive procedures and practices which, when honored, increase the likelihood of policies and programs which eventuate in justice. Fourth, we must recognize that the norms of justice are objective and that they exist independently of human volition. Fifth, since the "God of Love" is also a just God, love and justice cannot stand juxtaposed. Sixth, since justice is an objective quality establishing rights and obligations, calculations can and must be made by individuals and societies as to how their actions serve the claims of justice. Further, to seek to use the state as an instrument of love implies not only a sectarian state but a totalitarian state.

New alternatives for evangelical Protestantism's thinking about politics are created by adding the concept of justice to those of love and power. Politics, rooted in power, nevertheless fulfills a legitimate function when it serves the claims of justice. Love, while rejecting power and going beyond the rights and duties established by justice, establishes a will for justice and a moral motivation which crowns the just act. Love, while personally mediated, complements justice with its objective demands.

PART 4 : DEVELOPING THE MORAL SELF

7. Virtue and Character

In regarding to the virtue ethicists, we should not define an ethic of virtue abstractly, but see it embedded in the stories of people and groups. Virtue-oriented thinkers, when asked what to do in some situation, will likely tell a story rather than give a specific, abstract answer. These ethicists will point to biblical narratives and parables, or the lives of the saints, to demonstrate the use of stories in virtue ethics.

For Christians, that community is the church, the church itself is a social ethic. As a particular community, the church cannot use its story to address society directly, but it can speak to the world through its story as embodied in the very lives of Christians.

Many accounts of the virtues do little more than list the qualities generally praised by a society , and therefore a person who exhibits such qualities may not necessarily be a person of virtue. For even though being a person of virtue may be a morally ambiguous statement, we can assume that the phrase a person of virtue or character describes a self formed in a more fundamental and substantive manner than that possessed by other persons.

An ethic of virtue centers on the claim that an agent's being is prior to his doing. Not that what we do is unimportant or even secondary; rather, what a person does or does not do depends upon his possessing a "self" sufficient to take personal responsibility for his actions.

To be a person of virtue involves acquiring the linguistic, emotional, and rational skills that give us the strength to make our decisions and our life our own. Thus individual virtues are

specific skills required to be faithful to a tradition's understanding of the moral project in which its adherents participate.

Nevertheless, one cannot therefore assume that an ethic of virtue is therefore indifferent to social circumstance. Rather, our capacity to be virtuous depends upon the existence of communities that have been formed by narratives faithful to the character of reality.

It was a consensus concerning the good for humanity that made possible a unified ethic in classical and medieval culture. In such a situation there was really no need to justify morality. In the form of virtue, morality was clearly seen to have its justification in its orientation to that which was the end of humanity, the good.

To the classical list of virtues were added faith, hope, and love. In both the classical and medieval tradition ethics proceeded as the science of the practice of becoming a certain sort of person, a person with a good character. Character was understood in terms of the possession or lack of virtues.

The contemporary ethical movement often called "virtue ethics" is a call to address the fragmentation of ethics in the modern world with a return to something like the classical-medieval view that ethics is primarily the science of developing human character through the fostering of the virtues.

This is not to say that ethics is unconcerned with decisions or with principles which can guide decisions. But it is to say that decisions and principles for making them grow out of a history, or a narrative, which is more about what kind of people we are than about particular acts.

Then, Christian ethics is to be the practice of being a certain kind of people. It is to learn to embody a character which is defined in relation to the life of Jesus Christ. This kind of ethic still involves making decisions, but individual acts are placed in their context as the acts of people

with a particular history and character. More often than not, what we do is not really decided.

We act and then see that our action has shown what kind of person we are or are not.

The ethics of the Christian community is an ethic produced by the narrative that forms that community. That narrative is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is by being true to that story that we find ourselves to be people of character, people who embody certain virtues. 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 God.

It is important that we see that as Christians our faithfulness to a story is faithfulness to a true story. For if ethics is always qualified by the narrative of a particular community, we might suppose that what is being suggested is simply a form of relativism. But the Christian commitment to the story of Jesus as formative for our character is a commitment to the truth of that story as it comprehends human life and our relationship to God.

As the Church, we often get the impression that our approach to social ethics ought to downplay that which is distinctively Christian about our ethical stance. Our Christian commitment to justice, peace, sexual morality, or preservation of human life seems to suggest that we should set aside our doctrine and work together with "like-minded people" to bring about good in these areas.

The social ethic of the Church, what the Church has to say to the world on the subject of ethics is its own life as a community formed by the life of our Savior. For the Church to abandon its distinctive character as the people of God would also be for it to abandon the world. The Church has something to say to the world only insofar as it displays to the world the world's own nature as sinful and inadequate. The world needs the Church in order to truly know itself as the world.

It is believed that the work of Hauerwas and other virtue ethicists is in strong accord with our biblical conviction that God has called us to be a unique people, a people made peculiar by our participation in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Although the virtue theory does not cover the whole of ethics, the terrain of professional ethics covers at least four major areas:

1. Quandary or case-oriented ethics that searches for rules and principles helpful to the decision-maker in making choices between conflicting goods and evils, rights and wrongs.
2. The moral criticism of systems, institutions, and structures. Quandary ethics alone emphasizes too much the perplexities which the individual practitioner faces.
3. Professional regulation and self-discipline The problem of defective or unethical performance preoccupies the pay person more than professionals, either professional practitioners or ethicists.
4. The subject of virtue. While virtue theory may not deserve preeminence of place, it constitutes an important part of the total terrain.

Attention must be paid, especially today, to the question of professional virtue. The growth of large-scale organizations has increased that need. Professionals had better be virtuous. Few people may be in a position to discredit them. The knowledge explosion has also produced an ignorant and therefore dependent on many others.

A principle-oriented moral theory does not altogether ignore the question of virtue, rather it tends to subordinate the virtues to principles. Beauchamp and Childress gave the following definition: "virtues are settled habits and dispositions to do what we ought to do where ought judgments encompass both ordinary duties and ideals." This definition subordinates virtues to

principles, agents to acts; that is, the question of one's being to one's doing. This subordination systematically correlates specific virtues with specific rules and ideals.

While helpful, this scheme fails to acknowledge the importance of the virtues not simply as correlates of principles and rules, but as human strengths important precisely at those times when men and women dispute over principles and ideals.

Alasdair MacIntyre offers a useful start on this second way of interpreting the virtues: "A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods."

This definition emphasizes two important points. 1) Virtue is an acquired human quality rather than an inherited temperament. 2) We should prize the virtues primarily because they make possible the goods internal to practice rather than those goods that flow externally and secondarily from practices.

Religion and the Virtues, the virtues reflect not only commitments to principles and ideals but also to narratives, the exemplary lives of others, human and divine. Much of the moral life mediates itself from person to person and from communities to persons. Moreover, the influential narratives may be records of divine action, not simply accounts of exemplary human conduct.

Philosophers sympathetic to religious traditions often hold that religious narratives, at their best, illustrate moral principles. For example, Jesus' sacrificial life illustrates the principle of beneficence. On the other hand, religion thinkers tend to hold that sacred narratives about God's actions and deeds do not merely illustrate moral principles derived from elsewhere. Rather, these decisive sacred events open up a disclosive horizon from which the believer derives the commands, rules, virtues, and principles that govern his or her life.

Love other as God loved you while you were yet a stranger in need. Thus the virtue in question differs from self-derived benevolence. It bespeaks a responsive love that impels the receiver reflexively beyond the ordinary circle of family and friendship toward the stranger. The scriptural notion of service differs in source and substance from modern philosophical notions of benevolent or generous love.

PART 4 : DEVELOPING THE MORAL SELF

8. The Process of Decision-Making

Often ethics is so messy that a neat and precise method for getting answers eludes us. Sometimes, when we can easily discern good and evil, we do not overtly follow a method, but seek the will and courage to do right. Even though we decide intentionally, we remain aware of our finite reasoning abilities and our propensity at times either to skew moral considerations to our advantage or to overlook some vital element in the case.

Choosing involves plunging ourselves personally and passionately into the issue in question, allowing ourselves to be changed s part of the deciding process. Rather than viewing truth abstractly, as merely out there and discoverable through a scientific method, truth is highly personal.

No matter whose perspective we study on the process of decision-making, none gives us the precise, tidy formula we all would like-or think we would like. Overconfidence in our abstract thought short-circuits the personal and communal struggles that can so powerfully cultivate genuine humility and interdependence among the people of God. Perhaps it is in such struggles that we learn best to make moral judgment in tune with the radical ethics of the kingdom.

The goal of the doctrine of the moral object is to get as much of a grasp of the reality as possible because morality is based on reality. If you do not ask all the reality-revealing questions, your judgment will be based on only part of the reality and it will be right only by

accident. Therefore, no moral judgment can be reached until all questions have been answered as fully as possible.

The next reality-revealing, and thus morality-revealing question is *how?* What we are saying here is that the manner or style of an action contributes to the constitution of its morality in an integral way. *What* you might be doing may be good; *Why* you are doing it may be excellent; but the action may fail morally by *how* you do it.

Why? is also a critical question. Every who, i.e., every person is unique. They have their own unrepeatable story that is embodied in their personality and outlook, their own degree of sensitivity, their own conscience and their own superego, and their own neurosis, if the thesis holds that we are all neurotics,

When could be most important in evaluating an abortion. An abortion around the fourth week of pregnancy is not the same as an abortion around the sixth month or pregnancy.

The final two questions used to set up the moral object and thus make moral judgment possible are: What are the foreseeable effects? and What are the existent viable alternatives? Effects or consequences are so important in ethics that there is a particular ethical leaning known as consequentialism, which argues in substance that actions are good or bad depending on their consequences. If we may call it that, the consequentialist strain is good as far as it does but it does not go far enough. There is more to life than effects and consequences; there is also more to ethics, since ethics is the art-science of human life. Thus to look merely at effects is to succumb to the lure of a simplistic one-rubric ethics.

With the completion of these questions what, why, how who, where, when, what are the effects and the alternative, we have done what we can to set the moral object.

An aid has been used in the analysis of ethical judgments that are concretely available, such as the directions given by the apostle Paul to his community at Corinth upon hearing of the

different positions taken by the strong and weak regarding the permissibility of eating meat sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 8-10); memorials from church bodies concerning public issues (*Denkschriften*); studies of the problem of violence; writings, like Luther's, on the subject of "commerce and usury"; and case histories from the field of counseling.

A clarification of what it is that requires a moral decision is the first task. Here reflection must center on how the one making the judgment is affected by the matter at issue, how he or she is involved in it. On the sources of the problem, what needs and interests it touches, and to what extent problems are at stake that require more than merely technical solutions inasmuch as they challenge his or her own ethical judgment.

Problems arise for human beings out of their complex world and within it; the situation comes into being through the delimitation within a complex environment of my situation, or our situation, on the part of the individual or several or even many interacting subjects. This involves an investigation of the real context in which the problem arises, in order to determine how the definition and solution of the respective problem is conditioned by this context. Even so-called inward problems arise within an inward environment that is in many ways intertwined with outward environments.

The usual reaction to a problem or problematic situation is always: What is to be done? As behavioral options and their foreseeable consequences are considered, the question arises with the conscience exercising a control function here, by raising the question of the identity or integrity of the subject or subjects, whether a behavioral stance would be a good or right one.

We must survey and choose among the ethically relevant criteria of decision. The human life-world is intertwined with a multiplicity of norms, many of which have assumed a relative life of their own. In the course of making a judgment, the norms that are utilized are to be understood in terms of their objective function: a norm is whatever links a situation or situational

schema to an act or mode of behavior by a judgment. Moral are those norms which intend to let this lineage take place in a morally defensible manner, which maintain the integrity of the subject.

The judgment is a synthetic act made with a view to the problem presented, on the basis of the cognition of the facts of the situation, the possible behavioral options, and the applicable norms. It implies an active self-determination: I make up my mind to do such and such.

Often, judgmental decisions are made in a tentative and preliminary manner. Ethical decisions, in particular, are often reconsidered, sometimes again and again. For instance, it might be considered whether the decision really meets the problem as defined, whether it constitutes a solution, whether the steps are strictly linked to one another and to the whole course of the decision-making process, whether new factors now present themselves which had not been considered previously.

It is hard to predict where the one making the judgment will commence his or her deliberations; most likely one would begin by experimentally connecting various elements with one another, perhaps elaborating them or else rejecting them, possibly starting over at a different point and only gradually structuring one's thoughts and finally one's judgment.

From the psychological standpoint, the process in question is thus evidently to a large extent an interactive process. In our schema, we have identified the particular elements of this process, following the methodology of ideal types, and brought them into a logical sequence.

It is possible to identify the particular elements of the judgment-formation schema in the traditions. It is possible to analyze the role they have played wherever judgments in our sense have been made; for instance, in the Old Testament, the New Testament, or the Christian traditions. There can be little doubt that the normative dimension is represented by terms like law of God, will of God, commandment, eternal law, and law of nature.

The judgment-making schema points to another dimension of the ethical task: namely, to the constant critique of norms, not only as a result of an increasingly refined understanding of the ethos, but also because of the application of concrete norms in the exercise of judgment. Norms that repeatedly fail to prove themselves in the linking of situation and behavioral options decline in authority, while an increase in authority is found for norms that prove to be relevant both in such linking and in relation to the identity and integrity of the one judging. This increase is bound to be reflected at last also in the content of the ethical conceptuality. While the norms of the traditional ethos can scarcely fail, and in any case only over extended historical periods, they are put to the test again and again in the making of judgment.

The abstract thought is thought without a thinker. One strives to be fully informed about one's object and to weigh the evidence and arguments—all without one's prejudicing the results in any way. In short, to engage in abstract thought is to strive to become a *neutral observer*.

Main objection to engaging in abstract thought was a moral one: one is using oneself merely as a means to an end. For, when engaging in abstract thought, one cares about the product and not about oneself, the producer.

Regarding morality, only ethical and ethico-religious knowledge has an *essential relationship* to the existence of the knower.

It is not easy to explicate precisely what it meant by this "*essential relationship*" of the agent to moral knowledge, but was told that at least three things are meant. First, one is morally responsible for one's use of time down to the last moment, including time spent on deliberation over how one should spend one's time. Second, one must strive to put one's moral decisions into practice. Third, and most important, the moral agent is essentially related to the moral decisions he/she makes because of the special nature of the process of coming to moral decisions.

Though neglected, it is viewed insight as an important concept for moral philosophy, for two reasons. First, in making moral decisions, one should not use oneself merely as a means of determining the objectively morally right action. Second, the search for objectively correct moral decisions should not be seen as guided by reason alone, but as in principle being independent of the thinker's own personal experience.

When argument comes to a standstill, one can at least try to persuade the other person to role-play, or to read a novel, or to talk with a person who has lived through the type of situation being debated.
