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"A" for Ethics: an Alphabet of Action

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Boardman Lecture XXVIII. Edited and foreword by Mary M. Solberg.

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Abstract

The twenty-eighth Boardman Lecture in Christian Ethics at the University of Pennsylvania comprised a series of four lectures delivered over the course of several days by John W. Bowker, who at the time of lectures was Dean of Chapel and Director of Studies at Trinity College, University of Cambridge. Bowker argues for accountability among human beings as moral agents in a world that requires our willingness to accept the challenges of such accountability and such agency.

Comments

Boardman Lecture XXVIII. Edited and foreword by Mary M. Solberg.

The Boardman Lectureship in Christian Ethics
(Founded 1899)

XXVIII

**"A" FOR ETHICS:
AN ALPHABET OF ACTION**

Delivered Before
The University of Pennsylvania
September 14 - October 5, 1988

By

John W. Bowker

Edited by
Mary M. Solberg

Philadelphia
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University of Pennsylvania

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Foreword

The twenty-eighth Boardman Lecture in Christian Ethics at the University of Pennsylvania comprised a series of four lectures delivered over the course of several days by John W. Bowker, who at the time of lectures was Dean of Chapel and Director of Studies at Trinity College, University of Cambridge.

As a teacher and scholar, Professor Bowker has made major contributions in religious studies, biblical studies, interreligious dialogue, the conversation between science and religion, bioethics, and intercultural as well as religious education. He has published a dozen books, among them The Targums and Rabbinic Literature: An Introduction to Jewish Interpretations of Scripture (1969, 1979); Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World (1970, 1975, 1980); Jesus and the Pharisees (1973); The Sense of God: Sociological, Anthropological and Psychological Approaches to the Origin of the Sense of God (1973); The Religious Imagination and the Sense of God (1978); Licensed Insanities: Religions and Belief in God in the Contemporary World (1987); and The Meanings of Death (1991); He has written and presented, or contributed to, programs produced by the BBC and ITV touching on many subjects, among them genetic engineering, the beginning of life, AIDS, the question of evil, moral decision making, death and dying, Islam, Hinduism, music, and poetry. Professor Bowker has lectured and taught both in Great Britain and in the United States.

John W. Bowker's Boardman lectures are characterized by a wide-ranging intellect, clarity of thought, openmindedness, and great passion for accountability among human beings as moral agents in a world that requires our willingness to accept the challenges of such accountability and such agency.

I would like to thank Professor E. Ann Matter for her assistance in preparing this publication.

Mary M. Solberg
University of Pennsylvania

Faculty, 1988-89

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"A" FOR ETHICS: AN ALPHABET OF ACTION

1. Authority and Argument

Dr. George Boardman, who founded the lectures which bear his name, was originally called to be a Baptist minister in Barnwell, South Carolina. He resigned after a few months on moral and Christian grounds, because he was "unable to adjust his views on the slavery question to the Southern attitude." For thirty years he was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, and he became chaplain of the University of Pennsylvania for the year 1892. Even before that, from 1879, he was a member of the Board of Trustees.

When he founded these lectures, his instructions were explicit, clear, and detailed: "[T]he purpose of this Lectureship is to teach Christian Ethics."¹ It is not the purpose, he insisted, "to trace the history of the various ethical theories,....nor is it the purpose to teach theology, whether natural, Biblical, or ecclesiastical." Therefore, he stated again, "This Lectureship must be more than a lectureship in moral philosophy, or in church theology; it must be a lectureship in Christian morality, or practical ethics from the standpoint of Christ's own personal character, example, and teachings."

Finally, Dr. Boardman left some instructions on the kind of person who should give the lectures, and the same point is reinforced. He did not want professional philosophers or theologians, "for Christian ethics," he said, "is a matter of daily practical life rather than metaphysical theology." He hoped that the lecturer would, generally, be "a banker, a lawyer, a statesman, a physician," or someone at least who is involved in the realities of the world. I am certainly not a banker or a lawyer. But I have spent a lifetime trying to understand why religious people hate each other so much, and why it is that religions (or at least, to be more accurate, people involved in religious systems) are going to destroy human life as we know it. So far as ethics is concerned, the dilemma of religions is the dilemma of certainty in a world which has increasingly endorsed a preferential option for options. For many religious people, the word "liberal" has become a word of abuse, even among Christians who are supposed to be a living celebration of the fact that they have been set free into the glorious liberty of the children of God. It has become a word of abuse because "the new liberalism," as Basil Mitchell describes it², seems to be a straightforward application of the Mrs. Patrick Campbell principle (you may do what you like in private, as long as you don't do it in the street and frighten the horses), in which the definition of privacy has been vastly extended. In "the new liberalism" (as it is called), it seems to be the case that if you get "turned on" by frightening horses in the street, there is no absolute reason why you should not do so, though there may be cultural conventions and laws to stop you.

What, therefore, seems to be characteristic of the new liberalism is that it endorses what is known as noncognitivism in ethics ("Morality is not to be discerned but made; we have to decide what moral views to adopt," [writes] J. L. Mackie³), and it resists objectivity in moral judgments; whereas religions tend to express and endorse certainty and objectivity in moral demand. In contrast, the new liberalism maintains that a free society tolerates diversity of opinion and beliefs, because it is not possible to prove that some beliefs are true or justified while others are not (or even that they are beliefs as opposed to desires), either within one society, or between societies: there are many different life-

ways, but no privileged ground on which to stand in order to adjudicate on their propriety. It follows that any one desire has as much right as any other to be considered appropriate in its own context and from its own point of view. Therefore to suppress one but not another is unwarranted. Given that pluralism is a necessary condition of a free society, it follows that the only thing not to be tolerated is any claim to objective truth in moral discernment, particularly if it leads to action on the basis of that belief, because that would be a truth for all people, not a matter of opinion. That is necessarily incompatible with cultural relativity and pluralism, which is held to be the non-negotiable condition of a free society. Conversely, to espouse objectivity is to reject pluralism. In addition, religious and moral certainty seems to entail a commitment to destroy the free society, by reintroducing coercion—by bringing back, maybe, the Inquisition.

That is why the passions evoked by Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses were irreconcilable. To the new liberalism, the death threat and the burning of the book were a direct attack on its fundamental raison d' être, undertaken by religious fanatics: the issue was one of freedom of speech. But to Muslims it was not an issue of freedom of speech in the abstract at all: it was a specific issue of social morality; all liberal societies draw the boundaries and limits of freedom at some point, of obscenity, of racism, and so on. To allow an author to engage in an attack on the most profound religious sensibilities is, to a Muslim, a comparable instance of transgressive offense. As a Muslim put it in Voices of Islam:

Freedom of speech is not the issue at all. Freedom of speech is restricted under the law as it is, in countless enactments to do with sedition, to do with contempt of court, defamation of character, libel and so on.... It is a case of double standards if, when it comes to outraging Muslim sensibilities, people appeal to freedom of speech in defence, while all the time there are so many other things which we do not allow—racist writings, for example, are routinely censored, other writings are thought to be obscene, and so on. So this freedom is obviously being practised in a selective way.

The failure to allow that there might be the equivalent of "religious obscenity," except via the restricted route of the blasphemy laws, leaves at least some religious people thinking that they are being treated as a special case—the only ones who are "fair game" for abusive attack. But far more extensively than that particular and local issue, it seems to them to be the case that the values which religions have defended for so many millennia are themselves under unique attack. That may be a wrong perception, but it is a pervasive one.

The consequent schism in human community is then profound, and it is made particularly irreconcilable by the fact that many religions claim that their identification and defense of value come from sources of value which are not open to negotiation—from the Word or the Will of God. The fact that attempts to link moral judgments directly to authority in that way have been shown to be self-contradictory and self-canceling seems but another example of satanic liberalism—as also is the observation that there are many claimed words and wills of God, frequently in such conflict with each other than they are logically incompatible.

There are, of course, replies to these familiar criticisms, of which one is not

so much a reply as a defiance: it is to appeal simply to the authority and to mock the criticisms as examples of human arrogance (or worse): that is a route to fundamentalism, with which there can be no human conversation, any more than there can be with an absolute skeptic who denies that the world is there—that is the dangerous schism in human community.

Another reply is to accept the difference in different religions (as belonging, for example, to the necessary contingency of all revelation), but to ask whether there is a common essence of moral command, or some hierarchy of moral values. It is important to realize that, from the point of view of a critical realism, this can certainly be done, and it would be extremely odd if it could not. But the problems of authority and argument are not thereby diminished, let alone obliterated, because the common essence (the normative within the fact of diversity) is on such a level of generality (and often belonging to the structures of judgment) that it is virtually no help at all in resolving conflicts when it comes to the forming of particular actions and judgments. As I put it in an article on "The Religious Understanding of Human Rights," when asking whether there might be an interreligious cooperation in opposing apartheid:

There is a danger that we might merely point out the obvious. If you assemble representatives of world religions and ask if they are opposed to racism and to apartheid, the answer is going to be, Yes. It is somewhat like assembling a benediction of bishops and asking them if they are against sin. Obviously they are—or at least they have to say that they are. So for religions to endorse the obvious—that religions are opposed to racism and to apartheid—seems superfluous. It is like the famous remark attributed to Carlyle, who, when Margaret Fuller proclaimed with the romantic gesture, "I accept the universe," commented, "By God, she'd better!"⁴

Thus when Cardinal Hume declared in headlines that after the last week of April 1990, Britain ceased to be a Christian country, he did so because Parliament during that week passed legislation which allowed research on embryos for up to 14 days after fertilization, and which reduced the upper time limit on abortions from 28 to 24 weeks, but allowed, through amendments, abortions up to birth, either in cases where the fetus is handicapped, or on the grounds of permanent injury to the mental health of a pregnant woman. His main arguments were two: the sanctity of human life had been abandoned through the legislation; and, to quote his own words, "What has emerged with stark clarity is the lack of moral foundation for the formation of public policy in this most crucial area, that of human life and death."⁵

But to say that those who take a different view of when human life begins (in the case of embryo research) or who take a different view on the justification of the lesser of two evils (in the case of abortion) have given no moral thought to the matter (or if they have, that "all good men and true" will know that they are wrong) is an exact illustration of the defects of that kind of religious certainty. Even within Roman Catholicism, the view that the person comes into being instantaneously at the moment of conception has been contested; and Aquinas' understanding (crudely expressed though it was) that there are progressive stages of ensoulment is much more obviously implied by the facts

which our present knowledge of biology discloses. Facts (despite the much-quoted assertion that "you cannot get values from facts, oughts from ises") do imply values and obligations: but they do not often deliver incontestable judgments or actions in detailed cases. At a high level of generality, there may be considerable agreement (though even the meaning of something as apparently secure as "the sanctity of life" has been queried). But we will still be left with argument and context at the level of particular instances and issues. That will always be so, given the location of human beings in time.

But the problems confronting religious moralities based on authoritarian certainties are not exhausted, even then. For, when the nonreligious person (or even, on occasion, the adherent of a religion) looks at the practical moralities of a particular religion, she or he is often repelled. In the way of the direct seeing of values, some details of the ways of life commanded by religions seem simply and clearly wrong. Nor are these instances to be dismissed just as a matter of temporal and cultural relativity, since religions frequently tie them to timeless authority. Thus the same Cardinal Hume was reported recently as acting in a way that will strike the outsider as clearly and morally wrong. To quote the report:

Just before Cardinal Hume set off for the West Indies to lead a retreat, he had a Caribbean-style Mass at Westminster Cathedral. An invitation went out to "ethnic" altar servers throughout the Diocese of Westminster. One parish priest in the East End of London decided that all his servers qualified, one way or another; and about half of them made the journey down to Victoria. In the Cathedral they vested. Five of them were girls; seven were boys. The girls were denied access to the sanctuary. It was, they were told, against the Cardinal's regulations. The boys, at least from this particular parish, therefore, stayed off the altar in solidarity and sat, vested, in the front pew during the celebration. It later transpired that other parishes, knowing the ruling against the girls serving at the altar in the Cathedral, had decided against sending any of their servers to the service.⁷

That attitude to girls and to women, pervasive though it has been in Roman Catholicism, seems, simply and directly, to be wrong; and it seems so, not only to the outsider, but to many Roman Catholics as well. The reaction of authority figures within the system has not been to rehabilitate the fallibility of human judgments, but to reinforce the infallibility of the Magisterium, extending it, in the document, Instruction [sic] on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian, to even further requirements of obedience.

The issues, of course, may be far more extensive than that particular episode, in which religious appeals to authority in the control of moral judgment occur. Thus to take just one example: "Hinduism" is a 19th-century, European—or at least the word is. Hindus call their own life-way and religion by many names, but one in particular is sanatana dharma, everlasting dharma. Dharma, often translated as "law," is a wide-ranging word with many applications; but it frequently has the nuance of "appropriateness." In that sense, the whole of "Hinduism" can be understood as a map of dharma, a map of how to live appropriately in a world and cosmos of this kind. Dharma applies, not just to

human life, but to all life and to the whole universe. The root meaning of the word is "to sustain." Thus in one of the Aranyakas (Tait. A. x. 79) dharmā is called "the foundation of the whole universe" and in the great epic, the Mahabharata, "dharmā is so called on account of its capacity to sustain the world; on account of dharmā, people are sustained separately in their occupations and classes" (xii.110.11).

But that principle, which is based in Hindu scripture and revelation, has led directly into the elaboration of the caste system in India. Behavior in previous lives will determine the status into which a person had been born in this life, whether high or low. Dharma will then tell that person how to live in the status into which she or he has been born: and if he lives appropriately, he will then be reborn into a higher status in the next birth, or may even attain moksha, release from the whole process. But this confirms the outcaste, or even the lower castes, into ways of life which are fixed and which seem not just to the outsider, but to many Hindus as well, including Gandhi, unjustifiable and morally wrong. But to acknowledge that religious moralities are open to contest and change on such fundamental matters calls in question the validity of the authority which sanctions or requires them. In this example, it calls in question the linchpin of Hinduism in dharmā.

Thus all religions can agree with a part of the statement of Jonathan Lear, with which he began an article on "Moral Objectivity":

Morality exercises a deep...influence on the way we live our lives. The influence is deep both because moral injunctions are embedded in our psyches long before we can reflect on their status, and because even after we become reflective agents, the question of how we should live our lives among others is intimately bound up with the more general question of how we should live our lives.⁸

But what the cardinals and brahmins of religious cultures resist is the presence of two additional words in that opening sentence: "Morality exercises a deep and questionable influence." For Lear goes on:

The influence is questionable because morality pretends to a level of objectivity that it may not possess. Moral injunctions are meant to be binding on us in some way that is independent of the desires or preferences we may happen to have. When one asserts that a certain action is morally worthy or shameful one is, prima facie, doing more than merely expressing approval or disapproval or trying to get others to act as instruments of one's own will. If moral assertions were shown, at bottom, to be merely such exhortations, then they would be shown to wear a disguise. Morality would be revealed as pretending to an objectivity it does not have, and such a revelation could not but have a profound impact on our lives. It is doubtful that such a revelation could be kept locked up inside our studies.⁹

For relativism and noncognitive subjectivism to come out of the closet in that way would indeed be disturbing to religious moralities which rely on absolute authority, because it would subvert the very reason why such religions exist—at least in their own opinion. If the alternatives are indeed subjectivism or the

will of God, the evident consequences of subjectivism will compel us to the will of God. It is fine for John Kennedy to proclaim, "A man does what he must—in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures—and that is the basis of all human morality." But what if a man must—or believes he must—seduce his neighbor's wife, in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures: if there is no ground by God for saying, "Thou shalt not," then anarchy is (so religious people are inclined to think) out of the study and into the street. We might be moral on this view for prudential or social reasons, or simply because life would otherwise be as Hobbes described it, "a condition of war of everyone against everyone...solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Unity Mitford reported that on one occasion she quoted this to Goebbels, and after a pause, he commented, "It sounds such fun." But to a religious person, concerned with goodness, beauty and truth, it does not sound fun at all.

In contrast, religions, whether authoritarian or not, believe that the issues which confront us in our choices are a great deal more serious than the control or the fulfillment of our desires and wants in competition with one another. The issues are greatly more serious even than the issues of life and death—such issues as abortion, euthanasia, or capital punishment. Religions are indeed concerned with those. But they are concerned also with the underlying anthropology and its destiny. To be a person is to be at least one who exercises moral and aesthetic judgment realistically, and whose agency and responsibility transcend by a long way the reductionist accounts of maximized self-interest. Religions understand the moral subject to have the intrinsic value of one who is the locus of valuing and judging, far beyond the strict requirements of genetic interest. And more than that: religions are concerned also with salvation, with enlightenment, with moksha, with eternal life—or equally with everlasting death. Religions are concerned with what a person may ultimately become and be forever. Even if, for the sake of argument, religions were entirely wrong about what they believe in the case of eternal destiny, it would not affect the descriptive point: the issues of judgment and behavior are a great deal more important for religions than splitting atoms and splicing genes: "For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul." Or as Dr. Boardman put it in his own inaugural lecture:

[W]hat avails it to know everything in space from atom to star, everything in time from protoplasm to Deity, if we do not know how to manage ourselves amid the complex, delicate, ever-varying duties of daily life? What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world—the world geographical, commercial, political, intellectual, and after all lose his own soul? What can a University give in exchange for a Christlike character? Thus it is that ethics is the science of sciences. Very significant is the motto of our own noble University—"Literae Sine Moribus Vanæ."

This is the point at which we can begin to understand the almost desperate urgency of religious systems: do it my way, or die; and die not just immediately but die forever, in a condition distinguished eternally from some other more desirable outcome. The consequences of choosing wrongly seem (to those in

charge) too great to be left to the subjective opinion of those who cannot know enough about the case (any case) to be trusted to decide for themselves. It is the case for the Inquisition. But the anxiety is not confined to Roman Catholicism. In November of 1987, the then Bishop of London visited the United States in order to deliver the Green lecture. In that lecture, he made a passionate attack on subjectivism: the lecture was entitled, "The Tyranny of Subjectivism"; and he made, in contrast, a correspondingly strong appeal for a return to absolute values, enshrined in natural law. Subjectivism, in his view, is

based in the belief that principles and values are in essence no more than statements about the likes and dislikes, desires and aversions of those who hold them. From this it follows [though actually it doesn't follow, but I am simply reporting the bishop's argument] that there is no possibility of any resolution of disagreements about questions of principles and value or even of politics.... There can be no more on the part of the subjectivist, than the restatement of what he considers to be self-evident truths and he is impervious to the arguments or criticisms of those who seek to challenge him.¹⁰

We then get the claim that subjectivism, by having no objective and independent standards of truth or morality outside the subject, leads to violence and tyranny. The bishop recognized that in the past, and in the ages of faith when the church had absolute authority, bad things were done to good people, but at least the church in those days knew what it was doing and why. "It is for this reason," he went on,

that subjectivism leads to the use of violence to achieve its end, just as fundamentalism led to the Inquisition and to the rule of the saints in Calvinism, but with one significant difference. Fundamentalism could claim, albeit in the wrong way, to [be conforming to] the demands of truth outside man, whereas subjectivism leads to violence because it has no objective criteria to which it can appeal.¹¹

But once again, as with the cardinal, this is both absurd and offensive. It is absurd because the bishop gives no example of subjectivism leading to tyrannical violence. In fact, exactly the opposite is true. Those who say "do it my way or die" are almost invariably those who believe that they are objectively and absolutely right. As it was with the church in an earlier age, when it operated in the style which the cardinal and the bishop endeavor to continue at the present time, so it is with those in our time who have done most damage to immense populations of innocent people: Stalin, Hitler, the Japanese under Hirohito, the Khmer Rouge, the government until recently in Pretoria, were not subjectivists; they had an absolute sense of being objectively right, and of conforming to natural laws, whether those of history or of race. What is more, they all rejected subjective dissent with as much passion as the Bishop of London. And if I were a Jew or a homosexual or a woman, I would far rather live in the United States, which holds certain truths to be self-evident (the bishop's mark of subjectivism), than I would under the jurisdiction of the then Bishop of London or the Cardinal of Rome. It is indeed the case that the U. S. Constitution is non-negotiable

(although it is open to amendment), but to suppose that the United States is thereby committed to tyranny is absurd—the very country where moral protest led to the resignation of a president and the ending of a war.

But the conclusion is also offensive, because it implies that there was something better about a Jew burning in the fires of Torquemada's Spain than in the ovens of Hitler's Germany, on the ground that at least the Inquisition was trying to adhere to truth, objectivity, and external to itself. If this is where religious certainty leads, no wonder the world is marching to a different, noncognitive step.

We seem, therefore, to be left with two extremes, neither of which is attractive or true as a foundation of moral life: either noncognitive irrealism in which morality is a compromise; or absolute authority in which morality is conformity. But there is a better way, which a critically realistic approach to ethics makes possible. That kind of realism makes clear why the bishop and the cardinal are right when they insist that morality is not just a matter of opinion or improvisation. There are moral facts, and we see them directly; and naturalism at least sets limits on what is appropriate in relation to human and other good. But that kind of restricted naturalism and critical realism cannot deliver us from diversity and change, nor should it seek to do so, because that would itself diminish what belongs characteristically to human responsibility and moral being, the projection of life into relationships whose outcomes are novel and unforeseeable, and into acknowledged but unknown futures, both of which involve us in evaluations which are moral in character.

But that simply reinforces the point that the bishop and the cardinal are right to argue—and to argue with passion. After all, on issues of life and death it seldom makes sense to talk of compromise (though that is nevertheless what a free and civilized society has to aim for). The judgment of Solomon over the contested baby makes the point. Thus, a critical realism argues that facts imply values and obligations; and if it is factually the case that a person comes into being at the moment of conception, then that fact implies obligations (though even then, not uniquely and coercively the obligations the cardinal supposes: the exercise of proxy decision-making in that case could lead to a different outcome, as I have shown in the Ciba Foundation symposium, Embryo Research—Yes or No?). But it is also a consequence of that kind of critical realism that both the facts and the obligations taken to be implied by them may be disputed. Thus what is claimed to be a fact in this example (that the zygote is a person) is strongly disputed—and again, not as a matter of opinion or improvisation, but with appeal to the facts of the case.

So there may be consensus, but it cannot always be assured. The consensus may attain the level of certainty in relation to human good ("We hold these truths to be self-evident"), and it becomes the premise in social, political, and economic action and further debate. But the applications still remain underdefined and contested. Even religions with the strongest doctrines of revelation and inspiration are nevertheless open to circumstance. Thus Torah is certainly non-negotiable for observant practicing Jews; and within Torah, the laws regulating diet and food are central; and among those laws, those governing shebitah, the method of slaughtering animals, are absolute. Or are they? Jewish reactions to protests against shebitah may make them seem so. But in the opinion of Rabbi David Goldberg,

almost alone in the ancient world, the Jews were commanded to show kindness to animals....The debate for or against shebitah is conducted with more heat than light, and in the process an important ethical consideration is ignored: if, in fact, it could be conclusively demonstrated that shebitah is not the most humanitarian method of ritual slaughter, then the weight of Jewish teaching, with its emphasis on kindness to animals, would compel a modification of traditional practice.¹²

Exactly the same is true of Islam: for all the strength of its understanding of the Quran as the word of God, the application of Quran, via sharia, to life is always open to circumstance; and the agent of its application is reason and argument.

Reason, then is a part of our giftedness. But it cannot deliver us into certainty on all issues and in all circumstances. The Kantian hope which issued from the Age of Reason cannot be realized, nor is it desirable that it should be. However, as F. J. Jacob ended his book The Possible and the Actual, "The enlightenment and the 19th century had the folly to consider reason to be not only necessary but sufficient for the solution of all problems. Today it would be still more foolish to decide, as some would like, that because reason is not sufficient, it is not necessary either."

To that extent, the bishop and the cardinal are right. But they are wrong to look for more certainty than the nature of that particular kind of human judging can deliver without destroying its own nature and excellence. There are greater certainties in mathematics than in physics, much greater certainties in physics than in sociology, some greater certainties in sociology than in morals. The error is to claim for morals the certainties of mathematics, and then to dictate those claimed certainties to the world at large, as though every certainty can be solved by writing in and asking for the answer:

Dear Miss Manners: Some time ago, a lady was dancing with her male friend at the White House, and her underslip dropped to the dance floor, and the lady just kept dancing as if nothing had happened. Was this the proper thing for the lady to do?

Gentle Reader: Yes, the thing to do is to ignore it. A general rule of etiquette is that one apologises for the unfortunate occurrence, but the unthinkable is unmentionable.

Is God Miss Manners? Or rather, are the cardinal and the bishop the Miss Manners and the Marjorie Proops of the religious world? Clearly not. They are right to represent the accumulated wisdom of generations derived from *Lex Dei* and *Lex naturae*: they would be subverting the responsibility of their pastoral office if they did not do so:

O when our Clergie, at the dreadful Day,
Shal make their Audit; when the Judge shal say
Give your accompts: What, have my lambs been fed?
Say, doe they all stand sound? Is there none dead
By your defaults? Come, shepherds, bring them forth
That I may crowne your labours in their worth.

O what an answer will be given by some!...
To say the truth, great Judge, they were not fed
Lord, here they be; but Lord, they be all dead

—Francis Quarles

It may well be the searching and utter seriousness of this responsibility which drives them on, "a bridge too far," in insisting, rightly, on the place of authority in human judgment. Nevertheless, the style in which they exercise it is wrong because it is inhumane: it is a contradiction of what it means to be morally human. It is an attack on precisely the same responsibility which each one of us bears for herself or for himself, for each other and for the planet. It may be the case that we are not sufficiently well-informed on particular issues in front of us, and should therefore look for advice, even at the level of Miss Manners (though discerning appropriate sources of advice is itself an exercise in moral responsibility). The Bible and the Magisterium (the teaching of the bishops in the church) have clear authority as sources of advice. They cannot be made a substitute either for God, or for our responsibility—not least because both are contingent and both contain error. It is in the domain of freedom that conscience is the *locus* of, and the vocation into, value.

In the language of the Second Vatican Council:

In the depths of his conscience man detects a law which he does not make for himself but which he must obey. Its voice always summons him to love and to do what is good and to shun evil. At the right moment it resounds in the secrecy of his heart: do this, avoid that. For there is in man's heart a law written by God. His dignity lies in obeying it; and according to this law he will be judged. There he is alone with God, there in his innermost self he perceives the voice of God.

The devaluation of conscience in Nietzsche and Freud ("What is Jewish, what is Christian morality? Chance robbed of its innocence, unhappiness polluted with the idea of 'sin,' well-being represented as a danger, as a 'temptation,' a physiological disorder produced by the canker worm of conscience"; "The Superego is the successor and representative of the parents and ancestors who superintended the actions of the individual in his first year of life, and it perpetuates their function almost without a change.... The Superego is the vehicle for the phenomenon we call 'conscience.'") does not affect the phenomenology of the experience which as evoked the word and has set limits on the concept during its long and winnowed history—a point well understood by Kierkegaard. The concept of conscience can be misapplied in either of the two mistaken directions summarized on p. 00, and can thereby subvert the giftedness of human agency and responsibility at either extreme. On the noncognitive side conscience becomes a synonym for subjectivity without reference to the limits set by what is independently and factually the case, which are protected in consensual moralities: the authenticity of the individual and her or his good faith become the only objective value. The overvaluing of conscience in this direction becomes to Cardinal Ratzinger "the apotheosis of subjectivity," "subjectivity elevated to the ultimate criterion."¹³ On the other, legalistic side, sys-

tems become depersonalized and ethically automated, so that the judgment of conscience means measuring it against already established rules of living which individuals do not share personally or live existentially. That creativity which to Aquinas in relation to conscience is the mark and fulfillment of human being is lost.

In contrast, therefore, to both extremes, conscience stands more accurately (in relation to the phenomenology of its experience) for the way in which, having been prepared by the developmental process of human life for linguistic and social being, we are oriented, fundamentally, universally and absolutely, not to randomness and necessity alone, but to the objectivity of what is good and right. This constitutes the ethical goodness of the person. It is why good people exist, and why we encounter goodness extensively, even in a fallen world. This constitutive goodness is sometimes known as "fundamental conscience." On that basis, each of us engages in ethical judgments and actions, with more or less reflection, with more or less success; and this way of being human (of being ourselves) is known as "situational conscience." Clearly the latter sense of conscience cannot be equated with the "voice of God," since it is fraught with error. It is only in the former, foundational sense of the solus cum Solo that the inviolability of conscience can be affirmed; and even then, only in combination with its integrity, which includes a willingness to allow the a priori strength of the accumulated wisdoms of human communities and histories, particularly where they have come to be expressed as norms, or even (though here the ground trembles with corresponding histories of abuse) as principles. Even so, as Spaemann points out (and this returns us to fundamental conscience), it is the individual who acquires the act or the decision as a matter of personal responsibility.¹⁴ We are back to the acquisition of responsibility as the mark of human being and maturity.

What all this makes clear is that to be morally human is an extremely strenuous business. Of course the forming of any situational conscience is as enculturated as any other aspect of our being. Nevertheless, the words stand, phenomenologically, for an individual's reflection on the issues of judgment and action in the domain of value. It is the occasion when we are most and entirely ourselves: "Nothing is so sacred and final as conscience," argued Fransen: "No authority, not even the authority of the church, can take from me this burden, this duty before God, or can excuse me from this personal and free decision of my own conscience."¹⁵

It is true we are selves only in a field of selves, and that frequently our own decision is obscured in the corporate event or act. Thus, when we made the television series on evil, we explored this point through two disasters, both occurring within the same chemical company, Union Carbide. One was the explosion at the chemical plant in Bhopal; the other occurred much earlier, in the 1930s, when a tunnel was driven through a mountain in West Virginia, in order to divert a river for the purposes of generating electricity. A high proportion of the miners developed silicosis, and many of them died. In both cases, company spokesmen pointed to the wide diffusion of responsibility; and they were not being evasive in doing so. In the program in question, Edward Opton pointed out that no executive set out to kill the miners or blind the people of Bhopal. But in any large organization, individuals are insulated from the consequences of

their actions; and where there are several layers in an organization, it is difficult for information about wrongdoing (supposing it occurs and is detected) to reach the top. All this was seen with graphic clarity in the attempt to prosecute a company after the Zeebrugge disaster for corporate responsibility. The alleged derelictions of particular individuals could not add up to a corporate responsibility.

A consequence of this diffusion of responsibility is that Western-style democracies, with their high emphasis on individualism, are extremely uncertain in understanding the responsibilities and accountabilities of community. The tension between the Conservative party and the Church of England is a summary, in miniature, of this uncertainty. As a point of new departure, it needs to be realized from the outset that systems are not the sum of the individuals who comprise them, and that the conditions for the continuity and well-being of systems can only be discerned in relation to their own circumstances and goals. A system cannot be treated as a metaphorical individual, as though "it" can exercise the same kind of responsibility or accountability as an individual. But on the other hand, the ways in which systems design and accept accountability can scarcely be left to the chance of case law, since in that case repetitions of Zeebrugge or of the aftermath of the Lockerbie disaster, or of Alpha Piper, are predictable. In any of those instances, the individual decision at any level could not have prevented the disaster. Corporate morality is not the sum of individual moralities. All the more important, therefore, for corporations and firms to build into the monitoring of their operations and decisions the quite separate means of evaluating what they are doing in relation to human good. A business ethic is not the sum of the ethics of individual businesspeople.

Yet still, where those and all other individuals are concerned, they are the truth or otherwise of conscience in its own relevant exercise. No one can invade or take control of this activity of reflection and formation of judgment. In the words of the Second Vatican Council Constitution (Gaudium et Spes 16), quoting a radio message of Pius XII:

Conscience is the innermost centre and sanctuary in the human person. It is there that he takes refuge with his spiritual faculties in absolute solitude alone with himself and his God. Conscience is a sanctuary on the threshold of which all must halt, even in the case of a child, his father and mother.

So it is that in the Ignatian Examen of Conscience, it is the truth of oneself that one is attempting to bring to the level of awareness before God. Here we are confronting, not "the nature and destiny of man" in the abstract (or, as in that case, the title of a book): I am confronting my own nature and destiny, what I am, in the truth of my enacted being. And here, there can be no evasion.

The phenomenological experience which evokes the word "conscience" is a human universal. Its particular exercise is of course culturally relative. But the experience is common to us all, in the way that it is not to a stone or a star. It contributes to what characteristically makes us human. That is why I argued (in the paper already referred to) that a religious protest against racism and apartheid does not lie in finding a common essence of morality in all religions, but rather

in the structure of judgment, supported as a mark of humanity. Religions, beyond the large generalizations of "being in favor of goodness," are extremely, and often incompatibly, diverse. Moreover, in their own histories, they have done things which are at least as evil as apartheid and have held them to be justified from their own point of view (and in some cases they are still doing them). There is no way forward by trying to form general resolutions in favor of goodness, which ignore the facts of diversity which issue in highly contestable behaviors. When politicians meet to confront a difficult decision, they frequently pass the buck; when religions meet to confront a difficult moral decision, they usually pass the lily: they all claim to be innocent. But they are not; and the diversity and the evils in their own case must be the first item on the agenda. But then it becomes clear (in this instance) that within the diversity they nevertheless all insist that humans are accountable and responsible in their own thoughts and actions. Racism is defined as wrong and as evil because it prevents and makes impossible the proper exercise of that responsibility—exactly the mistake also of the cardinal and the bishop. The issue of human rights, therefore, is always an issue of the right to be human. As I concluded the paper:

This is why there can be, and has to be, a religious protest against poverty, against racism, against the male determination of what women may or may not do, against Leninist imperialism, against Coca Cola imperialism, against apartheid, against any contradiction of that basic religious insight that you cannot ask people to acquire and accept responsibility for the disposition of their own lives (as religions say they must) if you put them or control them into circumstances where there is no space and no way in which to be responsible.¹⁶

Authority, then, may provide the sources of conscience, but not the solutions to its problems. In any case, argument, context, and change, within the context of reliable limits, belong to the nature of human good. Of course such an account of the matter, at least so far, puts an enormous weight on rationality, and very little on the subversions of reason, or on the limits of reason at the bounds of possibility. A graphic cartoon made the point, when it depicted two unemployed young people, standing in a derelict inner-city wasteland; and one says to the other: "Charlie, are you a rationally autonomous person whose life is self-directed in the light of what reason determines?" There is much more yet to be said about evil and death. But has enough yet been said about authority of a different kind, the authority of God which rescues us from the impotence of reason, by supplying us with redemption instead? The words of God as the Word of God addressed to us should surely be a more reliable guide to our morality than the accumulations of human experience and wisdom. In that case the Bible becomes the root and foundation of our life. What then is the authority of the Bible?

2. Bible and Behavior

Publishing the Bible has been the salvation of publishers, quite apart from what it may have done for the salvation of those who read it. In the first years after its appearance in 1961, the translation of the New Testament in the New English Bible sold a million copies a year. But the Bible is a strange book to read, particularly if you start at page 1 and continue, in its own sequence, to the end. It may begin with a man and a woman in a garden and end in revelations, as Oscar Wilde observed, but in between there is the kind of confused and disparate material which baffles those who seek a simple story of salvation. For that reason, an attempt was made to domesticate the wild terrain by producing The Bible Designed to Be Read as Literature.

But the Bible designed to be read as literature is a long carry with a 1-iron from the Bible required to be read as the Word of God, on which Karl Barth was insisting at the very same time. To reduce the Bible to literature was exactly what Barth regarded as the error of liberalism in general, which had steadily, through the 19th century, reduced God to the measure of man: religion becomes a human way of experiencing, in which the contemporary intellect is the judge of what is true and valuable. Revelation is thus subordinated to reason. In contrast, far from domesticating the wild terrain of the Bible, Barth insisted on what he called "the strange new world of the Bible." There is, he maintained, an infinite, qualitative difference between God as he is—eternal, holy and wholly other—and ourselves, contingent, temporal and sinful. The "gap" cannot be bridged by reason, nor can God be reduced to the conclusion of an argument. The gap has been bridged the other way around, by the initiative of God as an act of grace choosing to speak through human life and language to those who hear by faith. The Bible is the consequence of what it portrays, the initiative of God speaking his word through Israel until the coming of the Word in flesh in the person of Christ. When this Word, attested to in Scripture, is proclaimed faithfully in the preaching of the church, then God continues to speak, through an act of grace, to humans in every generation, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And if Barth objected to the Bible being reduced to literature, he would equally have objected to liberal human authority whenever it usurps the authority of God. For, if the Word confronts us in the words of Scripture, then the ultimate authority will be found, neither in the pronouncements of a pope, nor in the autonomy of ethics affirmed as a human enterprise, but in the Bible as "a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119: 105).

But even then, the question will still be how that authority actually works. At one extreme the popular perception of the Bible and its authority is that of Alan Coren at 4:17 a.m. on the morning after a New Year's Eve celebration:

4.17 am light from fridge snaps on, reverberates through head like noise, can hear pupils contracting, shut fridge door, little polychrome rhomboids continue to kaleidoscope about in brain.

Or am I dead? This is Elysian fridge, I have snuffed it and gone to Kitchen, God's final jest, doomed to an eternity standing on jammy lino in bare feet, unable to find bottle opener, parched for Coke.

Would He be this tough on drinkers? Cannot recall pentateuchal

injunctions against alcohol, is there an XIth Commandment somewhere in small print, Thou shalt not booze? Are there parables in minor prophet texts, And Jeroboam came home legless and fell over the cat, and uttered oaths; and the LORD God brought forth thunderbolts and smote him in that place where he was, saying: Henceforth shall the floor of thy mouth be as an wadi, and thine eyeballs as twin coals, and the fruit of thy loins go about on all fours, even unto the tenth generation?¹⁷

That is a perception of the Bible as Big Brother, as the eye that monitors our behavior, offering rewards to those who do as it commands, and punishments to those who do not. It imitates the voice of the elder sister to the younger sister of the Punch cartoon, "Go and see what baby's doing and tell her not to."

It is easy to caricature the negative authority of the Bible in this way; and religious people are perfectly capable of living the caricature, without the help of outsiders. On the first visit of the present pope to the United States, the Washington Post carried a cartoon showing the pope addressing a vast crowd and saying, "Women priests, no; abortion, no; euthanasia, no; homosexuality, no; married clergy, no; contraception, no; toleration, yes." But there is, nevertheless, a truth which the caricature is distorting: it is the observation that the Bible could scarcely have any claim to be the word of God, revealing his purpose and will for his creation and its redemption, if it did not give us some clear guidance for our behavior. There are non-negotiable conditions in creation to which we give the name "law"—as of gravity or of Boyle. We cannot ignore them with success. It would seem odd, therefore, if what is claimed to be the revelation of God's word and will for us did not give explicit instruction about the behaviors which conform to the conditions for living successfully in his creation. Such limits might then supply the possibility and the meaning of natural law. In the case of Scripture they would appear as normative, and are sometimes known as "creation principles"—conditions of successful or appropriate living which cannot morally be ignored, and which appear consistently in all the many different forms of Scripture—in narrative, song, reflection, and history, as much as in law and instruction.

However, the Jewish vocation is not simply to be moral: it is also to be holy. The limits on life if it is to be holy are set in Scripture, in much more specific and detailed ways, and they issue in the commands and prohibitions of the law contained in Torah. For an observant Jew, the syag, or fence, of Torah creates a context in which the prophet Micah's question can be answered in a detailed and specific way: "You know, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:8). We can know what the Lord requires of us, because he has told us, in the words now contained in Torah.

The quest for holiness in the detail of Torah cannot be a substitute for morality, as the prophets reminded Israel even before the detail of Torah was fully established. That is why, to a Jew, the vocation to be holy according to the commands of Torah is a specifically Jewish vocation, while the obligation to be moral is universal. Thus it is not incumbent on Jews to convert Gentiles, because the very first of all the covenants (with Noah) is understood by Jews as a kind of "natural law" relationship in which Gentiles can be within the restora-

tion which will culminate in the messianic age, without any necessity for them to become Jews.¹⁸

This means that Jews can expect or hope for human cooperation (and certainly for interreligious cooperation) in seeking to identify and apply moral norms, without seeking or expecting agreement between religions on doctrinal or other matters. In the succinct claim of David Bleich, "Basic moral values are universal and not contingent upon sectarian claims."¹⁹ The critical realist in moral matters is likely to be more circumspect, and to say that the discernment of moral facts, together with the structure of justification, is universal, and that these issue in general statements about moral values, some of which have immense and tested reliability (amounting to practical certainty), but whose application nevertheless remains contingent, so that their meaning is necessarily, and unregrettably, open to change.²⁰ It follows that even if Scripture contained clear statements about eternal values (and even that, as we shall see, needs some careful discrimination), the contests about how to apply them in detail will not diminish.

This means that the Jewish hope of relating religions to a universal morality via the route of Scripture is unlikely to be realized, because the steps of the argument will not be followed or agreed. In the same volume on Jewish Bioethics, David Bleich indicates what the steps in the argument are: first, Torah, because it is revealed from God, will provide eternally valid answers to even newly formulated queries; second, Torah does not address itself to all issues, least of all those which it could not foresee, such as those in bioethics; but third, Judaism has always extended Torah through formal study and application, culminating in Halakah (literally, that by which one walks, the accumulation of interpretation through the years, regarded as Torah itself, but Torah transmitted orally):

Jews, to whom all such questions [as those in bioethics] are quests not simply for applicable humanitarian principles but for divine guidance, must, of necessity, seek answers in the teachings of Torah. "The Torah of God is perfect" (Psalms 19:8) and in its teachings the discerning student will find eternally valid answers to even newly-formulated queries....To be sure, not all bioethical problems are questions of black and white. There are many gradations of gray, questions to which answers are not immediately and intuitively available. A person who seeks to find answers within the Jewish tradition can deal with such questions in only one way. He must examine them through the prism of Halakah for it is in the corpus of Jewish law as elucidated and transmitted from generation to generation that God has made His will known to man.²¹

But Christians (let alone other religions) have not conceded the exclusive validity of hermeneutics to rabbinic Judaism in that way—nor, indeed, have all Jews. Christians clearly do not relate their detailed decisions to Scripture in that way. For Christians, the answer to what counts as "doing justly and walking humbly with God" is no longer to be found within the strict observance of the laws—Torah. When Jesus was asked, as many rabbis were, to suggest which law was the kelal, the greatest of all the laws in which all the other laws were

effectively contained, his reply was, The love of God with your entire being, and the love of your neighbor as yourself. Where other rabbis were concerned, these kelalim were not intended to abolish the rest of the laws, but rather to supply a quintessential summary which the others would exemplify in detail.²² That may also have been the intention of Jesus, who is reported to have said that he had not come to abolish the law, and that not a jot or tittle of it would be removed. But what Jesus clearly began to realize was that Torah is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for entering into the covenant relationship with God.²³ It is not exclusively necessary, because Gentiles have observably entered it by faith; and it is not sufficient, because the observance of commands in detail may not yield goodness. Neither of these observations was particularly novel: holiness is neither a synonym nor a substitute for morality. And Jesus certainly did not say that if you live within the boundary of Torah, you cannot be in that covenant relationship with God: the Jewish vocation is still valid (a wiser starting place for Jewish-Christian relationships than those many others which have led to the massive Christian contribution to anti-Semitism). But Christians subsequently began to raise a quite different issue, the status of law in relation to salvation, and to combine that issue with a radically different, and far more pessimistic, anthropology: where Jews understand Genesis to be illustrating the human inclination to evil (and to good), with the implication that humans are educable into goodness, Christians understand Genesis to be illustrating a radical incapacity among humans to save themselves, least of all by education or by following the precepts of law. The statement, "The good that I would I do not do, and the evil that I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19) is, in Paul's view, a human universal: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). We therefore need a rescue which we cannot achieve for ourselves, a new testament or covenant with God, for which the older testament is a preparation—not that Torah is shown thereby to be a failure, but rather that human failure to keep it perfectly shows that a more radical solution is required.

So Christians are not surprised to find, in what they call the Old Testament, indications of what is normative in any human life that deserves the predication of the word "good." But they do not believe that a generally agreed morality can be achieved by translating Torah plus Halakah into life, nor do they believe that that procedure will disclose general moral truths that others might discern in any case on other grounds (so that there can be a universal morality in detail as much as in general). And while the attempt to discern the normative in the process of change will be as possible in the biblical case as in any other, the process of change will also have to be taken with equal seriousness. For it is obvious that we cannot go to Scripture (however much we accept it as the Word of God addressed to us) without the discrimination that contingency demands. It is not the case that all the behaviors endorsed and commanded by the Bible remain commands for us. Mrs. Spicer made this clear when she wrote to the office of the Censorship of Publications Board in the Republic of Ireland. She wrote in response to the Board's ban on the publication in Ireland of Alex Comfort's book The Joy of Sex. She wrote in to request that a far more dangerous book should be banned, a book in which "mutilation and genocide, coupled with graphic obscenity and ritual murder is a prominent theme, and,

indeed, many of the heroes and heroines are extolled for their murderous ability and promiscuous prowess." The book is of course the Bible. Mrs. Spicer asked the Board, "Why should The Joy of Sex be banned? Are people not supposed to enjoy sex? If there is going to be censorship, then violence should be on the menu—the Bible is riddled with it."

According to the report in the newspaper:

She then singled out sections of the Scriptures. She claimed that Deuteronomy 22 endorsed the murder of brides who were not virgins and quoted the passage which reads, "...but if a thing is true, that the tokens of virginity were not found in a young woman, then they shall bring the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of the city shall stone her to death... So shall you purge the evil from your midst." She also quoted a passage from Deuteronomy ch. 25 to support her charge that mutilation is advocated in the Bible: "If a woman puts out her hand and seizes him by the private parts, then you shall cut off her hand, your eyes shall have no pity." Mrs. Spicer said that sexual abuse and slavery occurred in passages where Moses told the Israelites not to kill captured young virgins but to keep them for their own use. The Board said that the submission would be considered.²⁴

But the answer to that (on the part of those who appeal to the authority of the Bible in determining our behaviors) is sharp and simple: the Bible does not operate in relation to our decisions in such a naive way: it is not the case that if some behavior can be found to be endorsed in the Bible (even if it is directly commanded by God), it automatically becomes a warrant for our behaving in exactly the same way: the Bible exhibits the transcendence of its own past, not least for Christians by the relation of the new covenant to the old: "You have heard that it was said of old..., but I say to you...."

But that already means, first, that criteria of judgment are being applied to the content of Scripture, and second, that the historical contingency of the Bible is being accepted. The classical concepts which defend the authority of Scripture are verbal inspiration (the words of Scripture, and not simply the message, were chosen by God to be used by a biblical author), plenary inspiration (all parts of Scripture are equally inspired, and all are equally authoritative), and inerrancy (if God is the author of Scripture, it is inconceivable that he would be associated with error, and thus the Holy Spirit has to be understood, in this respect, as preserving the biblical authors from what Lindsell calls "factual, historical, scientific, or other errors."²⁵ But if the Bible is not a quarry in which any one stone is equal to any other stone, no matter from what part it is hewn, then some evaluation of the different stones is going on. In theory, Christians should have no difficulty with that: the criterion of evaluation is the cross of Christ, together with the claim to incarnation, in the case of Christ, which surrounds it. In practice, though, many Christians only operate that criterion when it suits them, and otherwise do use the texts of Scripture indiscriminately, like the stones from any part of a quarry. Thus, as we shall see, in the case of one particular example, documents emanating (with authority) from the Vatican are inclined to scatter texts around, as though they will automati-

cally supply warrants for assertions, without any reference to the historical context of their origin. "The Bible says" is a familiar and ringing cry—amplified now through the loudspeakers of TV sets, as televangelists hew texts from the biblical quarry as though all texts are equal—though some are clearly more equal than others.

And why not? If the inspiration of Scriptures is verbal and plenary, and if it issues in an inerrant text, it cannot surely be used in any other way: on this view, the word of God is in history, but it is not affected by history. But that immediately makes it clear why Scripture cannot be used in that way: for, the Word of God, in the person of Christ, is both in history and affected by it. To use the Bible in that other, homogeneous, way, as though its historical contingency is an unfortunate accident to be explained away, is to deny the patience of God in the process which leads up to the Incarnation itself: for, if God can reveal to us all that is necessary for salvation in words which are protected from the consequences of time and circumstance, then why did he not simply do that, and save himself from the further patience (patior, "I suffer") of the cross? To which Muslims reply that he did: through many prophets, among many different peoples, he has revealed Quran. The message of the Quran is always the same, although it is revealed in different languages and circumstances: but the guidance offered is always the same.

From the Muslim point of view, the Bible contains Quran: the biblical prophets, from Abraham and Moses to Jesus, are highly revered in the Arabic Quran, which was transmitted or revealed through Muhammad. But in the case of all previous communities, the message of the Quran has been corrupted, or it has been confused: thus the Gospels contain Quran, but they also contain stories (ahadith) about Jesus: the message and the messenger have been confused. Equally, the Gospels cannot be reconciled with each other when, as they often do, they give different accounts of what Jesus said. In any case, Jesus spoke often, perhaps always, in Aramaic, but his words have been translated into Greek.

It is only the Arabic Quran, according to Muslims, which has been preserved and transmitted without error and without textual variation. There have then been fierce arguments, during the history of Islam, about whether each word of the Quran is inspired, or whether it is the general message. But no Muslim doubts that the miracle of the Quran demonstrates that it comes directly from God. To a Muslim, the Christian belief that Jesus is the self-utterance of God in human life, is a frightening blasphemy: God cannot be contained in some part of his creation. Yet religiously, the Quran comes as close to saying that as it is possible to come, while still keeping God distant from his creation: the "mother of the book" is with God in heaven, and God transmits it through a prophet so that the humanity of that prophet does not affect the message.

It follows that in ethics the Quran functions as many Christians believe that the Bible ought to function: all texts in the Quran are of equal authority; and wherever the Quran contains explicit commands or prohibitions, it is clear that it must be obeyed. The Quran is not, of course, exhaustive: it does not deal with every possible circumstance that might arise. It is therefore supplemented (but never superseded) by the stories (ahadith) of what Muhammad and his companions said and did, because they are the first living commentators on Quran.

Eventually Quran and Hadith were organized into different schools of practice, or sharia, which form the context in which most Muslims live. Sharia itself remains open to continuing interpretation and extension, but only within limits: the Quran itself has the absolute and non-negotiable authority, of a kind which is also claimed by at least some Christians for the Bible.

It is true that Quran is not tyrannical (or at least, not compared with Vatican Catholicism). The single greatest principle (asl) of Islam in relation to conduct is that "the things which Allah has created and the benefits derived from them are essentially for man's use, and hence are permissible." So in general, in Muslim life,

the sphere of prohibited things is very small, while that of permissible things is extremely vast....In this regard the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "what Allah has made lawful in His Book is halal ['permitted'] and what He has forbidden is haram ['forbidden'], and that concerning which He is silent is allowed as His favor. So accept from Allah His favor, for Allah is not forgetful of anything."²⁶

Nevertheless, where some behavior or action is specified, the nature of that behavior or action is dictated as surely as the Quran is dictated by God. That is why Quran is almost invariably understood literalistically. Mystical or allegorical interpretations (for example, of the Sufis) are extremely marginal; and to understand the story of human origins, through the figures of Adam and Eve, as a myth is an assault on the citadels of truth: myth is equated with its colloquial sense of falsehood; and the thought that God might reveal his word through myth in its original and creative sense (a universal language of truth as powerful as the far more recent universal language of science) is simply unimaginable.

At an extreme, therefore, Muslim life produces the conformity which al-Ahazzali commended:

Know that the key of happiness is following the surna [the path established by Quran and Hadith] and imitating God's apostle in all his goings out and comings in, in his movements and times of rest, even in the manner of his eating, his deportment, his sleep and his speech. I do not say this concerning his behavior in matters of religious observances only...; no, this has to do with all matters of use and habit, for in that way unrestricted following arises. So, you must sit while putting on trousers and stand while putting on a turban; you must begin with the right foot when putting on your sandals, and eat with your right hand. When cutting your nails, you must begin with the forefinger of the right hand and finish with its thumb; in the foot you must begin with the little toe on the right foot and finish with the little toe of the left. It is the same in all your movements and times of rest. Muhammad b. Aslam used not to eat a melon because the manner in which God's apostle ate it had not been transmitted to him.²⁷

The question, then, which we come back to is this: is the Bible the Quran? Can Christians use Scripture as Muslims use the Quran, as a timeless text order-

ing the detail of life from now to the end of the world? The Muslims are the first to answer, No, they can't. The Muslim understanding of verbal and plenary inspiration, and of inerrancy, makes it clear that the Bible cannot meet the highest specifications of those terms. Muslims allow that the Bible contains Quran, though it is now mixed and confused with other material. Nevertheless, it follows that the prophets in the biblical communities, through whom Quran was transmitted, were inspired. But the words of revelation are now dispersed through human material (history, legend, opinion, letters, songs, hymns, footnotes), and they have been obscured by human alteration and interpretation. A comparison of the four Gospels makes it evident to a Muslim that the ipsissima verba of God, transmitted through Jesus, have been translated into Greek, and have been altered to the interpretation of each particular Gospel. For the Muslim, the Bible cannot count as Quran.

But all that is to say negatively what Christians actually want to affirm positively, that the self-revealing of God, culminating in the Incarnation, is entangled in history. It does not dispense with the historical: it transforms the story. It makes history his story, God's story: and it changes what the history of the world would otherwise have been. It does this, not by the imposition or dictation of particular words, but through the consequences of those many people who apprehended in their day, at the level of their own understanding and context, not only the demand of God upon them, but something also of the nature of the one with whom they had to deal. What is thus known and made articulate in word and image, however limited the language, is God. What God is does not alter according to our opinion, since what there is in the case of God is what God is. It is a logical truth that if God turns out to be God, it is God that God turns out to be.

Thus the stability which brings Scripture into being is not the suspension of what it is to be human—to be set in a particular language and circumstance, with all the limitations which that involves. The stability is God, who works, not despite, but through those limits; and the limits are then not in the least restrictive: they are the necessary condition of creativity (see Licensed Insanities and A Year to Live)—not in this case of a symphony but of a psalm, and of every other genre of biblical utterance. We should therefore have no hesitation of speaking of inspiration. Without God, these words would not have come into being. When we, as the bearers and discerners of value, encounter the source of value, in the many different ways in which we do, we are capable of being raised into transcendent action and utterance. That is not to say that all consequences of inspiration are "the same thing," whatever that might mean. In the case of the Bible, we are dealing with a unique phenomenon which issued from the responses of women and men, in succeeding generations, who inherited an enculturated understanding of the name and the nature of God, and who, by living seriously with it, moved into a deeper and more demanding and often more confusing and certainly more truthful understanding: one which led them repeatedly to contest the past, and to edit or amend the writings arising from it, even while they were preserving them with care.

But truthful in relation to what? In relation to God, without whom, as a non-negotiable limit set upon the possible and always approximate languages about himself, these words would not have been spoken and written—and without

whom the people of Israel would still be the bene Jacob, a kinship group of wandering Arameans, following their flocks (Deut. 26:5). In The Religious Imagination, I described at length and in detail how that extraordinary transformation came about—transformations of the available images, symbols, actions, liturgies, and so on, of the peoples and times in which the Israelites found themselves. What, so to speak, motivated this recurrent commitment to a transformation of the available grammars of God? The argument of abductive inference leads to the necessary answer that it was God. That is what is meant by revelation. We are profoundly mistaken if we think that God cannot reveal something of his meaning and mercy without suspending the humanity of those to whom and through whom the revelation occurs. Nor should revelation be confused with particular theories of inspiration, although without inspiration (the encounter of the discerners of value with the source of the value) revelation does not occur.

Christians, therefore, are unwise (or rather, they are untruthful to the nature of Scripture) if they try, as many in effect do, to turn it into Quran. Scripture is not inerrant. And that is not a controversial statement. Some of those who have defended most strongly the inspiration and authority of the Bible have recognized that the Bible contains errors. Some (for example, Charles Hodge) have felt the errors to be too slight to undermine the overall truth of the Bible: he regarded them as "flecks of sandstone in the marble of the Parthenon." Others (for example, E. J. Carnell) thought that the introduction of errors into the transcription of the texts was efficacious in reminding us of the pervasive consequences of sin. But perhaps, most commonly, the claim was made that the original autographs were inerrant: errors were introduced in the process of transmission and transcription. For B. B. Warfield, the demonstration of an error in Scripture (fleck of sandstone though it might be) would mean that it could not have come into being as a consequence of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit could not have inspired error. He therefore restricted the work of the Holy Spirit to the inspiration of the original autographs.

But this, while it is unanswerable (since no autographs have survived), is desperation and evasion. It also concedes the Muslim point, that the Bible contains error. In contrast, it would have been wiser (and more truthful to the nature of Scripture) if the word "concurive," which was important to Warfield, and which has been central to these discussions of biblical inspiration and authority, had been taken more seriously. The word "concurive" has been explained by J. L. Packer in this way:

We are to think of the Spirit's inspiring activity, and, for that matter, of all His regular operations in and upon human personality, as (to use an old but valuable technical term) concurive; that is, as exercised in, through and by means of the writers' own activity, in such a way that their thinking and writing was both free and spontaneous on their part and divinely elicited and controlled, and what they wrote was not only their own work but also God's work.²⁸

Packer (and all the writers mentioned above) rejects a dictation theory of inspiration, because by that means the distinctively personal and human characteristics of the authors (what Hodge called "the organs of revelation") would

be obliterated—which, in the case of Scripture, they clearly are not. But then the human contribution to the “concursum” has to be taken far more seriously. It is not just that their writing was free and spontaneous, but that its frame and style belonged to one time and one point in cultural and religious and political history. Even with the Holy Spirit, human words about God will bear the imprint of their day and of their social and cultural context; and all such words will be approximate and corrigible. Nevertheless (as I pointed out in Licensed Insanities), they establish immense and accumulating reliabilities, because there is what there is in the case of God, even though we can never know, exhaustively or incorrigibly, what God is; and it is that which sets a limit on all otherwise possible languages. So it comes about that the Bible can produce imaginations of God which are in real conflict with each other as we pointed out in the Doctrine Commission Report, We Believe in God:

The more carefully one studies the Bible, the more one becomes aware of ideas of God and responses to him which seem actually to conflict with one another. Thus, God is a righteous judge, who does not protect his creatures from the consequences of their sins, but God is also a loving Father, who will not abandon his people even when they rebel against him. God is awesome and holy, infinitely removed from the sphere of his sinful creatures, yet God is also know with great directness and intimacy by those who approach him with penitence and love. God is a God of peace and nonviolence; but acts of great severity, even of brutality are attributed to him.²⁹

So Scripture is the consequence of a process through which the self-giving of God has been gradually apprehended and secured, not despite cultural and historical relativity, but through it, in a way which respects the conditions of creation.

This means that in the process of Scripture as consequence, there is a continuing correction of the approximate and the false, even in its own tradition. Equally, there is a reinforcement of that which has been found reliable and trustworthy, as people begin to understand more clearly both the faithfulness and the demand of God, and begin also to see the real truth of her nature: for God is love; and the fact that we can begin to liberate our own imagination of God by using a feminine instead of a masculine pronoun, illustrates how this process goes on, even now.

So this consequence of Christian Scripture does not insert nuggets of non-contingent words into the world; it delivers the Word of God into birth, and into both death and resurrection. The imitation of Christ is thus distinctively different from the imitation of Muhammad, and Muslims are right to insist on the difference. They are also right to recognize that Christians cannot then convert their Book into Quran. Christians can only approach Scripture as itself a consequence of a cooperation of the human and the divine, issuing in a joint authorship of that particular sequence of human history which culminates in Christ.

It is because God is the author of all things, including these particular words which stand now as Scripture, that those words have continuing authority: they continue to be the means through which God is the author of our lives; for the two words, particularly in the underlying Latin, auctor, auctoritas, are closely

related. In the Latin dictionary of Lewis and Short, auctor is defined as "he that brings about the existence of any object, or promotes the increase or prosperity of it, whether he first originates it, or by his efforts gives greater permanence or continuance to it." It is an excellent definition of the biblical understanding of creation. From it flows the meaning of auctoritas: basically, it has to do with bringing something into being, an invention. So it also means an opinion, or advice, or encouragement. It means weight, or importance, hence power and our sense of authority: to have the power to bring something into being involves the right, and also the responsibility, to bring something into being, the authority to do so.

The use of Scripture in relation to ethics, therefore, should never be a quest for what O'Donovan has called "moral bricks"—discrete items which can be extracted from any part of Scripture without reference to context. What Scripture will reveal to us is the kind of wall worth building, which will evoke the predication of "good" (p. 00)—or of the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord" (Mt. 25:23). As O'Donovan puts it:

The items in a code stand to the moral law as bricks to a building. Wisdom must involve some comprehension of how the bricks are meant to be put together.

This has an immediate bearing on how we read the Bible. Not only is it insufficient to quote and requote the great commands of the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount (and there are still many who need persuading of this in practice if not in theory); but it would be insufficient even if we added to them, if we could compile a complete list of things commanded or prohibited: it would be insufficient even if we included in such a list, with a shrewd awareness of the relativity of semantic terms, principles derived from other modes of moral teaching in the Bible, such as stories, parables or laments. We will read the Bible seriously only when we use it to guide our thought towards a comprehensive moral viewpoint, and not merely to articulate disconnected moral claims. We must look within it not only for moral bricks, but for indications of the order in which the bricks belong together. There may be some resistance to this, not only from those who suspect that it will lead to evasions of the plain sense of the Bible's teaching, but from those who have forebodings of a totalitarian theological construction which will legislate over questions where it would be better to respect the Bible's silence. But in truth there is no alternative policy if we intend that our moral thinking should be shaped in any significant way by the Scriptures. For it requires only very limited talents at skepticism to raise doubts about the application of any biblical teaching, however plain, to any situation whatever; and if, when such doubts have once been raised, we are denied any biblical recourse in quieting them, then we are doomed to think the Scriptures inconclusive for any question that is worth stopping to doubt about in the first place. The result will be that all important moral questions will be settled explicitly on nonbiblical lines. It hardly needs to be added that it is constantly stressed in the New Testament itself that to understand

the moral law of the Old Testament we must attend to the principles of order which are to be found within it.³⁰

Unless, then, we go to the Bible in the context of creation, resurrection, and redemption (O'Donovan's book is called Resurrection and Moral Order), we will always go to it wrongly. Because God is the author of all things, the unproduced Producer of all that is, we can recognize with gratitude his work of authorship in the lives and words of those whom he chose and who responded in the words of the prophet, Here am I, send me. But his authorship did not obliterate the circumstance or context or cultural relativity of any particular person, or of any particular community; nor did it obliterate the obduracy and the wickedness of many of them, even of those who cried "Peace" when there was no peace. The words of Scripture articulate the truth that is God, as it was perceived and known and felt at particular times and in particular circumstances. It is a joint authorship which is seriously concursive.

But if history is not overruled or ignored by God, it cannot be ignored by us (unless we are prepared to trivialize the Incarnation) when we appropriate for ourselves the words which are indeed a consequence of his initiative in seeking and searching for that which was lost. In our history we engage with that history long ago; and that engagement takes us immediately into the issues of hermeneutics.

The word "hermeneutics" comes from the name of the Greek god Hermes, the messenger of the gods. The term refers, very roughly, to the issues which arise when we attempt the interpretation or exegesis of a text. Thus the term is not confined to the exegesis of a biblical text, but occurs in, for example, the study of English literature or in anthropology. A central question in hermeneutics is: whose meaning counts as the meaning of the meaning? If you take, for example, a play by Shakespeare, or a speech in one of his plays, whose meaning are we attempting to establish and understand? Is it the meaning which Shakespeare originally intended to put into his words? Or is it the meaning of a literary critic, who may well find unintended meanings that Shakespeare was not consciously aware of? Is it the meaning of the producer who stages the play? Or the meaning apprehended by the audience? Or by one member of the audience who relates the play to her own circumstances and history?

If it is the latter, does that mean that all exegesis is ultimately private—that there are no public meanings but only private acquisitions? In one sense, that must be so: where else could the grasp of meaning and the discernment of value be located? But it does not follow that it is private in Onnie Jay Holy's sense of privacy:

"Now, friends," Onnie Jay said [when trying to promote the Holy Church of Christ without Christ], "I want to tell you a second reason why you can absolutely trust this church—it's based on the Bible. Yes sir! It's based on your own personal interpretation of the Bible, friends. You can sit at home and interpret your own Bible however you feel in your heart it ought to be interpreted. That's right," he said, "just the way Jesus would have done it."³¹

But while "the way that Jesus" interpreted the Bible was indeed idiosyncratic and daring, it stayed within limits set by the nature of Scripture itself

(remembering that in any case the boundary of Scripture had not finally been fixed by the time that Jesus was alive); and it stayed within the communal boundary within which meanings alone can be intelligible, however much they may be disputed or rejected—indeed, they can only be disputed because meaning is social. Interpretation is always controlled by the community in which it occurs, which in the Christian case is the body of Christ. There are consequently limits outside of which there is simply no doubt that a particular exegesis is false; but conversely, inside those limits, it is by no means clear that only one interpretation is correct. The consequence of history and hermeneutics is that we have to learn to live with legitimate diversity—or else abdicate our responsibility and hand over the excluding decisions to a man-made (but usually God-claiming) authority.

This consequence of history and hermeneutics is often summarized in the phrase “the fusion of horizons.” A text occurred (concurrently) in a particular historical horizon, and we have to try to understand the possible meanings that belong within that horizon. But we, who attempt to do that, are living in our own horizon of history, experience, and culture. Scripture works into us, not by our attempt to reproduce the original horizon (the purity, e.g., of New Testament Christianity, which is neither accessible, nor possible), nor by our attempt to impose the contemporary horizon (the subordination of revelation to reason), but by connecting the two so that they create a new horizon—a new way of looking and living which would not otherwise occur.

The point can be put very simply. All Christians reject a dictation theory of inspiration—and those who do not have, so to speak, defined themselves as being outside the boundary of Christian faith and understanding. To maintain a dictation theory of inspiration makes the Incarnation unnecessary and the Holy Spirit redundant. But it then becomes an equally deep and self-destructive contradiction to create a dictation theory of Scripture in relation to ourselves. Scripture does not dictate behaviors and attitudes directly to us—though many Christians behave as though it does. Even where an attitude seems pervasive throughout the whole of the Bible (for example, the subordinate relation of women to men), we may be dealing, not with an abstract “creation principle,” but with a social and cultural attitude which happened to prevail for the whole of that period, but which is now open to change—and indeed which must be changed if the eschatological vision (when there shall be “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female,” Gal. 3:28) is to be anticipated here and now. Another obvious example is slavery: neither Aristotle nor the Bible could imagine a society without slaves. But slavery came to seem totally incompatible with the Christian understanding of love and with the non-Christian understanding of justice.

So even though there will be a prima facie case for respecting the wisdoms accumulated in the past and expressed in Scripture, they are necessarily open to the constant questioning of the Holy Spirit, leading us further into truth. The words of Scripture can always inform behaviors, they can never dictate them. Scripture will always be paramount as a means through which the Holy Spirit informs (forms within) individual and community decisions, but not by imposing those contingent words as though they are Quran. In the earliest community crisis in the church—the issue whether gentile converts should keep the

whole of the law or only a kind of kelal-summary of it—the apostles certainly made reference to Scripture by way of constraint on the decision (Acts 15:15ff.), but their decision was expressed in the form, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” (Acts 15:28).

This means that the issues of hermeneutics are not problems to be explained away or ignored. They are opportunity. They are opportunity for the Holy Spirit to write these words into the story of our lives, and thus to become the joint author of that story, converting it into a narrative of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance—the gifts of the Spirit. All life is fiction, at least in the sense in which Montaigne intended it: “If you have known how to compose your life, you have accomplished a great deal more than the person who knows how to compose a book.” Christians are those who allow the components of the biblical story of creation and redemption to become the controlling metaphor in the narrative and the story of their lives.

So the test of the true use of Scripture is transfiguration: does the fusion of those two horizons issue in the consequence of love? Or not? When someone has come from Scripture—from conversing, as Jesus did, with Moses and Elijah—does her life shine (as his did), so that others know that she has been with God? And does it, as it did in the case of Jesus, point on to her own exodus (Lk. 9:31), to her own journey from death into life?

This continuing encounter with God on the holy ground of his consequence in Scripture slowly—or maybe even abruptly—brings us to the realization that we are gifted children: we have received all things, including ourselves, as gifts: it is Scripture which demonstrates this conclusively for us. If we do not find and respect the patience of God in Scripture (not coercing us into one particular word, but renewing and transforming all our words by our direct and immediate encounter with himself), then the world may well seem

little more than a drab, monotonous desert where generations [as Hopkins put it] “have trod, have trod, have trod.” Such was the feeling of the heroine of Hardy’s...The Mayor of Casterbridge, whose life-experience little inclined her to praise the Creator: “The doubtful honour of a brief transit through a sorry world hardly called for effusiveness.” In a more modern idiom, one of Beckett’s tramps declares: “That’s how it is on this bitch of an earth.”³²

So it was for Coker, in Joyce Cary’s The Horse’s Mouth:

“No more religion for me,” said Coker, “I hate God. It isn’t fair to make a girl and give her a face like mine.”

“Don’t let it get you down, Coke,” replied Gully. “Don’t get in a state. That was my trouble, getting in a state.”

“I shall if I like,” said Coker. “That’s the only advantage I’ve got. I don’t give a damn for myself. Why, even when I was a kid, and I got my earache, I used to say, go on, ache; go on, you bloody flap. Give me hell, that’s what I’m for.”

“Don’t you believe it, Coker,” I said. “You’re young. You don’t know. Things are never so bad they can’t be worse. Don’t you let anything get hold of you. You’ve got to keep your independence. When I was a kid, my father died and I went to live with an uncle

who used to try which was harder, his boot or my bottom. And when my poor mother saw me cry, she would take me in her arms and say, 'Don't hate him, Gull, or it will poison your life... Don't let him get inside you,' my mother said. 'Don't let uncle reign in you heart—you want only happiness there. You want only joy and love and peace that passeth understanding.'"

"So it does," said Coker. "It passed mine long ago."³³

On all this, Justin Kelly has commented:

That attitude is natural and understandable. In fact, it might be called the "natural" attitude of human beings apart from the experience of God. It takes a revelation to make the "unsuspected discovery" that life is a gift and a miracle. A person normally inclined to complain that things are not better than they are is suddenly filled with awe that they are at all. It is the intuition of the Giver that transforms the merely "given" into Gift.³⁴

Scripture is the guarantee of the gift. Without Scripture, entangled as it is in uncompromised and uncoerced human lives, we could scarcely dare to trust the outrageous claim that God is love. It is in the expectant and prayerful taking up of Scripture that an intuition is turned into encounter, and the self-giving of God is known for what it is. That self-giving in the case of Scripture did not dispense with the contingency of the particular, any more than it did in the very act of creation itself, or in the Incarnation. But once we see Scripture in the context of creation, redemption, and renewal, then we begin also to see that we are not called to be televangelists, still less to abuse the Bible as they do, but rather are called to receive into ourselves the Word of God through the words of God, and thus to become a new creature.

So the ethical consequence of Scripture is not the dictation of particular behaviors or attitudes, nor is it the administration of legal items. It is the continuing work of God in changing this life and this action, at this moment, into his own. What we see may be extremely simple: it may, for example, be Wordsworth as an old man, standing each day by the window of the dining room of Rydal Mount, reading the psalms and the lessons appointed for the day. Or it may be more urgent and dramatic: Bonhoeffer, for example, facing the end in brutal circumstances and writing to Bethge, "How good it would be if we could go through this time together, standing side by side; but it is probably best for us to face it alone; I am so sorry I cannot help you at all, except by thinking of you as I read the Bible every morning and evening, and often during the day." Or the man who was jailed fourteen times, stabbed once, bombed three times in his own home, and eventually shot: he was cited for the posthumous award of the presidential Medal of Freedom as "the conscience of his generation...: his life informed us, his dreams sustain us yet": Martin Luther King marched towards the dream convinced that the Bible is right: "Let us go out," he demanded, at the end of his last presidential address to the SCLC, "realizing that the Bible is right: 'Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' This is the hope for the future, and with this faith we will be able to sing in some not too distant tomorrow, with a cosmic past tense, 'We have overcome, we have overcome, deep in my heart, I did believe, we would overcome.'"

It is not that he used the Bible as Quran; nor is it simply that the cadences of the Bible echo and resonate in his words; it is much more that the great themes of the Bible became the unfolding program of his life. The authority of the Bible lies in the power it has, as a consequence of God, to bring your life into new being. Its authority does not lie in the extent to which it can dictate specific behaviors, for not even love can be commanded: it lies in the extent to which it is the place of our encounter with the one who is the author of all things, and who becomes, at this place, the author, or at least joint author, of your biography, and of mine. In this way, the relation of Bible to ethics is one of continuing inspiration, through which the consequence of God's authority, his authorship, in Scripture is the access of the Holy Spirit into the transformation of our life into love, joy, peace, and those other fruits of the Spirit.

So the forming of Christian judgment does not depend on whether we can find a particular word in Scripture which seems to say something explicit on a subject—like bioethics: or on whether we can freeze-frame the New Testament world and look to it as the model of a Christian society—as some do who oppose the ordination of women. The forming of Christian judgment begins, continues, and ends in Scripture as the place where the Word of God encounters us through the words of God; but the consequence may well be a change and transformation of existing judgments and institutions which the cognized and apprehended nature of that Word as love actually demands. Scripture sets a limit on behavior: it points to norms of behavior in the newness of life which is ours as a consequence of the resurrection. But that life in the Spirit not only challenges the spirit of the age—of any age; it challenges and contradicts many of the behaviors described in the Bible, even some of those which are described as having been commanded by God; and it challenges assured positions in the church in almost every generation. Thus it points to normative values in the process of change; but the process of change is itself valued as the opportunity of creativity, growth, and salvation. But it is precisely the openness to change and to the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit which makes many Christians feel most threatened and defensive. So what does all this mean in practice? As the same Onnie Jay Holy muttered, "That's the trouble with you innerleckchuls: you don't never have nothing to show for what you're saying."³⁵ What then (to concentrate on one example) do we have to show in relation to that most deeply tense and divisive issue, AIDS, homosexuality, and the judgment of God?

3. Consequences and AIDS

In 1894, the spire of St. Mary's Church in Shrewsbury fell down, severely damaging the church. The Reverend Mr. Poyntz, who was rector at the time, preached a special sermon "to the good people of Shrewsbury" stating that the spire had been thrown down by God because the people were organizing a memorial to Charles Darwin. Such are the judgments of God, who is keeping his eye in (so we were told at the time) with flashes of lightning directed at York Minster, when a liberal bishop was consecrated there recently, not to mention AIDS. Except that people do mention AIDS, and connect it with the judgment of God. A [Jules] Feiffer cartoon portrays a white American couple in conversation with the Moral Majority: "Lung cancer," they are told, "is God's punishment of smokers." "What!?" "And heart disease is God's punishment of those who go on eating fat." "Are you kidding!?" "And diabetes is God's punishment of sweet eaters." "Are you crazy!?" "And hunger is God's punishment of Ethiopians." "You are sick!?" "And AIDS is God's punishment of homosexuals." "You said it, you've got it, you better believe it, it serves them right!"

This is by no means a travesty. The authors of a recent pamphlet, AIDS and the Judgment of God, took their fellow evangelical Christians to task for failing to recognize and affirm that God singles out individuals for attention and (to use their word) "zaps" them: "Twice in the AIDS debate, in two separate evangelical publications, it has been written that God does not 'zap' individuals. The Bible witness is, that he sometimes does."

Well: does he? And if so, is AIDS an example of his doing so? The answer is clearly, certainly, and unequivocally, No. In all the debate and uncertainty about AIDS, this at least all Christians can agree on together, that AIDS is not the wrath of God striking down particular sinners. It cannot be, in relation to those who acquire the virus through blood transfusions: it cannot be, in relation to infants in the womb; it cannot be, in relation to the animal populations in which the virus is present. In any case, to suppose that God invented a virus and put it in a population of green monkeys (supposing, for the moment, that that theory of its origin is correct) in order to infect the heterosexual population of central Africa, in order to punish a group of men in San Francisco and West Hammersmith, is absurd—quite apart from the fact that it attributes to God as Father a character and behavior which, if it occurred among us, would lead to a prosecution by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty Against Children.

But is that not exactly how God is portrayed in many parts of Scripture? Yes; but that is exactly the point about hermeneutics, that the horizon of history cannot be abandoned as though it has had no effect on the constantly corrected ways in which God has been imagined, still less can the perception within a particular horizon be lifted out and imposed on a subsequent situation or context, as though it contains an absolute and timeless truth: to do that is to deny the patience of God in the work of our redemption. Yet that is exactly how Scripture is all too often used by those who are most identified with the defense of biblical authority. The result is precisely the reverse: the Bible is reduced to a reinforcing illustration of human opinions and prejudices, because its own nature has been in effect denied.

In the case of AIDS and the judgment of God, this can be illustrated, very graphically, from a sermon preached in 1988 by the Reverend Gavin Reid, a leading figure in the councils of the Anglican Church, a spokesman for the Evangelical party and now a bishop. He was preaching on the episode in the book of Numbers (21:4-9) which describes the restless rebellion of the people during the Exodus:

The people grew impatient on the way. They spoke against God and against Moses.... Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them, they bit the people, and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you; pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

On this, Gavin Reid commented:

The writer [of Numbers] said, "God sent these snakes. This was judgment." Even today's Christians find a few hang-ups about agreeing with the author of Numbers. It interests me to see how Christian leaders are falling over themselves to say that AIDS is not the judgment of God. The writer of Numbers would say, "Of course it is!"

But that immediately raises the question of the truth-conditions of those sentences in Numbers. What are true are sentences. For a sentence to be true, it has to meet the conditions of its truth, in relation to what it purports to be about. Gavin Reid takes the words literally (while, of course, at the same time being an interpretation): "The effect of the crisis of those snakes was to wake the people up to their need for God: and in that sense the crisis literally was a God-send." So the sentence, "God sent the venomous snakes as a judgment against the people," is taken by Gavin Reid to be a proposition about a putative matter of fact: it is either the case that God sent venomous snakes as punishment, or it is not. How, then, would we set about establishing the truth of that sentence?

The truth-conditions of the more restricted sentence, "Snakes appeared among the people," are relatively easy to meet: the sentence is true if, and only if, reliable witnesses at the time, not hallucinating, etc., correctly reported the event. The addition of "venomous" increases the falsifiability of the sentence, and thus increases the information. At the same time, it raises the truth-conditions of the sentence: if the snakes turned out to be grass snakes, the truth-condition would not be met, and the sentence would be falsified. But to add "God sent" and "as a punishment" raises the truth-conditions even further: there is more to be falsified; and yet immediately it raises the question of how such a proposition (understood literally, as Gavin Reid does understand it) could be falsified at all. What could one produce which would demonstrate that the truth-conditions of what is claimed had been met? Clearly, it could not be a direct, empirical observation. It can only be an inferential interpretation—and not the worse for that, given the importance of adductive inference in relation to claims that God acts in the world of his creation. But that is already to concede that Numbers cannot be used as though the human contribution to the concursus is negligible—as though the text describes the action of God simply

and literally, in such a way that we can use it to form our actions and judgments with a corresponding simplicity and literalism. And Gavin Reid in effect concedes the point. His sermon continues:

The writer of Numbers would say, "Of course [AIDS] is [the judgment of God]!" Not in the sense that God is zapping individuals—God is not a callous flinger of bombs into humanity. No, but in the sense that it exposes our vulnerability, as a species on this "whirling speck" that has created a life-style that leaves God's values out of the reckoning and doesn't ask in sexual matters (or even in economic matters or any other matters) whether there is a way we ought to live. In the sense that we live without asking that question the consequences come.

But that is a very different sense of judgment. It is an example of what has come to be known as "gracious" judgment: God puts "markers"—such things as venomous snakes and viruses—into his creation to keep us in line. Put a little less sharply, this view rests on a clear truth: it is true that there could not be a universe, and there could not be a "you" or a "me," if there were not stable conditions and constraints which run down, in the end, to the laws of motion. Without the consistency of those conditions, no life would be possible: the spire of St. Mary's Church might otherwise have fallen up and not down, much to the confusion of Mr. Poyntz. If we ignore the conditions of the universe, the consequences in the universe are likely to come up and hit us with a sandbag. This is the proper sense of natural law, which rests on facts: and since such facts, as we have seen, imply obligations, natural law sets limits on behavior that is to count as morally good. In that sense, AIDS, if it is spread by sexual promiscuity, is not different from syphilis or gonorrhea: it is a reminder that gene-replication and growing up into human maturity are surrounded by conditions which, if we ignore them, will result in a whole range of miseries, from the increase in the number of those affected by STDs, to a decrease in the number of those who have learned, in stable families, to speak the languages of love as the finest languages which humans can speak to each other.

So certainly there is a stability and reliability in the universe: which we can cooperate with it for immense technological benefit, and for discerning what is objectively good in promoting human flourishing; or which we can despise and neglect, with consequences that are obvious all around us. But all of that is remote from what the text of Numbers is saying. Indeed, most of it could be said without using the word "God" as the subject of the word "judging" (that is the strength of the natural law argument). What the text of the sentence in Numbers actually says is, wayeshallach Adonai ba'am eth hannechasisim hasseraaphim. Yesshallach is a transitive verb, in the active mood, with a subject and a direct object: the Lord sent the snakes. Yet Gavin Reid proclaims very strongly:

The snakes were not made specially by God. Nor did He fly in by Hercules transport plane a whole lot of snakes and drop them to get to work on the rebellious people. It doesn't imply that for a second. Nor does it for a moment imply that those bitten by the snakes were in any sense singled out to be "zapped" by God. It's very important we don't waste time having hang-ups about what it is not saying.

But then, what is it saying? Where precisely does it say, as Gavin Reid is claiming, that the snakes were in the wilderness as an equivalent of the AIDS virus, waiting there as a "gracious judgment," established in the conditions of the universe, in order to deal with those who step out of line? And if it is not saying that, then how is the passage in Numbers even remotely relevant to the issue of AIDS and the judgment of God? The passage in Numbers is certainly not talking about "gracious judgment." It is not saying that if you speak against God and fail to ask how you ought to live, then you are likely to be bitten by those venomous snakes which God puts into the universe in order to be a punitive consequence for those who act in that way—just as (to draw out the parallel), if you engage in promiscuous homosexual intercourse, you are likely to be cut down by an HIV which God put into the universe in order to be a punitive consequence for those who act in that way. The plain text of Numbers does not say that, or anything remotely like it. Indeed, it is not at all clear what the meaning of the text in its original language actually is. Gavin Reid accepts the translation of hannechasisim hasseraaphim as being "venomous snakes." But the word seraphim is the word for the flying creatures of Is. 6:2, the seraphs who are described in Is. 14:29 and 30:6 as "having wings." Therefore some translate the passage in Numbers to say that God sent flying snakes—in which case, Gavin Reid's jest, about God not flying them in by Hercules transport plane, is out of place. In any case, the verb saraph means "he burned": that is why many English translations say that they were "fiery snakes": they only become venomous by making "fiery" equal to "painful from poison."

All this means that the book of Numbers cannot be hijacked to demonstrate that God punishes homosexuals through AIDS. Hermeneutics is hard work; but the Bible has no place in ethics if the work is not done. In particular, in that "fusion of horizons" which was described in the last chapter, the original meaning of the text cannot be wholly abandoned: it must exercise some limit on our appropriation of it. Thus, while it is true that Gavin Reid, in his sermon, is "fusing horizons," his way of doing so is false and distorting, because he is allowing his own personal horizon of meaning entirely to dominate the other. He is, in other words, subordinating revelation to "the opinions of men" (Col. 2:8), because he does not allow the parameters of the original horizon to have any limiting importance at all. Far from enhancing the authority of Scripture, his method destroys it, because it treats the text as being available to our interpretation, no matter what it originally said. If you are sure that God ought to punish those with AIDS, it will not take much ingenuity to find a biblical text or passage to supply a warrant for your assertion.

That abuse of the Bible became spectacularly clear at the Lambeth Conference in 1988, when the Anglican bishops turned their attention to AIDS and homosexuality. Under the headline "African Bishops Attack 'Sin of Homosexuality,'" The Independent carried this report:

African bishops yesterday led a fierce and triumphant attack on liberal understanding of human sexuality at the conference, Andrew Brown writes.

An official motion on AIDS, and a private member's motion on human rights for homosexuals, were savagely amended.

One African bishop said: "When you speak of homosexual rights, what does that mean? You are speaking of the rights of sin, and that I am totally against. It is totally anti-biblical. Leviticus says the practice is an abomination."

The Primate of Kenya, the Most Rev. Manasses Kuria, said: "For those of us who know sin as sin and preach against it as sin: to allow and to support people who continue in sin, and help them only not to be infected with the disease AIDS, that is not the gospel of Jesus Christ."

He said homosexuals should hear the message from the Lambeth Conference that AIDS "is a disease from that sin of homosexuality."

The Archbishop of York, Dr. John Habgood, made a vain plea that "We are not just talking about sin, important though this is. We are talking about death, disease, and world catastrophe; and that means that in the sort of advice we give we have to recognize the sort of lives that people actually live."

Even the Bishop of Chester, the Rt. Rev. Michael Baughen, who introduced the Church of England's General Synod motion condemning homosexual acts last autumn, was swept aside as a liberal in the African assault.

He had originally produced an amendment which would have had the conference "strengthen the traditional biblical teaching that sexual intercourse is an act of total commitment which belongs properly within a permanent married relationship." But after discussions with the proposer of the motion, the Bishop of New York, the Rt. Rev. Paul Moore, he added a clause that contained the substance of the original sentiment: "and in the light of that to encourage those who cannot and will not marry at least to observe faithfulness and permanence in their sexual relationships."

The proposed, but defeated, amendment rests on a pastoral wisdom which is deeply traditional in the Christian church. Nevertheless, it was swept aside by a text from the book of Leviticus, which was then equated with "biblical morality." As such, it is highly selective. If we go back to Mrs. Spicer, it is obvious that a biblical morality cannot be constructed by anthologizing the behavior which the Bible endorses or prohibits. Thus, no one, under the new dispensation, talks about executing putative virgins who turn out not to be so. How, then, does it come about that under the new dispensation we can behave in comparably brutal ways to homosexuals? We have, until very recently, hung them by the neck until they are dead.

The answer to that, on the part of those who feel that the authority of the Bible is at stake here, is that the Bible is consistent in its condemnation, if not of homosexuality, then certainly of homosexual acts. This allows Christians to say that they are loving the sinner while hating the sin. It is the consistency which indicates that this is a creation principle, not a culturally relative attitude. Thus when Paul condemned homosexual acts, he was following his usual practice of confirming the moral law of the Old Testament (which is in any case claimed to be a human universal), while abolishing the ritual and the ceremonial laws. The

position would have been even stronger if Jesus had had something to say on the matter (which had been recorded in the Gospels), for then, on this view, we would have had the strongest possible foundation for a non-negotiable Christian moral judgment: a dominical utterance (a saying of the Lord); an application by a New Testament writer; both of which are consistent with the same principle in the Old Testament; and an occurrence of the same principle outside the boundary of Scripture, pointing to its natural nature. All of these are expressed in historically contingent contexts, but within the contingency, the normative can be discerned.

But once again, the point of contingency must not be obliterated. Homosexual acts were evaluated and condemned in the particular contexts of their times, and with all the necessary limitation of comprehension that must obtain in any concursive understanding of how Scripture came into being. Even if the condemnation of them is consistent (leaving on one side the fact that the meaning of the original texts is contested), it is homosexual activity as they understood it that is being condemned, not some abstract state or condition. Consequently, if our own understanding of the nature and origin of homosexuality changes (as it has), it is that horizon of meaning which has to be fused with the biblical. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are under as much obligation to seek the new meaning in the fusion of horizons here as we are in other matters where the Bible is less explicit—as, for example, in issues of bioethics. Otherwise, we distort the biblical authority in ethics completely: if the Bible says something explicit, we freeze human life and behavior into the pattern of biblical society two thousand years ago; if the Bible says little or nothing we are free to seek the mind of Christ on the issue from more general indications. The consequence of this neglect of contingency is that Christians all too often oscillate between deep-freeze and rapid thaw as they seek to legislate for their own inclinations. Thus at the same Lambeth Conference, the African bishops reversed a decision of a Lambeth Conference a century before, to the effect that converts to Christianity could not continue their polygamous marriages. From now on, existing wives do not have to be turned out; and one African bishop made the point explicitly that this reversal of the earlier decision was possible, because the Bible is silent on the matter.

It seems an extremely wise pastoral decision, recognizing the sort of lives that people actually live. But it is wholly inconsistent to apply it in one case and not in the other. There are, after all, many early texts and passages in the Bible which accept the propriety of polygamy, followed by clear indications that it is no longer regarded as appropriate. The Bible is scarcely silent on this matter. In fact what is happening is exactly what happens repeatedly in the history of the church: those who control and operate the system do so to their own advantage, even when they are not conscious of doing so. Thus at Lambeth a male majority voted consistently in its own favor, supporting polygamy in some circumstances, continuing to resist the ordination of women to the priesthood, refusing to condemn female circumcision, and absolutely condemning homosexuality.

If that is what biblical morality is, then it is simply an extension of the male dominance of patriarchal societies 2,000 years ago. It is an inevitable consequence of treating texts as though they are timeless truths which can be quoted without reference to their original context, or to the continuing work of correc-

tion which goes on within the Bible itself and in the subsequent history of the church. Thus the Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons, in 1986, simply lists the texts which have some reference to homosexual acts, without any exegesis, and only the briefest reference to context and historical contingency:

In Genesis 3, we find that this truth about persons being an image of God has been obscured by original sin. There inevitably follows a loss of awareness of the covenantal character of the union these persons had with God and with each other. The human body retains its "spousal significance" but this is now clouded by sin. Thus, in Genesis 19:1-11, the deterioration due to sin continues in the story of the men of Sodom. There can be no doubt of the moral judgment made there against homosexual relations. In Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, in the course of describing the conditions necessary for belonging to the Chosen People, the author excludes from the people of God those who behave in a homosexual fashion.

Against the background of the exposition of theocratic law, an eschatological perspective is developed by St. Paul when, in 1 Cor. 6:9, he proposes the same doctrine and lists those who behave in a homosexual fashion among those who shall not enter the Kingdom of God.

In Romans 1:18-32, still building on the moral traditions of his forbears, but in the new context of the confrontation between Christianity and the pagan society of his day, Paul uses homosexual behavior as an example of the blindness which has overcome humankind. Instead of the original harmony between Creator and creatures, the acute distortion of idolatry had led to all kinds of moral excess. Paul is at a loss to find a clearer example of this disharmony than homosexual relations. Finally, 1 Tim. 1, in full continuity with the biblical position, singles out those who spread wrong doctrine and in v. 10 explicitly names as sinners those who engage in homosexual acts.

But hermeneutics, as we have seen, requires that we attend to the limits which are set upon possible appropriations by the original meaning of the text in its context. The meaning and implication of all these texts have been disputed. But let us suppose that that half of the two horizons is no longer disputed, and that the meaning of those texts is clear and unequivocal. Even then the task of hermeneutics is not over, because we have to relate those meanings to our own horizon, which includes an inherited history of living in that newness of life which the resurrection enables and the Holy Spirit sustains, and which includes a far more extensive understanding of the natural order of God's creation. The Pastoral Letter was a clarification of an earlier document, De Persona Humana, which stated that homosexual acts and masturbation are objectively wrong, because they are a "deliberate use of the sexual faculty outside normal conjugal relations," and in that sense they are un-natural:

No pastoral method can be employed which would give moral justification to these acts, on the ground that they would be consonant

with the condition of such people. For according to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality. In Sacred Scripture they are condemned as a depravity and even presented as the sad consequence of rejecting God. This judgment of Scripture does not of course permit us to conclude that all those who suffer from this anomaly are personally responsible for it, but it does attest to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of.

But is the argument correct that homosexuality lies outside the natural order? As always, it depends what one means by nature. If what is meant is that it is different from the natural way in which genetic information is replicated in another generation, then the answer is, yes, it is. But so also is celibacy in a monastery or a convent. They are different vocations. But if what is meant by the word "natural" is the question, "Does a homosexual predisposition lie within nature in the sense that it precedes, by way of inheritance, the choice or learning experience of some individuals?" then it is becoming increasingly clear, through the work of biogenetic structuralism (supported by the work of such people as Eckert on monozygotic twins, or of Whitman and Mathy on incidence in different cultures, or of Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith on sexual preference) that the answer is, yes, it is natural for many people—for about four or five percent of any population (the fact that about ten percent of many studied populations is homosexual indicates that there may be additional causes).

What this means is that the developmental processes, including the genes which build the structures and chemicals of our bodies, build also the structures of the brain. In the case of the majority, they build particular structures which initiate heterosexual attraction and behaviors. We have no idea, as yet, exactly how the genes do this. That is why those working in AI [artificial intelligence] are inclined to treat the brain as a black box: the inputs and outputs can be studied, and inferences can be drawn, but we cannot observe how the operations work. What we can say is that the genes prepare the majority of people for heterosexual interactions and behaviors.

But correspondingly, we can also say that the developmental processes prepare a minority of individuals for homosexual interactions and behaviors. In the case of such complexity, it can be said with safety that there is no single "gene for homosexuality," so that sexual disposition cannot, even theoretically, be manipulated by genetic engineering.

There is nothing particularly surprising in any of this. We are prepared for an immense variety of behaviors: in the autonomic nervous system we are hardly even aware that they are going on. We are prepared for physiological changes at the age of puberty, we are prepared for language competence. Nothing determines what we do in detail with the behaviors for which we are prepared, any more than it is determined whether you learn French, German, or Spanish, or what you say in those languages. That is why a mark of moral maturity lies, as I argued in the second lecture, in the extent to which we acquire responsibility for the ways in which our "preparedness" is expressed. In no way is this any kind of genetic determinism. But it is certainly becoming increasingly clear that as the majority of people are literally "turned on" in the genetically constructed limbic system in a heterosexual interaction, so some are "turned on" in a homo-

sexual interaction. In that sense, homosexual disposition precedes some individuals: it is not a consequence of learning, or of defects in infant experience, or whatever. In that sense, it is natural (in nature), accepting that all nature, in a Christian perspective, is in a condition of fallen disorder. Nevertheless, in that context it is obvious that a homosexual couple can be as much a means of grace to each other and to others, as can a heterosexual couple. Christianity understands the enterprise of being human as one in which we are intended to be a means of grace to each other, a means by which we support, sustain, and encourage each other into the transformation of life into love. It is what the philosopher Danto has called, in relation to art, the transfiguration of the commonplace.

I am not despising or underestimating the satisfactions of the commonplace: there is not one of us who does not know the immediate limbic satisfactions of such things as lust, malice, gossip, vindictiveness, and all the rest of that boisterous crew. But they are as nothing, they are as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, compared to the experience of life being transformed into love. There are very few of us who have not envied, at least once, the rich who never have to worry about the mortgage, but they are as nothing compared with the consequence of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance.

We are called by God to be that means of grace to each other, to be the means through which that transcendence of what Freud used to call "the abject points of our departure" becomes possible. Often the vocation is general, feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, visiting those in prison, and so on. But it may also be a particular vocation, in relation to one other person. Marriage is that particular vocation, for two people to become exactly that means of grace to each other, by a commitment of fidelity through time, the means in relation to each other whereby they help each other to grow up in themselves and into God. Christianity offers, through word and sacrament, the resources to help us to live in that way. In that perspective, it then seems impossible to maintain that two homosexual people cannot be that means of grace to each other, through a commitment of fidelity which brings all the moral virtues to bear; and in that way, they can become, like any other partnership of that kind, a means of grace, not only to each other, but to many others in the world around them. I am not in the least saying that all gay people are marvelous. Nor are all heterosexuals. But surely every single one of us knows at least some gay people whose lives are full of grace and truth; and if we do not, then it is we who have been living in the closet, and not the gay community.

But to accept that argument would surely require an impossible change in the church's attitude—a contradiction of its own past. But changes of that kind are not impossible when the urgency which is the Holy Spirit makes it clear that they are demanded of us. The church has repeatedly changed attitudes and behaviors which it formerly endorsed, but which it has come to see are wrong. Thus Christians no longer keep slaves, although the New Testament simply advocates a change in the treatment of slaves, not the abolition of slavery (and Wilberforce was passionately opposed by Christians who found warrant in Scripture for continuing slavery); Christians no longer burn witches, although they did, and they had a text in Scripture to justify it; Christians no longer murder Jews, although they did, and they had a text in Scripture to justify it;

Christians no longer execute homosexuals, although they did, and they had a text in Scripture to justify it; Christians no longer condemn all suicides and refuse to bury the bodies in consecrated ground, although they did, and they had a text in Scripture to justify it; it was Christians who brutalized black people through apartheid, and while they no longer claim the warrant of Scripture for it, they did so officially, in the Dutch Reformed Church, until very recently. Many Christians, including Roman Catholics, use contraceptives, although Scripture was supposed to contradict it (and the debate in the first half of this century among Anglicans/Episcopalians on that issue is very instructive in showing how change, even on an issue considered to be biblical and fundamental, can nevertheless happen).

All these are immense changes. Most of them were deeply contested, and some still are. In practical terms, it means that in any generation there are always some issues, of utter seriousness, which have not yet been resolved. That is not to be regretted, painful though it frequently is. It belongs to the providence of God that in seeking for that which was lost, he did not despise the limitations of the time and history of his creation, but was born among them. The Bible cannot be converted into what it is not, without destroying what God intended it to be. Hermeneutics, therefore, is strenuous, hard work; and it must occur in community. While we live together, seeking to discern the truth into which the Spirit is leading us, but before the resolution of a particular issue has become clear, we are under obligation not to assume that our opinion is clearly right and the other treacherous villainy. We can know that some things are certainly wrong. In the test of 1 John, wherever the quality of Christian love, or agape, is absent, there you know that God is absent also. But far more frequently, those with whom we disagree are eloquent of that love, and the issue is not resolved. Then the principle of action is clear and deeply established in the Christian tradition: you are under obligation to maintain the truth as you see it (though never in such a style that it makes continuing love impossible); you have then to relate to someone whom you believe is acting wrongly in such a way that you try to alert them to what in your view is wrong (and to what in contrast is right); and having done that, you must support that person in a way that (from your point of view) minimizes the damage and maximizes the good in what he has chosen.

The limitation of damage may be very restrictive or drastic, particularly where the "direct seeing" of evil is concerned (some things can be known to be wrong), or where the defense of the vulnerable is involved. In the case of an enormity such as Hitler—where efforts to persuade are not even available—this principle of minimizing damage led to the conclusion that the assassination of a tyrant is justified; it contributed also to the theory of the just, or justified, war, with extremely careful specification of its limits. Even then, some Christians would disagree, and would regard the taking of life in such circumstances as always wrong.

Nevertheless, the principle of maximizing the good and minimizing the damage, in the case even of those whom one believes to be acting wrongly, still obtains. It is applied with admirable clarity in a pamphlet which was issued by the Catholic Truth Society, entitled, Catholics and AIDS: Questions and Answers. Bearing in mind the prohibition on contraception and homosexual acts, the first two "Questions of Conscience" are:

1. I am a hemophiliac who is HIV positive owing to a transfusion

with an infected blood product. Can I have sexual relations with my wife if I use a sheath (or condom) to protect her from infection?

It is clear that the general teaching of the Pope and the Bishops in communion with him is that every sexual act must be open to the transmission of life: if you seriously believe that your conscience tells you that you must go against this norm by using a condom, then Catholic moralists will tell you that, provided you have given genuine consideration to the question and have really concluded that the general teaching cannot apply in your particular case, you should follow your conscience.

It is part of the virtue of prudence, the virtue by which we determine how to apply moral principles in particular cases, that we seek, and be open to, advice from other people, and particularly people who have a recognized competence in ethical matters. You should be ready to allow whoever you consult (friend, priest, or other) time to consider carefully the grounds you propose for your course of action; and you should of course be very certain that the way in which you propose to have sexual relations with your wife is in fact absolutely secure from the danger of infecting her or passing the condition on to another generation.

Recognized and reputable Catholic moral thinkers believe that there are a number of contradictory opinions in this area which different Catholics may legitimately hold: some hold that it would be wrong for you to have sexual relations at all because of the dangers of passing on the virus to your wife and children, some that it would be wrong to use a sheath in this situation, some that it need not be wrong, and some that this issue must be dealt with by private counseling. These moralists believe that none of these opinions is yet the position of the Church and that until such a time as the position of the Church is clearly defined, Catholics should follow St. Augustine's dictum: In what is certain, obedience; in what is doubtful, freedom; in all things, Charity.

2. A close friend of mine is gay, and I know that he does have sexual relations with other men. I have frequently urged him as a friend to lead a chaste life, but he insists on the importance for his life of at least occasional sex. Can I in good conscience recommend that he use a sheath?

Yes. When you have done what you can to prevent a sin, it would be your duty as a Catholic to help someone who is determined to sin to limit the evil of their act.

Your advice should include reference to laws of the country your gay friend is living in, as well as to the ages of the people involved.

In relation to AIDS, this may also mean that the church should support health and social agencies in their endeavors to minimize the damage by the provision of free needles to drug addicts. This is not condoning sin. It is the same principle: the evils of drugs and addiction do not become other than evil; and we have a corresponding responsibility to try to persuade those addicted

of a better way; and if we do that, we also have an obligation to supply the means for them to do so. But if we fail in the attempt, as we frequently do, then we have to support that person in maximizing the good and minimizing the damage; and socially that will certainly include structures of restriction—for example, in drug dealing and opportunity. Law is immediately related in that way to morals. But in individual terms, it demands that we are close enough to people to support them where they are. Incarnation is immediately related in that way to morals.

It was for all these reasons that we wrote, in the discussion document for the Lambeth Conference, on AIDS:

theological arguments which have to do with the origin of disease, and the theological judgments which underlie pastoral action. In confusing the two, we identify the spread of AIDS with homosexual practices (despite the fact that in many countries the virus is spread in heterosexual relations), or drug abuse, and we ignore the dimensions of poverty, war, and deprivation as being factors which also affect the spread of the disease. The spread of AIDS in Uganda, and among drug users in Scotland, are examples of these links. Thus we must recognize that AIDS is a diagnostic instrument: it points out the vulnerable places and people in society, and it is pitiless in exposing our negligence of our neighbors. Christian strategies must recognize the ways in which AIDS is judging us. AIDS is a challenge to faith and Christian mission, as it is also, in different ways, to society: "In as much as you have done it to the least of one of these...."

We then drew attention to the many different ways in which the church could give a practical lead: in redeeming the vocabulary of AIDS; in articulating images of hope that survive in the face of disaster; in education, particularly in the writing of learning programs for school computers; in monitoring threats to civil liberties in the case of such things as life insurance, mortgages, confidentiality; in ministering to the immense disruptions of family life; in pioneering new forms of family dependency; in caring for orphans; in mediating the perceptions and experiences of women, who, as mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, have different, and often very profound, insights from which we need to learn; in attending, particularly through its chaplaincies, to the specific vulnerabilities of those in prison.

And as if that is not enough, what are the wealthy of the world doing for Africa? The catastrophe that threatens in Africa is on a scale that defeats the imagination. AIDS in Africa is transmitted almost entirely in heterosexual relationships or in the womb. In some areas as many as 10 to 30 percent of sexually mature adults are carriers of the virus. We speak of high-risk groups in the West: in parts of Africa to be between the ages of 20 and 30 is to be in a high-risk group. Christians have been decisively important agents of education and health in Africa, and they still are. But the scale of the catastrophe is such that having given a coat (Mt. 5:40), much more than a further cloak is now needed.

At the 3rd International AIDS conference in Tanzania, it was estimated that it costs between \$104 and \$631 per annum to treat one AIDS patient. The Tanzanian health minister, Dr. Aron Chiduo, reported that the Tanzanian health budget had declined from \$3 per head per annum in 1973, to \$1 in 1988. It costs \$1.50 to do a test for the presence of HIV.

If there is a judgment in connection with AIDS, this is where it is taking place. Is it a judgment of God on us? If that concept has meaning, it has it only in the context of an adequate doctrine of creation. The reliability in the universe makes it more probable that it is derived from the unproduced Producer of all that is, than that its precision is derived from chance and randomness alone (see my book, The Meanings of Death). It is because we live in stable and reliable contexts that we are able also to live with confidence, not only scientifically, but religiously and morally as well. But we live at a sufficient distance from God for our actions to be genuinely our own. If we have sold our souls to the devil, it has at least been a relatively free transaction. The response of God has not been to obliterate that freedom by zapping us and getting us back into line, but by respecting us in love so much that he gave himself, in the frame and context of a human life, to the end "that all they that believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16). That redemption is not compelled upon us; nor are we coerced, least of all by the Bible, into behaviors as though in all circumstances we can be sure of what counts as good. The only non-corrigeable judgment is the final judgment, when it becomes clear (as it begins to become clear in this life) what we are and what we have made of all that has been entrusted to us in the boundary of this body and this life. Christian ethics has to do with vocation and vision; with responding to the summons of God to move further into love; and with the commitment of the artist who is prepared to learn the skills and tradition of her art, but who then uses the resource of tradition to create, with the grace of God, a new work of beauty in this life.

In the way of direct seeing, the issue of judgment remains as simple now as then: I was hungry and you did not feed me; a stranger and you did not take me in; naked and you did not clothe me; sick and in prison and you did not visit me. Now, in our day, he stands before us and adds: I was black and you discriminated against me; a homosexual and you despised me; a street person and you left me there; a woman and you kept me in my place; a patient with AIDS and you cut the budget.

And if that criterion of final judgment seems frightening, then at least we know that it is being made by one who suffered under the partial judgments of Pontius Pilate and who insisted that mercy is the meaning of God. In the marvelous words of the verse from the Dies Irae, which all of us can make our own: *Qui Mariam absolvisti*

*Et latronem exaudisti
Mihi quoque spem dedisti.*

Yes. But it is still dies irae, the day of wrath. It may make moral judgment selfish and therefore less moral if it attends constantly to the consequences for me. But if there are ultimate consequences—heaven and hell—it would be irrational not to have them in sight in moral judgment. What, then, is the status of the final state in Christian moral judgment?

4. Death

So, finally (which seems the appropriate adverb), death. There's a lot of it about: not so much at the moment as birth, but still the general conclusion to which we all come.

In the last lecture, we saw (through the example from the book of Numbers) how specific was the belief, at one time in Israel's history, that God brings death as punishment to those of whom he disapproves. We then moved off in a different direction to doubt whether such episodes or texts can be read as a comment on AIDS. But that does not alter the fact that for generations in Israel, the connection was made, between suffering and sin, with early or premature death understood as punishment from God. As a later saying, recorded in the Talmud, put it, "There is not death without sin, there is no suffering without sin" (B. Shab. 55a); or again, "If a man sees that painful suffering visits him, let him examine his conduct." (B. Ber. 5a).

But, as my book Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World makes clear in detail, that connection between sin and death was already being challenged and corrected within the biblical tradition itself. Virtually every psalm in the Psalter is dealing in some way with exactly that issue: if God is like that, and if he punishes the wicked and rewards the faithful, then why, observably, do the wicked flourish like a bay tree, and the innocent suffer and die young?

The rain it raineth everyday
Upon the just and unjust fellas,
But mainly on the just because
The unjust steal the just's umbrellas.

Habbukuk, Jonah, Ecclesiastes, and, supremely, the book of Job, are all attempts to deal with the bankruptcy and error of the view that where you see suffering, there you see sin, with death as the epitome of God's disapproval and punishment. So given that previous history of correction, it is not surprising that Jesus also repudiated that view, in his comment on the collapse of the tower of Siloam.

At that very time there some people present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He answered them: "Do you imagine that, because these Galileans suffered this fate, they must have been greater sinners than anyone else in Galilee? I tell you they were not; but unless you repent, you will all come to the same end. Or the eighteen people who were killed when the tower fell on them at Siloam—do you imagine they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? I tell you they were not; but unless you repent, you will all of you come to the same end." (Lk. 13:1-5)

But the fact of death (of the same end) remains. So even if the process of Scripture has itself already winnowed out the defective view that the date of our death (early or late) is determined by our behavior (good or evil), perhaps it is after death that God will deal with us as we deserve. In the main Christian view, all that we all deserve is punishment: there is no life so exempt from sin

that we can earn its salvation. The great Christian themes of grace and justification then set the mercy of God against what we strictly deserve. Even so, there would need to be a recognition on our side of our predicament and of the God-created way to escape from it. We need, therefore, to be aware how serious the issues of life beyond death actually are.

So it comes about in Christian history (and at this point it becomes true of all other religions as well) that death is linked to ethics as an instrument whereby an attempt can be made to change human behaviors in this life by reference to what may happen in the next life—in other words, by what Muslims call promise and threat. What that means can be seen in a single example, from a book by a Jesuit, Dick Westley, called Morality and Its Beyond. First, he quotes from the 1913 edition of the Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique, in the article “Hell”:

From a pastoral point of view, one must ask whether it is useful to preach on hell in our day, and human wisdom tends to respond, no. True traditional wisdom has thought otherwise. Certainly, it is always better to come to Jesus because of love, but fear is capable of leading to love, even fear of hell. It is necessary to temper that fear with love, but it is also necessary to engender love of God through fear of his chastisements, and to avoid sin by the thought of the divine sanction, i.e., hell. Now that fear is just as necessary today as it was of old, because human nature is always basically the same.³⁶

He then makes clear what the consequences of that theology of terror were in his own case:

I almost want to laugh at the thought of it now. It seems so completely foreign to what I have come to know about God and how he works in the world that I find it difficult to believe I actually lived in such mortal fear of him. But I did. So did most other adolescent boys with whom I went to high school. One could hardly avoid being scared to death at what might happen if he indulged in or enjoyed, ever so slightly, an erotic pleasure! Since we were students in all-male Jesuit high school and were not married, to indulge in any erotic (in those days called “venereal”) pleasure meant we had sinned mortally. If we died after such an episode before we got to confession or made a perfect act of contrition, it was curtains for us. I still have an oft-quoted scriptural text in my head from those supposedly “carefree” days of youth: “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life shall be required of you’” (Luke 12:20). I suppose that is why non-Catholic adolescent boys always derived more pleasure from their erotic episodes than their Catholic counterparts. Our pleasure was always marred by the thought that we were playing Russian roulette with our very lives. If the church wanted to make erotic pleasures less pleasurable, it succeeded. But only temporarily, because adolescent boys have a way of growing up and rejecting what was accepted naively and uncritically, due to inexperience.

The image of God that emerges from that sort of view is of someone who doesn't really care what you may have done with you life as a whole, but is terribly concerned that you not violate the sixth and ninth commandments even once. When you think of it, that is

a rather strange picture, not only of God, but of any intelligent person. As any parent can tell you, you are much more concerned with the overall life-style of your daughters and sons that you are about individual acts of drunkenness or erotic indulgence. Indeed, when those sorts of actions occur, you are most interested in knowing how they fit into the total life of your child and whether they are an indication of a change in overall direction. This is standard fare for those involved in parenting. Why wouldn't that be the same with God who revealed that he is going to "shepherd us rightly" and that he is our father?"³⁷

One of the blights of that kind of spiritual terrorization is that not all people grow through it into the maturity which Westley exhibits. They remain paralyzed in that frozen inexperience which prevents them growing up and acquiring themselves as the responsible agent of their actions. Of course (as we have seen) that "growing up" requires the recognition of appropriate authorities and the internalization of constraint and discipline. But to stay dependent on authority as a substitute for one's own agency and accountability is a pathological refusal of vocation.

Yet the operators of strong systems clearly rely on that pathology to maintain their control. The sadistic/masochistic relationship is so deep within the possibilities of human sexuality that (as I have illustrated in The Sense of God), de Sade maintained that it was in nature: it belongs within nature to relate to each other in those ways. For some of course it is, or seems to be so. It nevertheless remains ab-normal (standing away from the statistical norms of human behavior).

So it is also in religious life. The equivalent of de Sade in Christianity is clearly Cardinal Ratzinger, who, in his correspondence with Charles Curran, or in the document issued under his name on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian, sees the command/obedience relationship as the natural and necessary relationship which should obtain in the church: neither the freedom of the act of faith, nor the obligation to follow one's own conscience can legitimately dissent from the Magisterium. That received deposit of the faith might, in its further explications, be better expressed (and theologians might help to do this), but it cannot contain error, and it cannot therefore be questioned.

Given the equivalent of sadistic/masochistic feelings in religious life, the natural necessity for authority and obedience in human growth and being can easily be exploited in these ways. But its exploitation in Vatican Catholicism (in the way, for example, in which bishops are appointed and theologians controlled) remains pathological and ab-normal all the same, and far removed from the ways in which most Roman Catholics now live their lives. In a comparable way, the other obvious example of spiritual control (the preaching of hell-fire) also relies on natural properties within the brain. William Sargent drew attention to this, when he wrote Battle for the Mind. He was a psychiatrist who had a strong physicalist understanding of how disorders in the brain (psychiatric disorders) should be treated. Thus he pioneered leucotomies and lobectomies; and when he was invited to give the Watson-Smith lecture at the Royal College of Physicians in 1966, he did so under the title, "Psychiatric Treatment in General Teaching Hospitals: A Plea for Mechanistic Approach."³⁸

In that context, he looked at the process of religious, and particularly Christian, conversion. He went back to Pavlov's demonstration of the ease with which, under life-threatening stress, acquired behaviors (at least in dogs) can be erased, and new behaviors imprinted. Applied in the case of humans, not only to behaviors but to beliefs, it was this which led to the claim that "brain-washing" is possible. In Sargent's view, this was the technique and mechanism of conversion. Having looked at examples, he concluded:

The evidence already presented suggests that the physiological mechanisms which make possible the implantation or removal of behaviour patterns in men and animals are analogous; and that when the brain breaks down under severe stress, the resultant behaviour-changes, whether in man or in animal, depend both on the individual's inherited temperament, and on the conditioned behaviour patterns which have been built up by a gradual adaptation to environment.³⁹

There is much in his book which is overconfident and imprecise, as Sargent readily accepted in later life. Nevertheless, that book was a milestone in drawing attention to the ways in which religious evangelists exploit the certain fact of death in combination with the uncertainties of what lies beyond it. Silas Todd, in the 18th century, recorded his appeal to Mary Pinner, a servant girl who had been condemned to death for setting fire to her master's house. He described how he used the method which he had learned from his own sudden conversion by Wesley. She was in prison where also "three or four men were cast for death, with whom Mary showed herself very wanton":

Therefore I took her aside, and said to her, "Mary, how is it that you, above all other malefactors, are so regardless about your precious and immortal soul? Do not you well know that God's all-seeing eye penetrates your every action? Are you not afraid of going to hell, seeing you are in a short time to appear before the great Jehovah, against whom you have sinned with a high hand? Are you determined to destroy your own soul? Are you in love with eternal perdition and God's wrath, that you so madly pursue it? Do you long to be involved in the bottomless pit, and the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which will never be quenched? Oh remember, if you die in your present condition, you will die eternally under the wrath of an offended Saviour; and all these miseries will be your portion for ever!"⁴⁰

The consequence was (as Todd recorded it) that she went to her execution "singing, praising and giving glory to God without intermission." If she could not be rescued from that savage death, it was perhaps better that she should be helped to face it that way. But it nevertheless raises the question whether we are entitled, or even required, to use the fear of hell to engineer changes in behavior and belief. A reply on the part of religions might be that if the punishments of hell are a factual reality, or if they are more probable than not, then it would be an absurd irresponsibility not to take them seriously, in one's own case, and in the case of others. Not surprisingly, therefore, all religions have vivid imagina-

tions of what the nature of torment after death will be like. The Buddhist Tibetan Book of the Dead warns those who are going to be reborn in hell after death that they will have no choice about it: they will be compelled to enter it helplessly:

Lands of gloom, black houses and red houses, black pits in the earth, black roads along which you have to go, will all appear. If you go there, you will enter into Hell and experience unbearable suffering through heat and cold, from which you will never get out.

In the Hindu Siva Purana, the souls as naked as ghosts are dragged to the domains of Yama along a path strewn with sharp thorns, infested with different terrible beasts of prey, wolves and tigers, vicious misquitos and blood-sucking leeches of hideous size. On they go, "burnt and scorched by lightning falls and pierced through by heavy showers of arrows." Even after all that, it is clearly better to travel painfully than to arrive: when they do arrive,

their hands are tightly tied and they are suspended from the branches of tall trees by the attendants of Yama. They are beaten with goads of fiery color and terrible iron rods; they are smeared with glowing acid more unbearable than fire, their limbs are cut and smothered, gradually torn and severed and smeared with molten metal... They are then cast into wells of full filth and swarms of worms or in takes of putrid fat and blood. They are eaten by worms and by hawks with beaks as strong as iron.

In the Quran, the miseries of the damned are described with equally thoughtful care: not only are the skins of the tormented burnt away; they are then provided with new ones, so that the burning can continue forever (or at least for a long time; it is an issue in Islam whether the punishment is forever, as in my book, The Meanings of Death, makes clear):

Surely those who reject our signs we will roast at the fire. As often as their skins are burnt through, we will change them for other skins, that they may taste the penalty. Surely God is powerful, wise.⁴¹

There may of course be a debate about what, if anything, these highly divergent imaginations are attempting to portray. But supposing, by a critically realistic argument, we could establish what it is, as approximate and provisional languages, that they are wrong about, the issue will still remain whether the techniques of spiritual terrorization are right or wrong. It is clearly right to attend the possible consequences if they exist:

Even in my childhood, he [the Lord] did scare and affright me with fearful dreams, and did terrify me with dreadful visions... Also I should, at these years, be greatly afflicted and troubled with the thoughts of the day of judgement, and that both night and day, and should tremble at the thoughts of the fearful torments of hell fire; still fearing that it would be my lot to be found at last amongst those devils and hellish fiends, who are there bound down with the chains and bonds of eternal darkness, "unto the judgement of the great day." These things, I saw, when I was but a child nine or ten years old....⁴²

In the same way, Spurgeon, who was (in terms of the number of conversions) a highly successful preacher, looked back and remembered a childhood:

No one can guess at what age children become capable of conversion...When but young in years, I felt with much sorrow the evil of sin...God's law had laid hold upon me, and was showing me my sins. If I slept at night, I dreamed of the bottomless pit; and when I awoke, I seemed to feel the misery I had dreamed.⁴³

In that case, it would be a disaster, surely, not to use every power of persuasion to save others from the pit. There is a moving passage in Pearl Buck's biography of her father, a missionary who went far into China, at great hazard, to convert the Chinese. Pearl Buck had little sympathy for what she regarded as a kind of madness. And yet in one passage she reveals that she came to some understanding of the sense of urgency which possessed her father and others like him. Because of their real fear that their fellow humans would end in everlasting fire, they were possessed, she said, by an urgency of salvation, "a very madness of necessity, an agony of salvation":

The early missionaries believed in their cause as men these days do not know how to believe in anything. Heaven was actual, a space filled with solid goods. Hell did burn, not only for the evil unbelieving, but far more horrible, for those who died in ignorance. To go forth, to cry out, to warn, to save others—these were frightful urgencies upon the soul already saved. There was a very madness of necessity, an agony of salvation.⁴⁴

But the question is, to what lengths should the madness of necessity drive one? If it is not certain at what age children can be converted, it would seem advisable to err on the side of safety and start young: "Give me a child at eight and it will be mine forever." Equally, if it is easy to engineer effects, especially in the context of crowd-psychology, does not the vast consequence of the End justify virtually any means? Even at the level of advertising it is clear that human decisions can be manipulated with some ease.

However, that is precisely where the distinction can be seen most clearly. Advertising may be, as Stephen Leacock supposed, the science of arresting human intelligence long enough to get money from it. But that is precisely why there are regulations controlling advertising techniques—for example, prohibiting subliminal messages. There is even more money in religion than there is in a Unilever account. Thus when the pope visited Great Britain, the church set up a new company, Papal Visits Ltd., to raise the costs of the visit, estimated at a million pounds a day. The life we live, we live, not by faith, but by appointing the International Management Group, run by Mr. Mark McCormack. Mr. McCormack reported (in a *Times* interview) that when the church approached him, "they said that when the Pope had visited Ireland a couple of years ago, it cost the Church several million pounds, and that everyone and his brother had made money except the Church." Still, Mr. McCormack's 20 percent share of the profits was, as he pointed out, less than he charges for golf and tennis stars. The church itself commented that he had driven a hard bargain, but that in any case his reward would be in heaven.

Shades of Tetzel and the sale of indulgences, or of pieces of silver, stir uneasily from the past; and if that seems a little severe, then at least it raises other memories of the time when Vatican cars drove around Rome with the initials S.C.V. emblazoned on the doors, standing for Stato della Citta del Vaticano, but which the people of Rome translated as "se Cristo vedesse"—"if Christ could only see"—and all this long before the days of Archbishop Marcinkus.

The truth is that the engineering of effects in the religious case is very big business indeed, as (at an opposite ecclesiastical extreme) the TV churches have made clear. Threat and promise of a kind that has eternal consequences preys on uncertainty. In the context of crowd or group psychology, the engineering of effects is relatively easy. The temptation is obvious: if spiritual terrorization is more effective in moving at least some people to change their beliefs and behaviors than appeals to reflection or altruism or vocation, then many preachers will use the former and not the latter; and those who use the latter may well be abused for their empty churches as living proofs of secularization or (more shocking still) liberalism. The dynamic of this is summarized in the experience of John Berridge, who was a revivalist at the time of Wesley. He started as a conscientious pastor, who, when he first preached in his parish, invited people into a holier life. His preaching was, in his own estimate, ineffective. When he preached the blood of Christ and its effect on sin, and its power to save from everlasting damnation, people flocked to hear:

I preached of Sanctification very earnestly for six years in a former parish, and never brought one soul to Christ: I did the same at this parish for two years, without any success at all; but as soon as ever I preached Jesus Christ, and Faith in His Blood, then believers were added to the Church continually.

Berridge would encourage his audience to fall into states so familiar at pop concerts, as well as at evangelistic meetings. "Fall! Won't you fall!" he would cry. "Why don't you fall! Better fall here, than fall into hell!"

The immediate question that arises to all this (supposing for the moment and the sake of argument that there is what there is in the case of hell which sets a limit on the approximate but corrigible languages about it), is the same question which has been recurring throughout these pages: at what point does the method destroy that necessary and conducive property of human beings, the acquisition and exercise of our accountability and responsibility? All our decisions are constrained by hopes and fears of different sorts. But what is the existential value of a decision that has been imposed upon us against all exercise of agency, intelligence, and reason? In what sense can we still be regarded as the personal agent of that decision, rather than the recipient of an irresistible action upon us? And if not an agent, then in what sense can we attribute any responsibility to ourselves, whether for good or ill, for the decision? If we can coerce another person to conversion by that method, why not by any other method that works, including bribery and corruption? That is why society, through its legislators, does not hesitate to regulate the engineering techniques of advertisers, or for that matter (in a different sense of the word) genetic engineering. But it does hesitate on a multitude of frontiers where the balance between freedom of speech and refusal of aggression and harm is tested. Reference has already

been made, briefly, to one example (where some saw The Satanic Verses as an issue of freedom of speech, others saw it as an issue of racial and religious abuse). Another example lies in the area of pornographic hatred. In an article on the Diceman (Andrew Dice Clay), Tony Hendra drew attention, both to the fact that the Diceman played as a comedian to capacity crowds of 20,000, and to the nature of his material, which might best be summarized under the title of a series of books, Truly Tasteless Jokes, I, II, III, etc.: "His most famous opening: 'So I got my tongue up this chick's ass—you know how boring it can be on line at the bank.' His most controversial moral position: 'If a father pays his daughter's college tuition, he earns the right to have sex with her.'"45

There comes a point—a threshold—where moral protest is as important as the political may be. In the often quoted words of Niemoller: "First they came for the Jews, but I was silent; I was not a Jew. Then they came for the communists, but I was silent; I was not communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, but I was silent; I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me. There was no one left to speak for me." The aggressions of moral evil may comparably have to be resisted, because to acquiesce can be taken, easily, to be endorsing. Hendra has no doubt what the Diceman is: "Andrew Dice Clay is unquestionably racist, sexist, homophobic, classist and a bunch of other adjectives."⁴⁶ But then he queries—or rather mocks—the protests against this: "Four days later [after the cancellation of a Clay video], John J. O'Connor, the media critic of The New York Times, wrote a triumphant article with this lead: 'Popular entertainment does after all have a revulsion threshold. Andrew Dice Clay stepped over it and is now desperately trying to salvage his career as a stand-up comic.' Whether the Diceman is the authentic voice of a generally ignored portion of the American people or simply an exploitative jerk is far less important than the fact that he is being silenced. American puritanism is alive and well, and very media-adept. It can score its points quickly and do its damage deeply. Its face these days is liberal, caring and compassionate—in a word, nice. Control the uncontrollable, silence the visceral, insist that life fits into a preconceived pattern... But is anything gained by campaigning Clay into oblivion? His audience laughed, cheered, waved their fists, chanted his punchlines. You can get rid of him. They won't go away."⁴⁷

But the fact that "they do not go away" does not mean that society in general has to endorse those attitudes by acquiescence, in the name of freedom of speech. The truth is that there are "revulsion thresholds," not least in these areas of race, religion, and gender, where the vulnerable cannot protect themselves, and where the activities of the Diceman and his like are not contributing to any human good beyond the obvious generation of some wealth for some people. The chance that he is cathartic for some disturbed people is submerged beneath the endorsement which his attitudes receive when no resistance is offered. To repeat the irony: moral evil can be directly recognized, and almost all of us are capable of recognizing it. Instances can be contested, but on some there is virtual unanimity. It is only if we refuse to exercise our responsibility voluntarily (as a matter of will) on our own account that society is compelled to refuse endorsement, and to make that endorsement specific in law. Those who bring about censorship, at least in Western styles of democracy, are not abstractions like "American Puritanism," but irresponsible people, like the second murderer in Macbeth, who are reckless what they do to spite the world.

Thus the recognition of moral facts in relation to human good precedes debates about freedom of speech—indeed, it provides the context in which alone such debates can have serious, as opposed to rhetorical, meaning. And it is here that consequentialist theories of ethics have their strongest grip, because they take the possibility of being morally right or wrong to be exactly that—serious. To add the dimension of being religiously right or wrong is to go beyond ethics, as Kierkegaard realized in considering the predicament of Abraham in Fear and Trembling. But is it right to discuss that kind of consequentialism in terms of heaven and hell? Or, to connect the question with the earlier discussion, the more substantial (or at least the more ontological) question remains whether what was assumed for the sake of argument can be so assumed. To put it more colloquially, when, in irritation, you tell someone to go to hell, where exactly do you expect him to go? If hell is a place where the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched, then there is indeed somewhere to go. But is there such a place? Many religious cosmologies have met the challenge head on, and have claimed that a place of punishment is a part of the cosmic, or created, order (or will be: according to some Muslims, hell will be brought into being only at the final judgment, although what it will be is already known). Again, earlier Christian cosmologies held that hell is a place that can be found.

But not many Christians now believe that the truth condition of the sentence, "Hell is a place..." can be met in the literal way by digging down far enough and finding the place. There is a certain irony in that, since we know exactly where, at least in origin, hell was to be found. It was to be found about half a mile from the Temple site in Jerusalem, walking due south. For that was ge Hinnom, the valley of Hinnom, repugnant because of its associations with sacrifices to Moloch, and in consequence something like the municipal rubbish dump. It was there that not only refuse was tipped, but the bodies of the despised and villainous were thrown—the bodies of those who had excluded themselves from the human community, and did not deserve a proper burial, in a place where respects could be paid, and memories kept alive.

If you go to the municipal tip, you will find that it is exactly the place where the worm dies not, and the smoldering fire does not cease—precisely those images of hell which we find in the gospels, when they are describing Gehenna; for Gehenna is simply a Greek version of the Hebrew Ge Hinnom. In other words, this is a contingent and approximate picture of the horror of ultimate consequence in the direction of evil behavior. The model of ultimate repudiation in this life (the municipal dump) has been transferred in the gospels to the next life, to draw attention to the seriousness of consequence in the choices we make and in the behaviors which we exhibit.

But it is a picture derived from a particular moment in Israel's history. It does not belong to an abstract geography of the planet. Where Israel is concerned, it did not even have reference to punishment or consequence after death, since in almost the whole of the biblical period, there was no belief in Israel that there will be any significant life after death at all. They believed that a memory trace of an individual will survive, particularly if her or his descendants sustain it (hence the horror of ge Hinnom, since there will be no one to sustain that memory), but this is a very shadowy survival indeed. Until the very end of the bib-

lical period, there was no belief that there will be a worthwhile life with God after death; but equally, there could not be punishment either.

Exactly the same is true in origin of the great and continuing religious traditions of the East. There also they could not say that an individual goes to oblivion at the moment of death, because the dead continue in some sense in the appearance of their descendants, and in the memories of their descendants (for the details and evidence of this, see my book, *The Meanings of Death*). Nevertheless, they too did not believe that there will be any worthwhile continuing life with God after death—or its opposite, in eternal punishment. These imaginations are late in human history. This means that the human sense of God, and of being discovered by God, was achieved without any of the prudential or apprehensive considerations which most people, post-Freud and post-Marx, assume to have been the driving motivation of early religion. Those early ancestors of ours did not modify their behaviors in the hope of getting to heaven or of avoiding hell, because they had not belief that either was possible.

That may sound a very dry and academic point. In truth, it is one of the most momentous of all human achievements—to have realized God, without any expectation that there was “something in it for them” in terms of eternal consequence. It anticipates the absolute relationship of trust which the hymn was later to express:

My God, I love thee; not because
I hope for heaven thereby,
Nor yet because who love thee not
Are lost eternally.
E'en so I love thee, and will love
And in thy praise will sing,
Solely because thou art my God,
And my eternal King.

Does it follow that the conclusion of eternal life after death (to which both traditions, East and West, came) was an aberration? No, because the experience of human life in relation to God within the boundary of this life was of such unequivocal power and reality and insistence, that it seemed an obvious (though initially very tentative) inference that he would not abandon that friendship with his creatures in death. But the imagination through which this was affirmed was tied to the time and context in which it was formed. Jewish argument oscillated between affirming, on the one hand, a Greek philosophical soul, and, on the other, a Genesis/Ezekiel resurrection of the body; and Christianity then tried to put both of them together. In the case of punishment, the Christian imagination seized on the prevailing demonstration of absolute repudiation, the valley of Hinnom, and gave it ultimacy in a negative direction.

But that means that we can see that particular pictorial imagination (of hell being a place where the fire is never quenched) as a conceptual episode in religious history so far as it purports to be literally descriptive. Like many human attempts to imagine what has not been seen, its language is approximate, provisional, corrigible, and mainly wrong. But does that mean that we can abandon all consideration of eternal consequence in terms of heaven and hell? From a critically realistic point of view, the answer is, obviously not. Reliabilities can be established, even when the languages, through which the process of their attainment

has been achieved, are approximate and corrected. So the question has to be: given that the pictorial language about hell was descriptively wrong insofar as it proposed a literal place of that kind, about what was it approximately wrong?

At the very least, we would have to say that the human imagination of hell was giving powerful expression to the unease which people feel if they are asked to suppose that neither God nor karma takes any account of our behavior; that it makes in effect (in any ultimate effect) no difference whether we love our neighbor as ourself, or spend a lifetime kicking him in the teeth. And since the discovery of God, and the profound sense, even more, of our lives being transformed by God in the directions of holiness, goodness, and beauty, had been made originally within the boundary of this life, then the opposite of that, the nature of Hell, would clearly be to abandon or ignore the possibility of that interaction of relatedness, with all its consequences in immoral and evil behavior. It would be to turn away from it, and to lose within ourselves the means of our relation with God and creatively with each other. This, in our time, we can understand very well, because we know, with sadness, what is involved when we lose the means of relationship. We have an analogy to that failure and atrophy within ourselves in the tragic children who, for whatever disordered reasons in their parents, have been brought up in total isolation from any human contact. One such was Genie, who was rescued in 1970 from a small room in which she had been imprisoned since she was 20 months old—by then she was 13. Of course, in isolation she had not learned to talk. In most people, speech is lateralized in the brain, and in almost all the left hemisphere is speech dominant. As Genie was surrounded by supportive and loving people, and was gradually taught to speak, she used the right hemisphere. As Eccles comments, it is as though the speech centers of Genie's left hemisphere suffered from a functional atrophy when not used for all those years when they should have been attaining to full development.

In a similar way it is imaginable that we might live in such ruthless, self-affirming indifference to the feelings and worth and sufferings of others that we might create our own imprisonment, our own isolation from the least constraint of relation and love, and might therefore lose our capacity to engage with God and to be moved from the engagement into a true marriage of souls. We are built from the genes to move into relation with God and with each other as the discovery of value and the occasion of meaning. Love of God and love of another is the deepest immersion in that miraculous wonder of human being—and that is heaven, for love is stronger than death, tied as it now is to the furthest limit of love in the crucifixion. But to refuse that movement, or to make ourselves, by lack of use, incapable of it, is to realize what the approximate language of hell was attempting to describe by way of realistic warning: Hell is the confirmation of that condition forever. We learn the truth of these two extremes on earth and extend the consequence of them in eternity. As Ram Dass tells the story, there was once a big, tough, samurai who went to see a little monk. "Monk," he said in a voice accustomed to instant obedience, "teach me about heaven and hell!" The monk looked up at this mighty warrior and replied with utter disdain, "Teach you about heaven and hell? I couldn't teach you about anything. You're dirty. You smell. Your blade is rusty. You're a disgrace, an embarrassment to the samurai class. Get out of my sight. I can't stand you." The samu-

rai was furious. He shook, got all red in the face, was speechless with rage. He pulled out his sword and raised it above him, preparing to slay the monk. "That is hell," said the monk softly. The samurai was overwhelmed. The compassion and surrender of this little man who had offered his life to give this teaching to show him hell! He slowly put down his sword, filled with gratitude, and suddenly peaceful. "And that," said the little monk softly, "is heaven."⁴⁸

Does that mean that if we have already moved in the direction of atrophy and incapacity, we are past all redemption? On our own account, we may well think so. There do seem to be those who treat others with such violence and contempt, as much emotional as physical, as much institutionally as individually, that they seem to have broken all connection with the constraints of mercy and love. It really is hard to interpret a Manson or a Stalin or a Hitler as a privatio boni, as lacking good, rather than as expressing evil with both feet on the accelerator and nothing on the brake.

Yet even there the final judgment does not belong to us. The possibility of atrophy, of losing the means of one's relation to others and to God, is surely there. But what we need to remember is that even Genie, from her isolation, was eventually surrounded by such affection, care, and redemption that she learned to speak with those other parts of her brain. We too are surrounded, not only by the self-relating being of God, who must necessarily set us at a free distance from himself, if we are to grow; we are surrounded also by the communion of saints, by the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, by the bodhisattvas, to whom Buddhists pray when one among them is on the verge of death, that they may be a refuge to him who has no refuge, that they may protect him, defend him, keep him from the great darkness, turn him aside from the storm and hurricane of Karma, protect him from the great fear of the "Lord of Death."

Those, too, are pictures drawn in the human imagination. But they are evoked by the truth which any one of us can know, and probably does know, that those who are bruised and damaged by the accidents of life, who seem to themselves to be so unlovable that they are in what can only be described as a "living hell," nevertheless are loved, can be loved, can learn, themselves, to speak the languages of love. That is the harrowing of hell—that is the defeat of the worst evil, even though the young hero who undertakes the battle suffers and dies as a result: for to reach others in love always requires some sacrifice of ourselves: "Then the young Hero—he was God almighty—firm and unflinching stripped Himself; He mounted on the high cross, brave in the sight of many, when He was minded to redeem mankind.... Hope was born anew with blessedness and joy for those who before endured the burning."

That, too, from The Dream of the Rood, is a part—and a very old part grafted into Christianity—of the human imagination of hell and of its harrowing—the emptying of its significance and power. The images of fire and burning are not ones which we could any longer take as a literal description—indeed to retain a literal imagination of fire and torment would be to attribute to God a character and a behavior far worse than anything that even the worst parents would ever exhibit to their children.

But some imagination of evil and of its consequence is as necessary now as ever; and the whole poetry of The Dream of the Rood remains as eloquent now

as it has ever been. To trace the rise and fall of hell-fire is not the same exercise as tracing the rise and fall of the devil. Evil and the possibility of human lives becoming instrumental agents of evil have not declined. By some imagination we need to take seriously the ease with which we slide into living as though it is a matter of no consequence what damage we do or what tragedy we create in the lives of others and in this abused and long-suffering planet. For if that imagination fails—if our religions, our artists, our musicians, our writers fail to touch this nerve and prevent its atrophy—the politics of evil and oppression will draw its knife across the throat of its victims even more frequently that it is already doing.

It is in that context, of evil and sin being recognized for what they are, and of redemption and hope becoming the practice of our lives, that the relation of death to ethics becomes clear. It is not a matter of calculation and self-interest, but one of grace and self-abandonment. It is to receive all things as gift, and of longing, therefore, to share the gift with others. The transformation is profound. It can be seen in miniature in the way in which the missionary conference which succeeded the Edinburgh Conference of 1910, and which met at Jerusalem in 1928, corrected its predecessor:

"Our fathers," they said, "could not bear to think of people dying without Christ. We cannot bear to think of them having to live without Christ."

In that respect, the Boardman bequest is too restricted: it requires the lecturer "to teach Christian ethics, that is to say, the practical application of the precepts and behavior of Jesus Christ to everyday life." But what is offered to life every day is not only the imitation of Christ ("building up human character after the model of Christ"), but much more; what is offered is the living Christ himself, that life which is love communicated into yours and mine through word and sacrament, prompted, encouraged, and enabled (as was his own in his humanity) by the stupendous power of the Holy Spirit.

So we come round again to the word "constraint," because actions which can legitimately be called Christian are those whose outcomes are controlled into being what they are by constraints which include the gift of the Holy Spirit. There will be other constraints which may be identical with those which non-Christians share—facts imply obligations, and moral facts can be directly seen. For that reason also, lives that claim to be Christian may exhibit less in the way of goodness and beauty than lives that do not, because "the devil goeth about seeking whom he may devour," and the claim to Christ does not exempt anyone from being, like the best bananas, well to the front of the stall, in order to catch his eye.

But none of that affects the basic fact that in the network of constraints which controls Christian thought and action into being what it is, the Holy Spirit is a part, converting the story of our lives so that they become a narrative of compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, and, above all else, of love and peace (Col. 3:12f). But is constraint the right word? To us it is a word of restriction.

I should ill requite thee to constrain
Thy unbound spirit into bonds again,

was William Cowper's opinion, "On receipt of his mother's picture"; for which reason, perhaps, he concluded,

All constraint
Except what wisdom lays on evil men,
Is evil.

And who among us ever thinks of the Spirit in terms other than those of freedom?

Yet in truth, as I have already pointed out, constraint is the necessary condition of freedom. To be a human reading these words is to be controlled by a network of limits or constraints immensely more elaborate than those which produce a rockweed kelp or an amoeba. The elaboration of constraints, far from increasing restriction (though it may do so initially), has actually increased the degrees of freedom which are available to us to do the sorts of things that a rockweed kelp cannot. When constraints are understood, as they may be in the human case, then advantage can be taken of them even more dramatically than Ashby's cybernetic principle states, that where a constraint exists, advantage can usually be taken of it. We will never swim as far as a salmon or fly as fluently as a swallow, but by building ships and planes we can find our own way in alien worlds.

If, then, we recognize and internalize relevant and appropriate constraints, we may initially limit our degrees of freedom. That is the beginning of moral education, in family, community, and school. But relevant and appropriate to what? To moral goodness, as that has been given content through generations of human life; that is the winnowing process, through context and confirmation, which attains great reliabilities, some of which are certain; but which is open to equally great diversity and change.

So the beginning of moral education undoubtedly restricts our initial freedom. If that becomes the end, instead of the means to a different kind of freedom, then of course it produces the conformity the cardinal desires and which keeps people in a childish state of dependence on the rules of others forever. The art of growing up is to acquire oneself as responsible, by the internalization of constraint as a means to that end. It is not a simple process, because it cannot be abstracted from the context in which it occurs; and the period of transition, during which we acquire our independence, may be traumatic indeed. As the saying has it, "There's nothing wrong with teenagers that a good argument won't make worse." Nevertheless, the willingness to internalize constraint and allow it to be operative is the fundamental move in moral life; and "willingness" is the operative word: it belongs to acts of will, however constrained the will itself also is.

None of this is the least problematic when the necessary constraints are seen to be appropriate and relevant to some more discrete goal, like understanding physics or playing the flute. The internalization of constraint is initially a restriction on freedom, as one goes through the discipline of learning. But the end consequence is to be released into a greater degree of freedom—to be able, indeed, to play one's own music.

It is this which forms the constant theme of Stravinsky's Harvard lectures, The Poetics of Music:

At the very beginning of my course, I gave notice that I would continually come back to the necessity for order and discipline....So here we are, whether we like it or not, in the realm of necessity. And yet which of us has ever heard talk of art as other than a realm of freedom?⁴⁹

But he argues, "My freedom will be so much the greater and more meaningful the more narrowly I limit my field of action and the more I surround myself with obstacles. Whatever diminishes constraint diminishes strength. The more constraint one imposes, the more one frees one's self of the chains that shackle the spirit."⁵⁰

It is by comparable internalization of relevant constraint that Christian ethics looks always to the horizon of hope, producing, now, a character which is being transformed in the direction of holiness. It is as I Peter describes it (1:13f): "You must be mentally stripped for action, perfectly self-controlled. Fix your hopes on the gift of grace which is to be yours when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children do not let your characters be shaped any longer by the desires you cherished in your days of ignorance. The one who called you is holy; like him, be holy in all your behavior, because Scripture says, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

The verb used in I Peter for "the shaping of character" is suschematizomai, which means "to be shaped into the pattern of something." It is to allow the schema, the whole style and constellation of one's inner quality to bear one character rather than another. It is a word which was also used by Paul, when he wrote to the Christians at Rome: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, through the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed in the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:1).

And how is that to be achieved? By the internalization of the constraint of being holy in all your behavior—"...because Scripture says, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" Of course, when that was said (in the book of Leviticus), it was easier to know what to do about it, because for a Jew the whole of Torah, including the laws and the commandments, specify the necessary constraints; and while the Law may seem restrictive, in fact it sets an observant Jew free into a quite different schema, or pattern of life. But the consequence of Christ was to re-set the parameters of constraint.⁵¹ The constraint of love is offered as a gift by the one who gave himself in the schema, the pattern of the undeserving sacrifice, the lamb without mark or blemish (as I Peter goes on immediately to say), where the facts of evil, from which none of us is exempt, are countered in such a way that faith and hope are no longer facile or absurd.

It is that self-donation which becomes the schema of Christian ethical life. To internalize that constraint, of being always for others, will limit initially the degrees of freedom—no longer living, as I Peter put it, according to the desires you cherished in the days of your ignorance; and for many that price to be paid will seem too high. But the greater degrees of freedom, into which the internalization of the cross will set you free, are staggering and limitless: for you will join the company of those who are already dead.

When Paul wrote those words, "You are already dead," to the Christians at Colossae (Col. 3:3), he did not mean that they had joined some zombie cult of

the living dead—though the early Christians were regarded as pretty strange: they were accused, for example, of being cannibals, because rumor had it that they met to eat the body and blood of a man. What Paul affirmed was that through the enacted and transformative moment of baptism, the death and resurrection of Jesus are extended to operate in relation to ourselves—just as, in the enacted and performative sign of the bread and the wine, the effectiveness of God which had been known in the humanity of Christ continues to be known for what it is, effectively and objectively present. But that means that Christians are already on the other side of whatever significance death might have if it was the last and final word on our values. But through these two enacted signs, our lives are already hidden with Christ in God: “You are already dead, for your life lies hidden with Christ in God.”

The ethical consequences are then immediate and dramatic, and they can issue in specific commands and prohibitions: “Then put to death,” Paul goes on in Colossians, “those parts of you which belong to the earth—fornication, indecency, lust, foul cravings, and the ruthless greed which is nothing less than idolatry.” We are a long way here from a generalized ethic of good will—look for the most loving thing to do and do it. Christians should expect to be able to recognize and list those general and “in principle” things which count as right and wrong, good and evil. But they cannot substitute principles for the Holy Spirit. When Mr. Highton set out on his campaign to enforce biblical morality in the church, he stated, in an article in The Independent, that his primary reason for doing so was that the church “all too often plays fast and loose with the Bible”: “For example, in Romans 1:27 we are told: ‘Men abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.’ And the tradition of the universal Church for 2,000 years has agreed with this.”⁵²

But the error in that disastrous misunderstanding of biblical morality (as we have already seen) does not lie in trying to articulate what counts as good or holy, but in supposing that biblical morality can be read directly off the texts of Scripture without reference to contingency, and in supposing that if something has not changed for 1,000/1,500/2,000 years, it is immutable. As we have already seen at length, that refusal of the hermeneutical demand makes the Incarnation superfluous and the Holy Spirit redundant. In particular, it makes it impossible to recognize when the Holy Spirit is trying to open our eyes to the changes which are becoming required of us, if we are to be faithful to his gift to us of himself.

Of course it is not the case that all proposed change is automatically virtuous (and much that I have argued here is deeply conservative, because there are, in my view, realistic limits set upon appropriate utterance); still less is it the case that human societies make steady moral progress through time—far from it. But it is equally the case that those who oppose even the possibility of change on the ground that they are more popular for doing so are in a very far country from biblical morality. For Mr. Highton began his article by saying: “For years the General Synod of the Church of England has managed to sit on the fence over sexual morality in general and homosexuality in particular. However, I find I have greatly increased my personal popularity by putting up a private mem-

ber's motion on the subject which requires a decision." So far as the New Testament is concerned, the two people who are mainly remembered for doing things to increase their personal popularity are Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate.

Christians, therefore, no less than others, must expect to be involved in contest and diversity. What should mark them out is the style in which they are thus involved. They have to accept that there are many different styles of Christian life (which can point to their own legitimacy in relation to the source from which all Christian utterance is derived); and that living in one style is not necessarily a betrayal of those who live in another. The criterion of judgment (as it is the criterion of judging the authenticity of claims to the Spirit), in all parts of the New Testament, is whether one recognized the demand of self-donation and responded, not whether one abstracted rules from the Bible and kept them—important though rules are, as a guide that gets one to the place where one ought to be.

That is the connection between reflection and action which Dr. Boardman sought. It is the dynamic relation between the academic and the practical which I described when I ended the UN paper on religions and apartheid, and drew attention to the importance of prayer, in this way:

To conclude, therefore, let me refer to a handwritten note which Max Scheler added to the manuscript of one of his greatest works, Der Formalismus in der Ethik... Scheler, an outstanding moral philosopher, tried to establish persistent values at the foundation of ethical judgment, on the basis of a phenomenology of human relationships—and what could sound more remote and academic than that? Yet in the margin of his manuscript he wrote: "Schließlich ist Ethik eine verdammt blutige Sache...": "At the end of the day, ethics is a damned bloody affair"; and if it cannot give me directions on how I ought to be and to live now, in this social and historical context—well, what is it then? And Scheler then added another note in the margin: "The path from eternity, or from the amor intellectualis sub specie quadam aeternitatis, in which a glimmer of eternity becomes visible, to 'Today' and 'here' is immeasurably long. But it is precisely the task of philosophy to bridge, however indirectly, this gap."

But in the end, it is not philosophy that can bridge this gap: it is life. Or rather, it is the particular lives of those who, in the acquisition of themselves as responsible and accountable, embrace the particularities of other lives, sub specie quadam aeternitatis (under a particular light of eternity, and not out of some temporal or mundane consideration which tries to work out what I can gain from it myself).

There is no route to human rights via rhetoric: it is a bloody business—literally so, in prisons cells in South Africa and on the streets of Soweto. Good will is not enough: good grief will take us further. As Richard Bentley put it, centuries ago, "It was an excellent saying of Solon's who when he was asked what would rid the world of injuries replied, 'If the bystanders would have the same resentment with those that suffer wrong.'"

In that spirit, Jesse Jackson returned from South Africa with these words:

I hear the words of a song in Crossroads, South Africa, ringing out in my soul today. Those children in the pits of exploitation—no bathrooms, no running water, no right to vote, no political protection, no judicial regard—were there with nothing but their religion. They said that just because we are in the slums, the slums are not in us. We will rise above our circumstances.

They will rise even further if we will bear them up in hands that do not add to their injuries. Prayer is entrusted to us a means of love—an effective means of love. We will pray without ceasing. And we will act. God knows, as indeed he does know, white people have had their centuries of killing and beating and brutalizing black people. We cannot undo the past. But we can help to make the future. And if we are ever unsure what to do when we feel that resentment with those who suffer wrong, then we can always remember the single and simple advice of Helder Camara: "If you choose the poor, you always choose rightly."

We need to summon up the resources of all religions to make that choice. We must insist, as much to our leaders as to our local communities—and indeed, to ourselves—that we make that choice. We have to create that resentment of injury and that choice of the poor. The specific Christian and religious contribution to human rights is to define more adequately what it means to be human—the acquisition of our own responsibility and the acceptance that we are accountable; and the endeavor to ensure that possibility for all others. When Jefferson contemplated slavery, he once said: "I tremble sometimes for my country, when I reflect that God is just."

We have even more reason to tremble if we think that God is nothing.

¹For this and other quotations from Dr. Boardman's instructions for the lectureship, see the front matter of this publication: "The Boardman Lectureship in Christian Ethics: The Original Outline Written by Dr. George Dana Boardman and Mrs. Ella Covell Boardman in 1899."

²Law, Morality and Religion in a Secular Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

³J. L. Mackie, p. 106.

⁴In ed. D. D. Honoré, Trevor Huddleston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 154.

⁵See, e.g., Daily Telegraph, April 27, 1990, p. 1: 'Britain not now truly Christian', says Cardinal.

⁶See Helga Kuhse, The Sanctity-of-life Doctrine in Medicine: A Critique (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁷M. Walsh, Church Times, February 13, 1987, p. 8.

⁸"Moral Objectivity," in ed. S. C. Brown, Objectivity and Cultural Divergence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 135.

⁹ibid.

¹⁰"The Tyranny of Subjectivism," p. 3.

¹¹ibid.

¹²The Independent, 21st July 1990, p. 15.

¹³"Der Auftrag des Bischofs und des Theologen angesichts der Probleme der Moral in unserer Zeit," Internationale katholische Zeitschrift XIII, 1984, pp. 524-38.

¹⁴Moralische Grundbegriffe, Munich, 1984, p. 76.

¹⁵"Grace and Freedom," in ed. P. J. Kenedy, Freedom and Man (1965), p. 51.

¹⁶p. 170f.

¹⁷Tissues for Men (London: Sphere, 1981), p. 1.

¹⁸See my The Targums and Rabbinic Literature: An Introduction to Jewish Interpretation of Scripture (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1969, 1979), p. 236, for the Noachide laws; see my The Religious Imagination and the Sense of God, #1, for the Jewish vocation to holiness (Oxford: At the University Press, 1978).

¹⁹Jewish Bioethics, ed. F. Rosner and J. D. Bleich (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1985), p. xix.

²⁰See, for example, the discussion of "love" in my Licensed Insanities: Religions and Belief in God in the Contemporary World (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987), p. 95.

²¹pp. vii, xix.

²²For other examples, see my Targums and Rabbinic Literature, p. 51.

²³For details of this, see my The Religious Imagination, #2.

²⁴The Independent, February 12, 1988, p. 8.

²⁵The Battle for the Bible, p. 30.

²⁶Y. al Qaradawi, The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam (Indianapolis, Ind.: American Trust Publications, n.d.), pp. 14f.

²⁷Quoted from K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, pp. 100f.

²⁸Fundamentalism and the Word of God, p. 80.

²⁹pp. 3f.

³⁰Resurrection and Moral Order, p. 200.

³¹F. O'Connor, Wise Blood (London: Faber, 198?), pp. 146f.

³²J. Kelly, "Prayer and Incarnation," The Way, Suppl. 34, 1978, p. 9.

³³(London: Penguin), p. 15.

³⁴Kelly, p. 9.

³⁵O'Connor, p. 153.

³⁶Vol. 5, cols. 118-119.

³⁷Westley, pp. 190f.

³⁸In The Unquiet Mind, private reprint, 1984, pp. 256ff.

³⁹Battle for the Mind (London: Pan, 1959), p. 79.

⁴⁰p. 194.

⁴¹iv.56/9.

⁴²John Bunyan, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners.

⁴³Autobiography, Vol. 1 (London, 1987), p. 79.

⁴⁴Fighting Angel: Portrait of a Soul (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1936).

⁴⁵"The Comedy of Hate," The Correspondent Magazine, Oct. 28, 1990, p. 21.

⁴⁶ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁷ibid.

⁴⁸How Can I Help? (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1985).

⁴⁹(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 61f, 64.

⁵⁰ibid., p. 65.

⁵¹See The Religious Imagination, pp. 159f.

⁵²Nov. 11, 1987, p. 18.