PART V

What Do We Want the Other to Teach About Our Ethical Traditions?
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The Conference

The Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding (CCJU) of Sacred Heart University sponsored a symposium March 31–April 2, 2003, at Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut. The conference, “What Do We Want the Other to Teach About Our Ethical Traditions?” is part of CCJU’s ongoing work to promote dialogue and understanding. This was the final of five conferences with Jews, Christians and Muslims focusing on the topic, “What Do We Want the Other to Teach About Us?” Forty scholars and religious leaders agreed to participate in this symposium. Papers were presented, after which there were prepared responses and general discussion by all of the participants. Presenters included Rabbi Eugene Korn, Rabbi Barry R. Friedman, Dr. John Elias, Dr. Brian Stiltner, Dr. Asad Husain, Dr. Mohammad A. Siddiqi, and Imam Dr. Kareem Adeeb. In addition to the participants, several faculty, staff, and students from Sacred Heart University attended one or several of the sessions.

In addition to the sessions led by the scholars and religious leaders, there were two events that were also open to the public. First, Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard, Director of Organizational Development at the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership (CLAL), New York, spoke about the necessity and importance of interreligious dialogue. His lecture was followed by a reception in the lobby of the Pitt Center where a
cultural exhibit, "World Religions, Universal Peace, Global Ethic," was being featured. The exhibition invited the viewer to explore the spectrum of world religions to have a better understanding of the importance of their ethical messages for present-day society. With the help of short text panels, quotations, photographs and other illustrations, the exhibition introduced principles for a global ethic through which world religions could better understand each other and bring them closer together.

On Tuesday, April 1, the Fairfield County Jewish Chorale of Fairfield, Connecticut, offered a moving performance of religious music that was followed by a rousing concert by the Newark Boys Chorus. The Newark Boys Chorus School, founded in 1969, is a private school located in Newark, New Jersey. Known as Newark's "Musical Ambassadors," the Chorus has been heard throughout the world and its interreligious message rang clear and true that evening.

LIST OF INVITED PARTICIPANTS

Imam Dr. Kareem Adeeb, American Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies, Stamford, Connecticut
Dr. Judith Banki, Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, New York
Dr. Adena Berkowitz, New York
Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard, National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership (CLAL), New York
Dr. John Clabueaux, St. John's Seminary College, Massachusetts
Dr. David L. Coppola, Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding of Sacred Heart University, Connecticut
Rabbi Joseph H. Ehrenkranz, Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding of Sacred Heart University, Connecticut
Dr. John L. Elias, Fordham University, New York
Rabbi Barry R. Friedman, Temple B'nai Abraham, New Jersey
Dr. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, Divinity School, University of Chicago, Illinois
Mrs. Deborah Goldberg, Interfaith Council of Southwestern Connecticut, Stamford, Connecticut

Rabbi Emanuel S. Goldsmith, Congregation M'Vakshe Derekh, New York

Dr. Frances Grodzinsky, Sacred Heart University, Connecticut

Dr. Hugh Talat Halman, University of Arkansas, Arkansas

Imam Abdul-Majid Karim Hasan, Muhammad Islamic Center, Connecticut

Dr. Sohail Hashmi, Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts

Dr. Frank Henderson, professor emeritus of Newman and St. Stephen's, Edmonton, Canada

Rabbi Mitchell M. Hurvitz, Temple Sholom, Connecticut

Sr. Phyllis Kapuscinski, NDS, Institute of Judeo-Christian Studies, Seton Hall University, New Jersey

Dr. Colleen Keyes, Tunxis Community College, Connecticut

Rabbi Eugene Korn, Anti-Defamation League, New York

Dr. Ahmad Moen, Howard University, Washington, DC

Imam Sulayman S. Nyang, Howard University, Washington, DC

Rev. George Papademetriou, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Massachusetts

Imam Izak-El Mu‘eed Pasha, Masjid Malcolm Shabazz, New York

Rev. Thomas P. Ryan, CSP, Paulist Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, New York

Rabbi David Fox Sandmel, KAM Isaiah Israel Congrégation, Illinois

John Schramm, St. Francis of Assisi’Men’s Roundtable, Connecticut

Dr. Claudia Setzer, Manhattan College, New York

Dr. Mohammad A. Siddiqi, Western Illinois University, Illinois

Dr. Brian Stiltner, Sacred Heart University, Connecticut

Dr. Michael Ventimiglia, Sacred Heart University, Connecticut

Dr. Fayette Veverka, Villanova University, Pennsylvania
Introduction to Part V

What Do We Want the Other to Teach About Our Ethical Traditions?

Most people seem to be able to agree broadly about what the good society would be, what the good life in that society would be, and what it would mean to be a good person. Certainly, there are intra- and interreligious disagreements on some levels, but strong consensus is found among religious and nonreligious people that humans share “common sense” conceptions of morality based on some form of the golden rule. For Jews, Christians, and Muslims, shared ethical themes include the invitation to love God and neighbor, to act with justice toward others, to follow God’s commandments, and to be responsible stewards of creation, among others. For those who have embraced the Noahide Laws and Mosaic covenant, the cry of the other cannot go unheeded, which makes the pursuit of justice in this world crucial. The ethical revolution by the Abrahamic faiths in defense of the weak, poor, widow, orphan, and stranger has changed the face of human history and the way history is contextualized, told, and judged.

Although Jewish, Christian, and Muslim ethics developed out of common foundational experiences of revelation from God who invited humans into covenantal living (ethical monotheism), each has its unique history of development of ethical traditions, as well as distinct methodologies and prioritizing of authoritative sources employed in ethical decision-making and action. Even the universal religious command to love one’s neighbor or brother; for example, would have different nuances,
understandings, and narrative expressions in each religious tradition that cannot be immediately and simplistically equated.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims communicate ethical traditions because God has chosen to be in relationship with them and such a relationship by its very nature requires an appropriate response. Over time, as this covenental relationship developed, the responses of communities have taken on a classic and normative status that allows future generations to deepen and expand its relationship and identity. It would seem, for example, that ethical reflection, dialogue, and the common pursuit of social justice are all shared elements of a fundamental and necessary process that illustrates who each person is in relationship to his or her community of faith as well as the community itself. How one acts, communicates, thinks, and feels is the substance of personal identity. For the individual believer to respond to God’s invitation and say, “Here I am,” is to stand in line with Abraham, Moses, and the many prophets who helped to shape a common ethic from which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam drew inspiration and guidance. In a sense, this response is an act of conscience and is a process of consciousness of one’s identity and unlimited value in the eyes of God. Similarly, ethics and morality are inextricably interwoven in a community’s conceptualization of its identity and the recognition of the sanctity of human life as the starting point of ethics.

Religious identity that is based on notions of the good society and the moral person in relationship with God is often expressed in terms of law. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam acknowledge the need for law in common, but also see the need to remain faithful and consistent to their own revelations and convictions. At the core of law and the religious values contained in law is that community is a place where virtuous lives can be lived; and there are those who are chosen to speak for the community as leaders and authoritative voices of interpretation. Laws help to put into service a normative ethic that supplies the values or standards by which persons are to live their lives while balancing freedom, responsibility, right judgment, choice, growth, justice, and mercy.

At the ultimate conclusions of each religion, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam assert truth claims that are mutually exclusive. And yet, if each community refrains from triumphal expressions about its witness of the truth, then other cooperative efforts can be pursued together, especially on the level of ethics and social justice, working together for peace and
justice. Jews, Christians, and Muslims can learn to respect each other in principle based on their common recognition of one supreme God who calls them to ethical living in covenantal community.

In our time, there are many moral issues that affect millions of people, such as hunger, disease, homelessness, injustice, lawlessness, discrimination, and oppression. However, probably the most important ethical issue, inasmuch as its negative effects are exponential, is the issue of war and its use to initiate or resolve conflicts. The complexities of historical and cultural circumstances, the struggles against military oppression, and the ambiguities of wars for national liberation or proposed manifest destiny have significantly increased the urgency of interreligious dialogue for the sake of peace. Although each tradition promotes peace as a primary ideal ethic, and the scope of influence for each tradition has been unequal, each has been involved in violence and wars and has sought to find a rationale for an ethical or just war, usually in the context of self-defense or of defending the weak. Many pacifists contend that, in a nuclear age, it is impossible to meet the conditions for a just war. For an in-depth treatment of strategies to achieve peace through interreligious dialogue see Religion and Violence, Religion and Peace (2000), and Religion, Violence, and Peace: Continuing Conversations and Study Guide (2004), both published by Sacred Heart University Press.

Finally, Jews, Christians, and Muslims are immersed in secular cultures that idolize the secular. Such cultures have the effect of nullifying values or preferences of truth claims in the public forum. In response to secularism, members of each faith tradition need to develop together appropriate theological, philosophical, humanistic, and political ethics that advance the common good in ways that do not exclude the other traditions and maintain the distinctiveness of its own.
Until modern times no one had attempted a systematic account of Jewish ethics. Rabbinic authorities were generally not philosophers who quested after systematic constructs. On a deeper level, the absence of systematic Jewish ethics is probably attributable to the fact that Jewish tradition never considered ethics an autonomous subject matter or mode of inquiry. In fact, there is no indigenous Hebrew word for ‘ethics.’ Jewish ethics is embedded in Jewish law and theology, and only a modern would see Jewish ethics as isolated. In describing Jewish ethics therefore, I will attempt to formulate what philosophers call a “rational reconstruction,” i.e., a logical tapestry weaved from many different strands of Jewish literature, law, liturgy, and theology. Systematizing Jewish ethics is made more difficult by the fact that Jewish ethics is strongly pluralistic and consequently cannot be formulated as a universal apodictic system similar to Euclid’s geometry or even Aristotle’s ethics.

Although a modern product, a systematic presentation of Jewish ethics contains great value to Jews and gentiles alike. For Jews, it can shed light on the relation between formal halakhah and ethics. For Christians, it can assist in correcting their traditional polemical notions of Judaism and Jewish values. For Muslims, it may help counter anti-Jewish political rhetoric that has arisen around the tragic Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And for thinkers of all backgrounds, it can assist in resolving the age-old problem of defining Jewish tradition and culture.
The Essential Components of Jewish Ethics

Jewish ethics can be seen as having three fundamental components or dimensions.¹ The first is scriptural imperatives and formal law. These are usually detailed prohibitions or prescriptions of specific behavior in particular circumstances. Sometimes the Bible is a bit too general, so the talmudic rabbis had to flesh out the specific situations and behavior to which these imperatives apply. Honoring one’s father and mother (Exodus 20:12) or not infringing on a neighbor’s property or business (Deuteronomy 27:17) are cases in point. Just how does one display honor? How much competition is fair when it reduces another’s profits? The Talmud proceeded to define in careful detail how one could fulfill these imperatives.

The second level is that of overarching values. Examples of these generic values are the Divine image implanted in all human beings (Genesis 1:26), peace (Isaiah 57:19), holiness (Leviticus 19:1), justice (Deuteronomy 16:20), love of neighbor (Leviticus 19:18), and a general concept of moral rightness and goodness (Deuteronomy 6:18). These values run throughout with specific behavioral imperatives and are the intermediate purposes of their implementation.

The last level, which may be termed the *summum bonum* of Jewish ethics, is the ultimate vision that animates the entire system. This is the beautiful messianic dream of a society suffused with peace, justice, and knowledge of God, and is the dream that Jews are obligated to help realize within human history by virtue of their covenant with God. It may be helpful, therefore, to describe Jewish ethics by using a metaphor traditional to both Judaism and Christianity. Jewish ethics is similar to a tree. Its branches are specific positivist laws, its trunk is formed by overarching values, and its roots are the ultimate messianic dream which nurtures the entire living body.

**Positivistic Imperatives**

Legal imperatives constitute the starting point and first level. Commandment ("mitzvah") is the central category of Jewish life and culture, giving Jewish ethics a strong deontological character. These
positivistic imperatives flow from the sacred biblical covenant contracted between God and the Jewish people, and hence there is little influence—if any at all—of natural law considerations in formal mitzvot. For example, in contrast to Catholic teaching on sexuality and reproduction, Jewish sexual ethics are driven by the value of fulfilling the mitzvah imperative, not how God structured nature. Since Jews have a legal duty to procreate, if a woman has blocked fallopian tubes, it is a religious duty to seek artificial reproductive methods (e.g. IVF). If nature poses a problem, it is a religious imperative to "get around" the natural blockage. If pregnancy would endanger the life of a woman, then birth control is warranted since preserving life is a penultimate value and Judaism seeks to avoid sexual abstinence, seeing it as injurious to mental and spiritual health. The fact that such methods deviate from the way that prescientific humans reproduced or engaged in sexual activity is irrelevant for Jewish ethics. I believe these examples are representative within the entire system of mitzvot.

Jewish ethics is consequently behavior- and act-oriented. "Give to the poor," "Do not murder," "Do not stand idly by while your neighbor is in danger," "Do not work others on the Sabbath," are hallmark forms of Jewish ethics. The system does not strive for contemplation (ala Plato or Aristotle), metaphysical unity (ala mystics) or intention/authenticity (ala existentialists), but for empirical behavior that has salutary effects on society and its individuals.

It is important to stress that while traditional Jews take scriptural imperatives most seriously, traditional Jewish ethics is not fundamentalist or literalist. Even Orthodox Jews insist that while Scripture is divine, its interpretation is given over to human judgment and reason. (The Talmud even goes so far as to claim that the talmudic rabbis dramatically told God to "stay out" of a debate on a point of Jewish law, since after the revelation at Sinai, the Torah no longer resides in Heaven.) Jewish exegesis always employs rationality and considerations of the above guiding values to determine the normative meaning of scriptural imperatives. This means that traditional Judaism is not committed to a literal interpretation of biblical texts. In fact, sometimes a literalist interpretation constitutes heresy. The famous lex talionis, "An eye for an eye..." (Exodus 21:23), over which there has been so much Christian polemic, illustrates this principle. The Talmud reasoned that the value of one person's eye is not always equal to the value of another person's eye, and
that the pain suffered by one person in losing his eye is not necessarily equivalent to the pain suffered by another losing his eye. It would therefore, be a violation of justice if the court were to apply the verse literally. Instead, normative Jewish teaching demanded that monetary compensation equivalent to the value of the lost eye be paid by the aggressor to the victim.³ Note that it is considerations of justice that guided the normative application of the verse, not the literal meaning.

Capital punishment is another case in point. The Bible stipulates 36 capital crimes, yet the intrinsic sanctity of each human person established a bias against taking any life. Hence, the talmudic rabbis established elaborate judicial procedures that for all practical purposes ruled out the actual legal implementation of execution.⁴ One famous authority, Rabbi Akiva, even maintained that if he were the head of the Jewish court, he would rule out capital punishment in principle. One last example is the prohibition of charging interest. Biblically, this prohibition applies to all loans—whether business or personal. If applied literally, however, there would be little incentive to issue loans on property or for business purposes, causing all but the wealthy to be deprived of a livelihood. As a result, Jewish law found a way to permit charging interest indirectly on commercial loans, while retaining the prohibition on loans for personal reasons to the poor. In other words, biblical imperatives mean what authoritative rabbinic interpretation says they mean, not what the words literally connote. This is analogous to normative Catholic exegesis, which holds that Christian scriptures mean what the Magisterium says they mean. Both Catholicism and traditional Judaism are interpretive, not fundamentalist, traditions.

Overarching Values

There are a number of major guiding values that run through all Jewish ethical judgment. Most important is the doctrine that every human being is created in the image of God. This invests all human life with intrinsic sanctity and infinite value. A famous talmudic dictum (that later also found its way into the Qur’an) claims, “One who saves a single life is as if [i.e., is morally equivalent to] he saves the entire world; one who destroys a single life is as if he destroys the entire world.”⁵ Mathematically these equivalencies hold only if human life has no value or if it possesses
infinite value. Obviously Judaism opted for the latter solution, and this means that all life/death ethical dilemmas cannot be solved by finite utilitarian calculations. Human life has intrinsic noninfinite value that is independent of any social or intellectual utility. Hence Jewish ethics insists that all human life is worth living, and that one may never destroy one innocent life to save another. The pervasive moral utilitarianism now found in academic circles and the apotheosis of the pleasure principle in general society is, from a Jewish point of view, little more than old paganism in new garb.

The intrinsic value of human life derived from the Hebrew doctrine of Tzelem Elohim—which later became known in Latin as Imago Dei—is the governing consideration in nearly all Jewish prescriptions for interpersonal relations, and creates an absolute axiological dichotomy between physical objects and human beings. Well before Kant, Jewish ethics understood that the worst violation of ethics is to dehumanize a person and treat him as a finite object whose worth is measured by his usefulness to another. Jewish rabbis and philosophers have interpreted Tzelem Elohim differently, including metaphysical freedom/moral sensibility, glory, conceptual powers, and creativity, but all these interpretations converge on the principle that Imago Dei confers upon every human being sanctity and intrinsic dignity. In fact, arguably the foremost Orthodox theologian and legal authority in the 20th century, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, maintained that the halakhic category of kevod ha-beriyot (dignity owed to all human beings) was nothing other than the rabbinic formulation of the biblical doctrine of Tzelem Elohim. Thus, the sanctity of human life is the starting axiom of Jewish ethics.

There is another critical implication of the doctrine of Tzelem Elohim. Commenting on the Biblical prohibition against leaving the corpse of an executed criminal hanging overnight, the rabbinic Midrash states:

There were once twin brothers who were identical in appearance. One was appointed king, while the other became a brigand and was hanged. When people passed by and saw the brigand hanging, they exclaimed, “The King is hanging.”

This parable tells us that Tzelem Elohim constitutes an essential bridge between ethics and theology. To abuse a human being—even a
human body that has lost its soul—is ipso facto to defame or blaspheme God. This means that God is present in all human relationships. In effect, there are no bilateral human relations because how one treats another human being necessarily reflects on God. One cannot be ethically impure and religiously pious. Thus, in Jewish terms, ethics always has theological consequences and cannot be isolated from one's relationship with God.

Although Tzelem Elohim confers infinite value on human life, Jewish ethics are not pacifist. Life—not suicide—is a religious desideratum, and Jewish ethics teaches that if someone attempts to kill you, you have the moral right to defend yourself by killing him first if necessary. Both Jewish values and Jewish history have taught Jews that while the abuse of power is sinful, so is powerlessness. There is no glory in martyrdom, and allowing evil to reign unopposed by physical force only promotes slaughter and greater evil, thus plunging the world back into primordial darkness. Jews today make no excuse for possessing sovereignty and defending their legitimate security interests with physical force. Neither unbridled power nor complete powerlessness is a virtue. The Jewish ideal is to have power and use it within moral limits.

A second foundational value of Jewish ethics is justice, or “tzedeq.” This is articulated as a broad judicial and moral value by the Deuteronomic imperative, “Tzedeq, tzedeq tirdof”—You shall surely pursue justice. More fundamentally, at the very beginning of the Jewish people, God establishes “teaching justice and righteousness” as an objective for Jewish covenantal identity. Again there is a nexus here with Jewish theology. Pursuit of justice is not only a sine qua non of Jewish behavior, but as the continuation of that biblical passage indicates, Jews understand it as an essential attribute of God and His relationship with the world. When Abraham challenges God with the rhetorical question, “Shall not the Judge of all the world act justly,” he indicates that the Jewish conception of divinity requires that God Himself abide by the demands of morality. An unjust God is no God at all, and certainly not the God of the covenant. As such, there can be no contradiction between morality and mitzvah, the divine command.

Jews never interpreted the story of the binding of Isaac as did Kierkegaard, namely a conflict between the demands of faith and ethics. Kierkegaard’s entire dilemma is incomprehensible to people with a Jewish
conception of God and what he wants of them. No matter how lovesick Jews are in their romance with God, Judaism insists that faith never transgress the boundaries of the moral. Additionally, the majority of talmudic rabbis and medieval Jewish philosophers would have been equally perplexed by Tertullian’s famous phrase, “credo quia absurdum est,” which celebrates violating rationality to achieve religious goals. The classic Jewish understanding of the relation between faith and reason was best articulated by Sa’adiah Gaon in the 10th century: Reason is a God-given gift and God would be a sadist if he required humans to deny this gift in order to attain faith. Hence, Jewish ethical discussion typically contains a minimum of dogma and a maximum of practical reason.

A third fundamental guiding value of Jewish ethics is Imitatio Dei, imitating God. Here the Jewish concept differs essentially from the Greek philosophic idea of Imitatio Dei as contemplation, and the Christian understanding of imitatio as suffering or experiencing Jesus’ passion. Again, the Talmud supplies the key to the Jewish concept. The discussion begins, “Who can walk after God? Is he not a consuming fire?” How can a mortal human being emulate the Perfect and Wholly Other? Philosophically, it is only because a person shares something with God, namely Imago Dei, that he is able to engage in Imitatio Dei. What religious obligations do the rabbis derive from the power of divine emulation within human grasp? The ethical imperatives to clothe the naked, feed the poor, visit the sick, comfort those in pain, extend mercy and compassion to those in need, and perform acts of voluntary hesed (loving-kindness)—because Jewish tradition understood God to have so acted in the Bible. God as transcendent infinitude is beyond human understanding, but we can know God through his moral attributes and ethical behavior. God is immanent through his relations with others, and as such is the archetype for deepening existence by relating to “the other.” This is the source of Emanuel Levinas’ contemporary Jewish ethical philosophy of being. A corollary to this is that the Jewish concept of holiness is essentially social and moral, realized in community with others. The monastic life is holy for some, but to Jews, leaving the community bespeaks of sin that is devoid of any trace of kedushah (holiness).

A corollary of Imitatio Dei is the notion of going beyond the requirements of law, and acting with loving-kindness out of voluntary motive.
Just as God is not constrained by outside forces, *imitatio* demands that Jews develop virtuous characters that impel natural love and giving. If legal imperatives are the floor for Jewish ethics, acts of *hesed* are the ceiling. From the virtue of hesed flow compassion and a general sense of moral goodness that cannot be legislated.\(^{21}\)

**The Guiding Vision**

The global enterprise of Jewish ethical and religious life is messianic. That is, the vision of a messianic era is the endpoint of history that supplies direction and purpose to normative Jewish behavior. The messianic ideal is not a mere theoretical idea, but a practical goal to be worked toward. Unlike some Christian or mystical concepts, the Jewish messianic era occurs within empirical history. This means that taking the messianic vision seriously entails assuming moral responsibility for building a better future, indeed for repairing the world, which has become known by the popular Hebrew phrase, *tikun olam*. Jewish ethics therefore, is activist in nature and resists impulses to historical quietism or determinism. All acts—either ritual or interpersonal—are designed to produce the ultimate *telos*, that is, the vision of the Jewish Prophets:

> In the end of days the mountain of the Lord shall be established on top of all mountains and shall be exalted above the hills. And (many) peoples shall stream onto it. Many nations shall come, and say, “Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us His ways and walk in His paths. For the Torah shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war anymore. But every man shall sit under his vine and his fig tree; and none shall make him afraid. (Micah 4:2–4)

As the neo-Kantian, Herman Cohen, noticed in the early 20th century, postulating the messianic dream not only supplies vision and inspiration, it also provides practical motive for ethical commitment since it ensures ultimate efficacy of moral action.
The Processes, Methods and Future of Jewish Ethics

If the above schema of three dimensions of Jewish ethics is accurate, then Jewish ethics is a dialectic process balancing out law, values, and vision. Because of this balance, Jewish ethics tends to be casuistic—reasoning about a specific case in a detailed context—and therefore variable and pluralistic, leaving room for competing opinions. There are few absolutes ("categorical imperatives") in Jewish ethical discussion. In fact there are only three mitzvot that must be preserved, even at the cost of sacrificing one's life. These are the prohibitions against taking an innocent life, idolatry, and adultery/incest—and the Talmud makes clear that there are exceptions even to these seemingly ironclad imperatives.\(^{22}\) Priorities, operative imperatives, and decisions are most often dependent upon the particulars at hand.

It is crucially important to understand Jewish ethics as developmental. Again, because of the balance of scriptural law with reason and human understanding of values, different applications of the same mitzvah can evolve and normative behavior can change over time. This is best demonstrated by the biblical command to destroy the nation of Amalek. According to the Bible, Jews are obligated to blot out all traces of the Amalekite people.\(^{23}\) Taken literally, this means killing each and every Amalekite—not only adult male combatants, but also women and children. In other words, on a biblical level there is an imperative to commit genocide. Thus, Jewish authorities were faced with a morally dangerous, yet authoritative, text. This is the "dark side" that all revelatory religions need to honestly admit. Do religions follow the literal authority of the text and disregard the moral voice or do they acknowledge the darkness, face the problems, and somehow refashion new normative understandings consistent with moral consciousness?

There is no historical evidence that Jews in fact ever tried to fulfill this imperative literally, but even the potential and the theory are quite disturbing. Recognizing the morally problematic nature of the mitzvah, the talmudic rabbis ensured that the prescribed genocide never take place by announcing that the Assyrian king Sanheriv forced his conquered nations to intermarrry as a way of subjugating them and undermining the threat of their own nationalisms.\(^{24}\) Hence, concluded the rabbis, it is in principle impossible to know that any specific person is
descended from Amalek and the imperative to annihilate Amalekites is *per force* inoperative.

One thousand years later, Maimonides was bothered by the conceptual or theoretical problem of how a moral God could command genocide, so he reinterpreted the imperative to apply only to those persons who do not accept the fundamental moral principles of civilization; i.e., the prohibitions against murder, theft, anarchy, and adultery/incest. Maimonides achieved a conceptual revolution in the *mitzvah* by transforming the definition of Amalek from a genetic category to a behavioral one, consequently rendering the imperative consistent with our moral sensibilities and concept of justified self-defense. It is important to note that these developments were not done by unimportant Jewish voices in the wilderness, but by authorities who determined the normative understanding of Jewish law and the normative behavior of Jews. The history of Jewish ethics indicates that similar conceptual and behavioral developments took place regarding polygamy, and the biblical institutions of servitude and monarchy, among others. Here again we see a resistance to fundamentalism, and the thrust of progress dictated by the primacy of the ethical in Jewish tradition.

If, indeed, Jewish ethics is developmental, then there will be challenges for the future of that intellectual and spiritual discipline. Obviously, the rapid pace of technology, particularly in the biomedical sciences, changes our current existential reality and offers new possibilities for the future. These give rise to profound ethical questions around the subjects of cloning, extension of life, genetic engineering, disease prevention, and privacy. Jewish ethics will have to grapple with these new areas based on its traditional methodologies and guiding values, when scientific breakthroughs are thrown into the mix. Another area of required rethinking is feminism and women's rights. There is no gainsaying the fact that traditional Jewish ethics assumed a patriarchal dominance in domestic life, political and social roles, religious authority, scholarship, and many areas of ritual performance. Jewish ethics needs to find a way to honor tradition while taking into account a modern sensibility of justice and equality for women's rights and roles. This is a difficult—almost Solomonic—dilemma that will require pain, most probably both to tradition and to absolute egalitarian considerations.
Finally, the newfound status of Jews as full citizens in Western pluralistic societies, combined with the reality of a secure Jewish homeland, affords Jews the possibility to relate to gentiles as political and social equals. Today is perhaps the first opportunity to do this since the destruction of the Second Commonwealth in the first century and the subsequent Jewish exilic experience as a minority population in the Diaspora. Jews were often victimized but always vulnerable in this arrangement, and their condition of weakness tended to generate "an ethic of suspicion" toward the other. Today Jews can establish relations as equals with Christians (but not yet with Muslims in the Middle East), and assume that Christians are no longer their physical and spiritual enemies. In effect, modern tolerance and Jewish independence constitute an experiment in transforming Jewish culture: Can Israeli sovereignty liberate Jews from the image of being a victim? Can Jews generate an ethic of partnership and equality with the gentile world? Certainly the universal guiding values of Jewish religious teachings about the dignity and sanctity of all persons can be the foundation for this ethic, but psychological and intellectual transformations born of a new sense of security will also be required. Obviously, both Christianity and Islam will play essential roles in this experiment.

Conclusion: What We Should Teach About Jewish Ethics

What, then, should people teach regarding the essential characteristics of Jewish ethics? First and foremost, Jewish religion, ethics, and culture cannot be reduced to "Law," as past Christian polemics and current Christian Scriptures refer to them. Jewish ethics is a dialectic of law, values, and vision, all captured by the term that Jews themselves use, namely "Torah." Torah is best translated literally as "teaching," and not as "law" by way of the Greek, "nomos."

Second, Jewish ethics is interpretative and an ongoing process of bringing traditional values and imperatives into confrontation with evolving moral consciousness and sensibilities.

Third, redemption within history is the dream for which Jewish ethics—and hopefully Jews—work relentlessly. This will be achieved through concrete acts, some obligated and some out of voluntary motive,
in the physical and social world, not a spiritual flight from the messiness of human affairs. Human bodies and biology, a particular people, and a particular homeland are all essential agents in this movement toward redemption and they become sanctified in the process. There is tension between the empirical present and the spiritual dream, but no Platonic motif of “soma sema,” of questing release from empirical reality and the problematics of history. Jewish holiness is the penetration of the spiritual into the physical.

Lastly, the doctrine that all human beings are created b’Tzelem Elohim, in God’s image, necessitates that there is no cleavage between moral and religious duties, between Jewish ethics and theology. Kant strove to disentangle ethics from religion. He may have succeeded on philosophic or systematic grounds, but no faithful account of Jewish ethics can succeed in that enterprise. This is because the intrinsic value of human life as the beginning of Jewish ethics is fundamentally theological, and the messianic dream as the endpoint of Jewish ethics is a fusion of moral perfection and theological knowledge. Here is the way Maimonides formulates the prophetic vision:

At that time (the Messianic Era) there will be no starvation; there will be no hunger, no war; nor will there be any jealousy, nor any strife. Blessings will be abundant, comforts within the reach of all. The single preoccupation of the entire world will be to know the Lord....Israel will attain an understanding of the Creator to the utmost capacity of the human mind, as it is written: “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of God, as waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).18

Note here how peace and social perfection are concomitants of “the full knowledge of God.” Neither the prophets nor Maimonides were social workers. They were God-intoxicated personalities, passionate theocentric visionaries.19 In their religious understanding, the knowledge of God necessarily leads to empirical ethical progress, because the ideal moral state of affairs is a world where every person fully recognizes the image of God of others, thereby making God felt with clarity and immediacy.

I mentioned earlier that there is no Hebrew word for “ethics.” In fact, there is no indigenous Hebrew word for “religion” either. The term most often used is “dat,” whose more accurate connotation is “law” or “edict.”30
This is because both Jewish ethics and religion are incomprehensible in isolation from each other. Jewish ethics and religion are inextricably intertwined—not only linguistically, but conceptually and experientially for all serious Jews.

The messianic dream is Jewish in origin, but all who have a vision and commitment to historical and ethical progress can play a role in this prophetic process. It obligates each of us to become moral agents, to take responsibility for our future and that of humankind by creating good and defeating evil. In the conceptualization of the ancient Jewish teaching, when we do this we not only imitate God, we become partners with the Holy One to help him perfect creation.

Notes

2. Babylonian Talmud, Baba Mezia 59b
3. Babylonian Talmud, Baba Kama 83b–84a
4. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 81b
5. Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5
7. The nonfinite value of every human being is the origin of the popular Jewish custom of not counting persons. Counting presupposes both finitude and commensurability of that which is counted, thus implying that the countables are “objects.” Hence the Jewish custom is to indirectly number persons by associating a word of a scriptural verse to assimilate the holiness of the person to the holiness of the Torah scripture.
8. Meir Simchah Ha-Kohen, Meshek Hokhmah, Genesis 1:26; Nachmanides, commentary on the Torah, Genesis 1:26; Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, 1:1–2; Joseph Soloveitchik, Halakhic Man, Part II respectively
10. Deuteronomy 21:23
11. Midrash Tanhuma, ad loc.
12. Deuteronomy 16:20
13. Genesis 18:19
14. Genesis 18:25
18. Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 14a
19. This is the message of perhaps the most philosophic text of the Pentateuch, Exodus 33:12–34:7. Moses' plea of “Show me Your Glory” (34:18) is refused on grounds that no living human can fathom the Divine Essence. Moses' request to understand God's behavior, "Teach me Your ways" (33:13) is granted by God revealing His 13 moral attributes of compassion, slowness to anger, abundant mercy and truth, etc. (34:7). See Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed 1:54.
20. The clearest exposition of this is found in Lev. Chapter 19, which details holiness in terms of social relationships.
22. Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 74a
24. Mishna Yada'im 4:4, and Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 28a, Yebamot 17b, Yoma 84b. For normative codification, see Maimonides, Mishneh Torah (MT), Laws of Kings 5:4.
25. MT, Laws of Kings 6:4 and commentary of Kesef Mishnah ad loc.
26. Nachmanides, for example, clearly followed Maimonides lead. See his commentary on Deuteronomy 20:10.
28. Laws of Kings, 12:5
30. See Book of Esther 1:8,13,15.
A Reflection on Jewish Ethics

If I were to stand on one foot and try to explain the Torah, my message would be that we can not make absolute “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” On the other hand, the opposite extreme of relativism whereby everything is contextual is also untenable for me. I do not want the fundamental principles, “Do not murder,” or “Human beings are created in the image of God,” to be considered contextual and therefore, meaningless. I think every person and religion has to come to grips with the foundations of his or her spirituality and ethics. I think this is a rational process and one has to dig very deep into what is really axiomatic in one’s worldview and religious tradition.

Isaiah Berlin has a wonderful lesson where he teaches in one of his essays that people will disagree about morality, but we must be able to distinguish between fruitful and fruitless discussions. He concludes that if a person cannot see the fundamental moral difference between sticking a pin in a pin cushion and sticking a knife in someone’s belly, then walk away. One will never come to any kind of moral agreement since that person’s moral sensibility and spiritually are too different that one’s own. However, if someone says that only Jews are created in the image of God, and non-Jews are not, then I can argue that he is wrong from Jewish tradition. Although scholarly discussions may not be enough to persuade him, our discussion will be able to take place in the context of shared experiences and vocabulary and may prove fruitful.

One’s fundamental convictions do not come in a revelation overnight. Such insights come as the product of a long and arduous spiritual quest. I
remember my teacher in Jerusalem once said, "If I only talked with people who agreed with me, I would only need to walk around with a mirror all day." I would hope that I could talk with people with whom I disagree because I believe there is a very rich common sense of morality among people of good will. For example, although he is a utilitarian, I can talk to Peter Singer at Princeton. I think he is morally bankrupt, but there are certain things we would agree on because we have certain common values such as freedom of speech and freedom of expression. On a fundamental level, there are some questions that we are never going to agree on since I do not think it is ever morally justified to kill a hemophiliac so one could properly care for a healthy child. My mother used to say, "Consider the source. If it is someone you respect, you listen to him and you talk to him. If not, it goes in one ear and out the other."

I can talk with a Christian, Muslim, and even a Buddhist because I think they also appreciate that there is value to truth and peace and justice. At certain points, the conversations would reach impasses, but I think that since their morality emanates from a spirituality grounded in the value of human beings, such a spiritual source would lead us to agree on many ethical propositions.

Judaism proposes an integral relationship between ethics and religion. The basis of religion for Jews is ethics and the basis of ethics is religion. There is righteous conduct because, in and of itself, it is righteous conduct. I cannot translate religion to mean only ritual observance while ignoring what is taught about the proper relationships between human beings. For example, a person who runs a nursing home and abuses the patients violates both social ethics and the Jewish religious tradition. Similarly, someone once asked why the Ten Commandments have two parts—in the Jewish numbering, the first five commandments are between humans and God, the second five between humans and humans—and why is the fifth commandment to honor one's father and mother? The response was that to a child, the father and mother is Godlike, making food and love available. The activity of parents and God in the world are intertwined and one cannot violate one part of the commandments without affecting the other.

One of the challenges of teaching about the Jewish ethical tradition is that, in order to understand where a Jew is coming from, one must understand the theological, sociological, and political factors that gave
birth to many of what we call the ethical values, the ethical value stance, in this case, of the Jewish tradition. In short, the practice of Jewish ethics is both individual and communal, autobiographical and sociological.

I am the descendant of an eastern European maternal grandfather. He would not understand my presence here today among Christians and Muslims; nor could he have understood my traveling with Rabbi Joseph Ehrenkranz and people from the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding to Poland to spend time with Cardinal Macharski or with Cardinal William Keeler. Nor would he have believed that I spoke at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City with Cardinal John O’Connor. In fact, I began my presentation that evening saying if my grandfather had ever seen me in St. Patrick’s sitting on the dais with a prince of the Church, he would have had a heart attack and died on the spot. After my presentation, Cardinal O’Connor got up and said, “Rabbi Friedman, Barry, if my grandfather in west Philadelphia found out that I was the young man who had turned the lights on and off on the Sabbath for the Orthodox Jews, he would have laid down next to your grandfather and died.” Similarly, my son who sits with me today cannot understand the mentality of his eastern European great-grandfather. This is a new America, this is a new age and the time is right for us to teach about each other. But when we discuss what I want the others to teach about my tradition, I want them to understand where I came from and some of the reasons that gave birth to my convictions.

The Jewish ethical tradition tells us that the seven Noahide laws are meant to apply to all people to unite us. The laws of Noah say that we are all human beings and we are meant to be religious people, people who worship God. But there is a difference between being religious in the ritual sense and ethical. For example, the person who went into the kosher butcher shop and ordered three quarters of a pound of chopped meat and received instead, a half a pound of meat and a quarter pound of thumb on the scale from a religious butcher is being robbed by a thief, regardless of how religious the butcher is. How do Jews decide on matters of legal significance, for example, whether or not one is a thief? One story recounts the rabbis answering that when the Law was in the heavens, it was for God to make the decisions. But, when God gave it at Sinai, it is now for us to make the decisions, and we have the responsibility for interpreting the Torah. The Jewish approach is not devoid of principles, but first
reaches back to draw from our long tradition of learning and wrestling with simple and difficult questions. After such scrutiny takes place in a communal setting, then the appropriate principles are proposed and applied.

Therefore, we must understand each other, where we came from and what is important to us, as we make certain decisions. These decisions challenged us to be a strong community. Even the legal dictum that necessitated the presence of a quorum for prayer services and various rituals that would be performed, affirmed and strengthened a sense of community in daily and holiday observances. I would ask others who teach about me not to try to empathize with me, but to understand where I am coming from. I was always told that I needed to have ten men to hold a service. Therefore, I could not move somewhere to the top of the mountain and cut myself off from the community for better or for worse. My identity and ethical beliefs come from historical experiences living in a community, in a broad world, not in a cubbyhole.

When I grew up, mitzvot was understood to be one's doing a good deed. And it was an imperative, a command. It is an interesting thing for me to note that each generation interprets these commands for themselves. When I was a young fellow, if I were to say to my parents, "What is the reason for the meat and dairy to be on separate dishes?" The answer was, "health reasons." And when I got to be a cynical teenager, I would say, "What do you mean?" And, my mother said, "In the old days, plates had pores and if you had meat, it got into the pores of the dishes and it soured there. And then, if you had dairy in that plate, you got sick." And, I said, "Ma, the Philadelphia Eagles are not Orthodox Jews. They are healthy as horses, and they eat milk and meat together." Later on, I realized that the reason was not as important as the answer. The answer was that faithful Jews listen to the word of God and this joins us together in community. This is the command and how one interprets it is up to the individual, as long as he or she understands where it originally came from.

God is the compassionate One and the interpretation of God changed from one generation to the next. For many, God is a judge. Abraham could engage God as a partner and say, "Shall the judge of all the world himself not act in a just manner?" We also are commanded to be people who work for justice for every human being. We are commanded to pursue, not watch, but to actively pursue justice. Justice in the
A Reflection on Jewish Ethics

Jewish tradition—perhaps because we have always been the minority—is meant to have a universal application. Justice is not only for Jews, but when the Messiah comes he would be for all humanity. Some have suggested that Abraham was the original monotheist. I do not think so. But I do think that Abraham is the person we can look to who demanded that God play the game by the rules that He had set up. In the Jewish tradition, it is acceptable and important to confront God and demand that God play by the rules. Jews cannot agree with Kierkegaard's theological suspension of the ethical, which proposes that God suspended the laws of ethics to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah or for Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. We believe in the Jewish tradition that morality and ethical conduct are constant and binding for both God and humanity. Divine ethics are not contingent upon who is more powerful, who won the war, or whether or not you treat me decently today. Present in every human being is the divine image. And, to deny the existence of the divine image is to violate the tradition, the constant ethic as we know it. Our tradition demands a consistent mode of conduct between human beings—even in the marketplace—based upon the presence of God in every human being.

It was once noted at a Jewish Federation dinner that I attended that Jews have evolved from biblical times in many ways, but a foundational principle is that we cannot be observers of the human scene, we have to be active participants in the affairs of humanity. That is why there are so many Jewish attorneys, physicians, journalists, and researchers. It is important for Jews to be involved in tikun olam and repair, heal and eradicate the ills that afflict the world. God created the world in a state of imperfection and it is our responsibility to move that world closer to perfection by observing this and other mitzvah. For example, those who worked to prevent polio or other diseases were acting in a partnership with God in the ongoing act of creation and the ongoing act of perfection of this rather imperfect world. The Rabbis also offer a similar perspective. We are born uncircumcised, and the commandment is to be circumcised. Circumcision is a divine command to perfect an act of perfection. All of these factors have made me what I am today in terms of my position in the community and my ethical beliefs.

Jews ask God on the Sabbath before the new moon to grant to them a long life of good health, blessing, peace, abundance, harmony, and good
conscience. The prayer continues by asking for God to implant within them a love of God's Torah and the wisdom to revere his name. And it goes on to ask that we would attain prosperity with honor and that our heart's desire be fulfilled for the good. Amen. Note in this prayer that the mundane is qualified by ethical conditions. We do not merely want a life of abundance, but it has to be abundance with harmony. We do not pray for prosperity alone, but it has to be prosperity with honor. And, what may seem to us to be superfluous—may our heart's desire be fulfilled for the good—we leave it to God to define what is for our ultimate good.

I remember back to a time when I was a young, 19-year-old Orthodox fellow living in Israel, and the love of my life had come to an end. I was despondent and wrote to my leader in the youth group saying that I had observed all the mitzvah and followed God's word, so why was I rewarded by my love affair being terminated? And, he wrote back to me reminding me of the Sabbath prayer before the new moon. "Who's going to pray for a bad month? We don't know what's for our ultimate good. Only the Creator of all knows what is for our earthly good.

As noted in an earlier paper, Jews are not pacifists, but there is a conduct that the tradition demands of us, even in situations where one has to be a combatant. A Jewish soldier should be governed by a law of purity or the responsibility of arms. There is not a tradition of war that is holy, but there are wars that ought to be fought because they are defensive or the lesser of the evil. Despite the biblical story of Sampson or the choices made by the Jews at Masada under Roman siege in the First Century CE, as a general rule, we do not promote notions of martyrdom and suicide. Jewish tradition says that humans are meant to praise God and they do such by staying alive, because dead people don't praise God. To stay alive is a religious act under almost all circumstances. Therefore, if someone comes to kill me, I have every moral right, and probably even a moral obligation, to kill that party first. By and large, Jews have been powerless for the last 2,000 years. They did not have an army or a country and they could not defend themselves, and we were slaughtered in the last century. Now, the great spiritual challenge for Israel is not only to have power, but to have power and to use it responsibly and to use it morally. And, that is a very difficult thing to do and a lesson that we have to learn. Perhaps we can learn with and from the experience of Christians who have struggled to maintain morality in the midst of secular power. We
should remain hopeful and vigilant, but we, too, will probably have to learn from our mistakes with such power.

In conclusion, there is a commandment, which we all know; you shall love your neighbor as yourself. But, if one goes etymologically into the word “neighbor,” every time it is used in the Bible, the word does not define neighbor in geographic terms. It means, in effect, that everyone in this room is my neighbor because we are neighbors intellectually and emotionally, and we are neighbors in our dreams for what we want humanity, this community, whatever that may be, to be. However, the Bible says also that one must love your peer or your neighbor as well as the stranger. We are commanded, “You shall not oppress the stranger because you know the heart of the stranger, having yourself been strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9). This occurs numerous times—36—so that if one does not get it right the first time, then get it right the second. Similarly, we cannot accomplish tikkun olam by ourselves or even by one nation.

These are some of the things that I would want others to know and teach about Jewish ethics, where I am coming from, and why I am part of this community in 2003—one that may not have been able to exist in 1929. It incumbent upon each of us to do God's commands, to pursue justice and righteousness and to accomplish good deeds so that the messianic era will be ushered in, not at the end of days, but at the time that people by their actions will welcome the redeemer of all humanity. I think that our coming together here at Sacred Heat University is an unending supply of food for thought, and nourishment for the heart that will bring the messiah closer to us. May we move from strength to strength in this most noble endeavor.
What Do We Want the Other to Teach About Christian Morality?

I have never taken on such an ambitious project as this. Who can presume to write a chapter essay on what other religious faiths should teach about Christian morality? I feel like Augustine of Hippo when he quipped that he knew what time was except when people ask him to explain it. Having lived as best I can the moral Christian life and having studied and taught Christian morality for many years at various levels does not give much help when I approach writing a chapter about a topic on which scholars write volumes.

Students of Christian morality know that there are disagreements on almost any question one might attempt to address, whether on the nature of Christian morality, approaches to Christian morality, the morality of particular issues or on the ways in which people should be formed in the principles and attitudes of Christian morality. Christians differ on the role of Scriptures, tradition, experience, reason, and authority in determining Christian morality. For some, Christian morality is a biblical morality; while for others it is a philosophical or natural law approach: Take an issue such as abortion and you will find a full range of Christian responses from condemnation as murder to a justifiable and perhaps laudable ethical choice. Methods of teaching range from authoritative teaching to open-ended discussions about ethical issues.

After much thought, prayer, and sleepless nights I have come upon an approach to the topic that is not totally unsatisfactory, at least to me. I have decided to present something that the three branches of
Christianity have to say about Christian morality: a distinctive approach or two within each of the three branches of Christian faith: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox. The approaches I present are representative and widely held, but they are not the only approaches. I begin with a Catholic approach, since the Catholic Church is my home and I am most familiar with it, and presumably we know our homes better than we know other places. Protestant approaches will follow; I have spent many years teaching Protestant Christian ethics. I will conclude with an approach that I am least familiar with, the Orthodox Christian tradition, which I more recently became acquainted with in researching a book on the history of Christian education. These three branches have different approaches since their moral focal points are somewhat different. Catholic morality is greatly influenced by the practice of confessing one’s sins to a priest confessor. Protestant morality arises to a greater degree from the preaching pulpit. Orthodox morality is rooted in the worship and liturgy of the church.

What I have to say might be aptly summarized in an adaptation of an old story. A Catholic priest, an Orthodox clergyman, and a Protestant minister were asked to address a moral issue. The Catholic priest went first and began, “The Catholic Church teaches that according to the natural law. . . .” The Orthodox clergyman followed him and commenced “The ancient Orthodox tradition and worship teaches. . . .” The Protestant minister began his talk “I think that the Bible teaches. . . .” I may have already stated in essence all I will say, so you can all relax now with assurance that you have gotten the point of the talk. However, Rabbi Joe and Doctor David would not want me to stop now, so I will go on so there will be enough to be included as a chapter in this book.

What Does Christianity Add to Morality?

Perhaps this is the time to make a basic distinction between morality and ethics. Morality refers to the rightness or wrongness, the goodness and badness of human actions, attitudes, behaviors. Ethics, on the other hand, refers to the study of the justification of the morality of these actions, attitudes, and behaviors. Ethicists have devised many theories to explain and justify activity in the moral life of individuals and communities. It will not
always be easy to maintain this distinction throughout this talk. Differences of opinion are more often in the ways that religious and secular ethicists make their cases for the morality of actions and attitudes than in their actual judgments.

All persons have some common agreements about what the good life is; what the moral virtues are, what attitudes and actions count as humanly responsible. These agreements in many areas are found among religious and nonreligious people. When one proposes to propose what to teach about Christian morality, much of what I say you should teach will be the same as Jewish morality, Muslim morality, or even secular or human morality. Of course there will be many areas where there are disagreements. But usually similar disagreements exist within religious and secular and nonreligious traditions. It is rarely, if ever, the case that religious people think one thing is right or wrong and secularists view it in an opposite manner. It is rarely, if ever, the case that all in a particular group view something as right, which all persons in another group view it in an opposite manner. When it comes to morality I believe that there is one human morality with regard to the content of morality. I realize that not all ethicists accept this position. But it does not invalidate my point that what we want you to teach about Christian morality is pretty much what you teach about your own morality.

The first question that must be addressed is what precisely does Christian add to morality or ethics. Christian morality is a normative ethic in that it provides the values or standards by which persons are to live their lives. To be Christian morality, the norms and standards must be related to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus wrote nothing so we are dependent on what his followers recorded about his words and deeds. His followers presented him as a moral person worthy to be admired, a person who, like Socrates, was willing to die for what he believed. For followers of Jesus, Christian morality must take into account what God has done through Jesus. The ultimate moral questions for the Christian then should be: how should I live as a follower of Jesus? There is some truth in the question many Christians propose: what would Jesus do? It is a starting point, however, and not the only question to be asked.

The task of getting at the morality of Jesus is not an easy one. The materials that we have about Jesus combine a view of the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. The Jesus of history is the Jewish rabbi. The
Christ of faith takes on the characteristics of the Christian communities of the early century in the Scriptures and the character of many communities throughout history. If the life and teaching of Jesus are the focal point of Christian morality, then we can say that “the quality of his life and the depth of his love revealed in the acceptance of the cross have been regarded by Christians as the decisive revelation of what goodness ultimately means” (Wogaman, 1989, 21).

Jesus, a Jewish teacher, preached about the moral life as the reign of God, the power of God acting in the world and in the life of individuals. God’s reign entails an act of repentance, conversion or *metanoia* on the part of his followers, a turning away from sin and a turning to God. Jesus called people to discipleship, to be willing to learn from him as their teacher. This discipleship had a cost. Jesus said: Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple (Gospel of Luke 14:26). Discipleship entails a life of faith, love, humility, and hope in the face of adversity. The morality of Jesus is connected with the law or Torah. It demands fidelity to the commandments of the Jewish law. Some Christian scholars consider that Jesus’ moral demands were more demanding than those of the Mosaic covenant, for example, about marital fidelity. The ethic of Jesus was a morality of love. He called his followers to love even their enemies. The love of the Christian Scriptures is a call to a community or fellowship, to a service of others. Jesus declared certain people blessed in his beatitudes by proclaiming that the ordinary priorities of money, power, and comfort should not mark the life of his followers (O’Connell, 1990).

Christian theologians have debated over the past few decades whether there is a distinct Christian morality from what might be called human or secular morality. A Protestant theologian, James Gustafson (1975), even wrote a book *Can Ethics Be Christian?* Some Christians, aware of the failings of many Christians, rejoined with the question: Can Christians be ethical? Many have come to the conclusion that, when it comes to the content of morality—that is, the morality of particular actions—there is no distinctive Christian morality or ethics. Differences between approaches to morality lie more in the area of intentions, attitudes, dispositions, goals, ideals, and motivations of Christians. Christians as well as others who based their morality on religious grounds have specifically religious reasons for acting morally. Not all agree with this
position, asserting that Christian morality adds something distinctive to secular or human morality. In general, Catholic moralists are more likely to reject the distinctiveness of Christian morality since most of them adhere to a natural law or philosophical approach to Christian morality (Curran and McCormick, 1980).

Catholic Morality: Natural Law Morality and the Teaching Church

In their approach to Christian morality, Catholic theologians and educators have for centuries utilized an approach called natural law morality, whose conclusions are buttressed by the authoritative voice of the church. While one can trace Catholic natural law morality back to Aristotle and the Stoic philosophers of Greece and Rome, including the great orator and philosopher, Marcus Tullius Cicero, a good place to begin explaining this tradition is to start with the moral theory of the medieval Catholic theologian, Thomas Aquinas (Porter, 1990; Hall, 1994). This Dominican saint contended that there exists in the world a moral law or order according to which certain actions are morally good and others morally bad. The rightness or wrongness of actions, therefore, lies in their very nature and not in any decision by God or humans; actions are intrinsically, or by their very nature, right or wrong. Of course there also exists actions which are morally neutral. Corresponding to this moral law or order there is present within each mature human being a capacity called conscience by which humans both know and judge the rightness or wrongness of their moral actions. Thus, when we contemplate or observe acts of benevolence and respect, we know them to be good. When we reflect upon or encounter acts of stealing and lying we know them to be bad.

This natural law approach rests on two basic concepts or analogies: nature and law. Human nature and human actions are conceived of in biological or physical terms. Every human action has its particular nature; it is what it is; it has its definition. The nature of a thing is something inherent in it and cannot be changed. Typing this paper is an action, which is at least morally neutral. Stealing a computer from a store is patently morally wrong; using a computer to advance a good cause is morally good.
The second concept or analogy in the concept of natural law is with human law. Just as human legislators make laws to govern people's lives according to what is permitted and what is prohibited, so God, the supreme legislator, promulgates laws to govern human life according to what is right and what is wrong. These laws are fashioned through a divine creative process and are there to be discovered when humans gradually reach a certain level of maturity.

The applications of the concepts of nature and law to Christian morality have become areas of controversy in Christian ethics. It is charged that it is simplistic to emphasize the physicality of human actions and misleading to view the complexity of the moral life from the perspective of human law. Focusing on the physical nature of actions may cause us to ignore what is distinctively human about these actions. Furthermore, the analogy with human law runs the risk of introducing an unwarranted and unwanted legalism into understanding and living the moral life.

One way in which proponents of natural law morality have dealt with the issue of the complexity of human actions is to distinguish various features of these actions. They recognize that the morality of human actions is greatly influenced by the intention of the person acting and the circumstances or situation in which one acts. Doing something accidentally is different from doing the same things with a clearly defined intention. Acting in the midst of a rage has a different moral quality than acting in a calculated manner. However, proponents of natural law theory contend that no intention, however noble, nor any situation, however extreme, can ever turn what is an objectively immoral action into a moral action. In their view, neither good ends nor noble intentions nor unique situations or circumstances can ever justify evil means or evil actions.

Proponents of natural law morality recognize that there are many factors that affect the responsibility or guilt to be ascribed to persons who commit actions that are objectively good or bad. Here is where dependence on law enter seriously into the discussion. Ignorance, fear, and coercion can greatly diminish, or in some cases even eliminate, the guilt of particular actions. But this does not change an objectively immoral action into an objectively moral action. What is at issue here is the distinction between subjective and objective morality and responsibility.
Thus the bedrock of the natural law approach to Christian morality is the essential nature or givenness of human moral actions.

This natural law approach to Christian morality infused the textbooks or manuals which church educators used for centuries to train the clergy to be confessors and guides for their fellow clergy and laity (Curran, 1999). Through the work of Aquinas and the moral manualists, the principles of natural law morality extend to all spheres of moral life. It attempts to regulate personal conduct, the conduct of society, and even the conduct of nations. Its insights are applied to sexual relations, property rights, and issues of war and peace.

The origin of Catholic morality in confessional practice accounts for two further characteristics of the natural law approach: it is action-centered and sin-oriented. It is important to recognize how Catholic moral theory was shaped by its practical purpose of providing manuals to guide confessors in their work in administering the holy rite or sacrament of confession. The sacrament of penance or confession entails that priests accept the confessions of individuals, make a judgment of the morality of actions confessed, offer God's forgiveness and assign suitable penances. Consequently, this approach focuses primarily on the morality of particular actions.

The other feature of natural law morality is the development of casuistry. Since confessors deal with particular cases or moral problems in confessional practice, moralists provide moral cases that involve the application of moral principles to particular cases. The term casuistry has often had a pejorative connotation and is often associated with Jesuit priest-confessors, who were considered adept at finding loopholes or offering benign and even lax interpretations of natural and church law. While it is easy to caricature casuistry as excessive legalism, one has to admire the efforts made by casuists to deal with the complexity of peoples' moral problems. Whole systems of approach to dealing with moral problems arose over the years, ranging from rigorists' and perfectionists' interpretations to what are seemingly lax interpretations of laws and norms (Keenan and Shannon, 1995).

This natural law approach to Christian morality surprisingly did not make extensive appeals to the Christian or Jewish Scripture. To defend the whole notion of natural law, citations were made of statements of the Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Romans where he speaks of a law written
in the hearts of all human beings. With regard to the moral quality of various actions, appeals were made for the Ten Commandments as indicating the principal moral and religious responsibilities, as well as particular actions deemed wrong and condemned. The teachings of Jesus, Paul, and the writers of the Christian Scriptures were used to praise and blame certain human actions. It would appear that the Scriptures were used more often to confirm the judgments of reason. Later proponents of natural law morality have attempted to remedy this lack by a more profound use of the Scriptures.

Adherents to the natural law approach recognize that, to be sure, there are levels of clarity when it comes to the dictates of the natural law. They distinguish three basic levels. At the first level of greatest generality and clarity the natural law obligates us to do good and to avoid evil. A slightly lesser level of clarity applies to principles at a second level embracing injunctions of the Decalogue concerning the immorality of such actions as stealing, adultery, lying, and killing. The least clarity exists in third level principles such as the morality of warfare, birth control, abortion, etc. It is particularly in this area that Catholics should seek the guidance of the Church and of respected moral theologians (Grisez, and Shaw, 1991).

The Catholic natural law tradition goes hand in hand with the role of the Church Magisterium or teaching authority in authoritatively making decisions on the morality of human actions. Recognizing the complexity of many moral issues and given the dangers of individuals making moral decisions out of unenlightened self-interest or proclivity to self-indulgence, and given the wide range of moral opinions in society, the Roman Catholic Church has traditionally made authoritative decisions on the morality of human actions both for its own members and for the broader society. While individual conscience is viewed as supreme in matters of moral choice, Catholic moralists contend that conscience needs to be properly formed by the authority and tradition of the church. The Church has not hesitated to take stands on many moral issues that are controversial in society. Of course, authoritative statements do not automatically command the assent and compliance that church authorities expect for their statements. To make matters more complicated, there are different levels of authoritativeness attached to authoritative statements. There are also documented instances where in time, changes have
occurred in the Church's authoritative teachings; e.g., usury, slavery, and religious freedom.

The achievements of Catholic natural law morality have been considerable. Every moral area of human life has had extensive treatment. Some of its finest contributions lie in the area of social and political morality. John Courtney Murray (1960), the outstanding Jesuit theologian of the second half of the 20th century, applied natural law reasoning to such issues as church and state relations, religious freedom, and religious pluralism. His work, though viewed with suspicion in the 1950s, received strong validation from the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, which issued documents on religious freedom and religious pluralism. For the past 100 years Popes and Councils have critiqued economic and political systems by utilizing principles of natural law morality. Beginning with the Encyclical Letter of Leo XIII in 1896, down to the social encyclicals of Pope John Paul II, natural law morality has informed judgments on such issues as the right of labor to organize, just wages, discrimination, just working conditions, distribution of wealth, the conditions for economic justice (Dorr, 1992). In the 1980s the American Bishops in their highly regarded and influential pastoral letter on the United States economy appealed in part to this tradition. Issues of peace and war have always been treated within this tradition of natural law morality, even down to the morality of the possession of nuclear arms for purposes of deterrence. Influential social and political theologies, including theologies of liberation, also draw on this moral stance for many of their principle positions, including the preferential option for the poor.

There is no doubt that, in recent social teachings of the Church, arguments for positions in the social, political, and economic sphere have increasingly appealed to teachings of the Christian and Jewish Scriptures. But all of these documents have made the decisions to speak in two languages, the particular language of the religious tradition and the universal language of natural law morality. One of the reasons for doing this is the pragmatic argument that the language of natural law morality is more conducive to influencing policy debates in the public forum.

Though there is controversy within the Catholic Church and outside the Church on positions that the Church has taken in the sphere of public life, even more controversy exists when it comes to the Church's
teaching on sexual and life ethics (Cahill, 1996; Farley, 1987; Patrick, 1996). When Catholic leaders and moral theologians present their positions on such controversial issues as abortion, birth control, sexual expression before marriage, divorce, cloning, and many other issues they argue from what they believe are the universal principles of natural law and not the particular tenets of a particular religious faith. They contend that it is the very nature of these actions that render them immoral. Though Catholic moralists recognize that people in good faith arrive at different moral positions in these matters, they are insistent that an open and thorough examination of these actions in all their complexity will reveal them to be morally wrong. Most people recognize that the church's reasoning in these matters has not found acceptance outside the church and even within the church. Proponents of these positions point out that it took years and even centuries for societies to recognize the immorality of such actions as infanticide, slavery, and torture.

In Catholic schools, colleges, and seminaries the teaching of moral theology had a prominent place. I studied the subject for four years in a Catholic seminary. The strengths of Catholic moral theology must be seen along with its weaknesses and limitations. Catholic moral theology was taught as a subject separate from systematic theology and ascetical and mystical theology. Disconnected from these rich theological and spiritual sources, the subject tended to become legalistic and lacked inspiration for Christian living. More attention was given by its proponents to vice than it was to virtue, though the virtues were not ignored. Great novelists and playwrights have done the same, realizing that vice is more attractive than virtue. A distinction was made between the moral life and the spiritual life as if these two were disconnected (Billy and Orsutu, 1996).

For those of my generation, growing up Catholic meant being conscious of and keeping account of the sins one had to confess on Saturday afternoons. You did not usually go into the confessional to tell the priest about the good deeds you had performed during the previous week or fortnight. You were there to confess your sins of thought, word, and deed, telling how often each was done. We envied the Jews who we thought only had to do this one day a year and not in a dark confessional box. We knew that our Protestant friends were not obligated to perform this ritual. We were not aware of how Muslims handled their guilt.
Christian Morality

Beginning in the middle of the last century, a number of developments took place that have significantly affected the Catholic approach to Christian morality and the natural law approach. There has been a significant decrease in the number of Catholics who approach priests to offer their confessions. Catholic life has witnessed an increased interest in spirituality. Within the field of Catholic moral theology, a more biblically centered approach, pioneered by Bernard Haring's (1978–1981) influential work has changed the way many moral theologians approach their discipline. Many Catholic theologians and philosophers no longer identify themselves with the theological approach of Thomas Aquinas and other classical moralists. Catholic moral theologians today draw on numerous philosophical traditions such as phenomenology, pragmatism, existentialism, analytic philosophy and even postmodernism (Callahan 1991; Maguire, 1978). Many Catholic theologians have pointed out the weaknesses and limitations of the traditional natural law approach to morality still enshrined in recent church documents as well as in the classical church documents (Fuchs, 1987). Furthermore, theologians are more in touch with and influenced by Protestant ethics and to a lesser degree by Jewish and Islamic ethics (Maguire, 1993).

One of the upshots of these developments is that there has emerged within the Catholic theological community a rather large group of theologians variously called progressive, liberal, or revisionists who have come to positions on moral issues at variance with the official teaching of the church. At times these theologians use the same natural law reasoning of the tradition to arrive at their viewpoints. If polls taken in this country as well as in other countries are to be believed, and I see no reason why not, a large number of Catholics seem to share the views of these dissenting theologians. Theologians and people dissent not only on issues of life ethics and sexual ethics but also on the morality of particular military actions and capital punishment.

All of this should not lead to the conclusion that the natural law approach to Christian morality is dead among Catholic leaders and theologians. Pope John Paul II offered a spirited and sophisticated defense of this approach in his encyclical letter Veritatis Splendor (1993). Appeals to the just war tradition are prominent in Catholic assessment of military actions. Natural law arguments are used to support traditional teachings in sexual and life ethics. Many theologians have come to realize that a
Christian morality and moral theology based on Scripture can go just so far. While the Scriptures may provide principles for living the moral life, they do not provide answers to the many concrete and complex moral issues that so frequently arise in our society. Asking "What would Jesus do?" provides a spiritual and religious orientation but it will provide concrete direction and solutions only if it is supplemented by a thorough investigation of relevant facts and moral principles.

In drawing this section to a close and in attempting to suggest what you should teach about Christian morality from a Catholic perspective, I get guidance from an experience in my life. While teaching a course in Christian ethics at Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan, an inter-denominational Protestant seminary, a young student affiliated with a rather liberal Unitarian church volunteered that she was taking the course from a Catholic theologian because Catholics seem to have more fun theologically. From her vantage point, Catholics had so many interesting debates and arguments in comparison with her Unitarian congregation where people are generally expected to arrive at their own moral judgments and there is minimal debate. My advice to you is that you should teach the conflicts, the differences of opinion, the contrasting points of view. Very often, these are probably the same that occur within your own tradition. But what is more important, try to teach the arguments and reasons that are given for these points of view. It is a suggestion similar to Jacob Neusner's advice to not only teach what the great rabbis taught but also go deep into the reasons for their decisions (Invitation to the Talmud. Harper and Row, 1973).

**Protestant Biblical Christian Morality**

As I attempt to explain the Protestant ethical tradition, I realize that I am on much less firm ground. I have studied and taught the great Protestant ethicists, even teaching social ethics at Union Theological Seminary. But this is in no way comparable to growing up in an ethical tradition. But an attempt must be made to present all major elements of the Christian ethical tradition, even if parts are presented badly. I take consolation in the wise words of the English essayist, Gilbert Keith Chesterton: anything really worth doing is worth doing badly.
The sixteenth century reformers who protested against the abuses in the Roman Catholic Church based their reforms on the Christian Bible. They judged that the Catholic Church had departed in significant ways in faith, morals, and structures from the faith of the early church. Many reformers in Britain, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, and France began to develop a new approach to Christianity that corrected abuses and forged newer ways of being Christian in early modern societies and cultures that were emerging. The reforms had many prongs, some of which relate to a reformation of Christian morality. These include asserting the authority of the Scriptures in faith and morals, a questioning of the role of tradition upon which Catholics had depended for many of their beliefs, a rejection by some of the medieval scholastic theology upon which natural law morality was based, a rejection of the authority of the Roman Church in deciding issues relating to faith and morals, and a rejection of mandatory confession to a priest or at least removing confession from the sacraments or sacred rites of the church. In the place of these, the Protestant reformers put the authority of the Christian Scriptures and interpreters who they believed were faithful to the true meaning of these Scriptures.

The Protestant reform in Christian morality thus began with a return to fundamentals and that meant the Bible. Protestant morality in contrast to Catholic morality may be described as a biblical morality. Only those teachings that were firmly rooted in the Bible are to be matters of faith and morals. Decisions and practices of the Church that were not based on the Bible were to be rejected. Mandatory celibacy for priests and the monastic life were rejected not only because of widespread abuses in these institutions but because they did not have a sound basis in the Bible. Laws and canons of the church were overturned and doctrines were rejected. In their place, the reformers articulated a biblical faith based upon the reading and preaching of the scriptures and the celebration of only those rites or sacraments that had a firm foundation in the Bible. In the place of many pious devotions that had arisen over the centuries, the reformers privileged the prayerful reading of the Scriptures, to be interpreted not by any central authority but by individual believers. The Christian moral life would no longer be governed by Church ordinances but rather by faithful persons who piously read the Scriptures. In time, some reformers like the Swiss priest, John Calvin, introduced whole scale
moral norms and laws in their churches. In the area of morality, their reforms led to a biblically based Christian morality. Calvin also espoused an approach to morality that is similar to natural law morality.

Protestant ethicists recognize both the strengths and the limitations of an ethic that is based on *sola scriptura*. The ethic is clearly Scriptural in its orientation and in its motivation. But many questions arise, as indicated by James Gustafson: "What is the authority of Scripture for ethics: How is Scripture relevant to, or applied to, practical moral matters?" (1978, p. 26). These questions obviously face all Christian ethicists, but they are less important for Catholic morality since natural law and church authority play such an important role in the Catholic approach to Christian morality. The doctrine of *sola scriptura* leads to other questions about discrepancies in the Bible, determining what are theological and ethical principles and what are not. Protestant ethicists are especially concerned with how principles of two thousand years ago are applicable to issues faced today and with how one applies principles enunciated in a powerless minority community to the cosmopolitan world of today (Gustafson, 1978, p. 29).

All Protestant reformers, to some degree, attacked the scholastic philosophy that then formed the basis for Christian doctrines and moral teachings. Aristotle became the whipping boy for many of the reformers. Faith and morals expressed in his language and concepts were viewed as a corruption of the fundamental and pristine Christian faith, which was to be found only in the Scriptures. The natural law tradition encoded in the medieval legal system of the church was in the eyes of many reformers a corruption of the pure moral teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. Christians were not to be saved through philosophy. The reformers severely criticized the school of theology at the University of Paris where Aristotle and scholastic philosophy and theology ruled supreme. This school was considered the intellectual center of a corrupt faith, with its monkish Dominican and Franciscan teachers. Corrupt Renaissance Popes in Rome had long been unduly influenced by their explanations of Christian faith and morality. A later target of the reformers was the fast growing Society of Jesus or Jesuit priests who took up the task of combating what they considered the errors of the reformers through preaching and the establishment of schools and colleges throughout Europe and into new worlds. Early Jesuits were educated at the University of Paris and
became strong advocates of its highly rational approach to Christian faith and morality.

For many centuries the chief moral authority in the Western Church had been the Roman papacy. Final judgments on all moral issues came ultimately from this source. In rejecting the moral authority of the papacy, the reformers indirectly rejected its approach to Christian morality, which depended most often on legal and canonical norms. The strongest blow that the reformers struck at this moral authority was its attack on the practice of mandatory private confession of sins to a priest. This practice was viewed as a corruption of the Gospel since it required an unnecessary human mediator to be interposed between the believer and God. Through this practice, consciences were unduly burdened and there crept into widespread practice the biblically unfounded and corrupt teaching on indulgences, a practice by which the papacy did away with punishment incurred by sins.

The Protestant approach to Christian morality has certain characteristics that distinguish it from Catholic and Orthodox morality. While Catholics emphasize sins to be confessed to a priest, Protestants place stress on sin or the state of sinfulness. Sinfulness in Protestant theology is more a religious state than the moral state of Catholic sins. At liturgical services, it is this state of sinfulness, that is confessed rather than individual sins. This Protestant moral teaching is more pedagogical than it is moral. In focusing on sin or sinfulness, there is a strong desire to reject any form of legalism. Good actions are a result of our justification before God and not ways to achieve salvation and justification, as proposed in Catholic moral theology.

When one looks at the range of ethical approaches among Protestants, one finds it very wide. I can only give a representative sampling of Protestant approaches to Christian ethics. Since the Protestant ethical tradition did not develop as a separate branch of theology until recent years, the tradition includes some of the most prominent theologians of the twentieth century. At one end of the spectrum one finds a historicist or sectarian ethic, one that is termed Biblical Realism. In this view the Scriptures are the sole basis for this morality. Its proponents find no reason to enunciate a universal ethic since Christian ethics are only for Christians. In their view, Christianity is a particular historical community that is called to be faithful to the Scriptures. Members of this
community are called to a radical obedience to the teachings of Jesus. The reformers rejected natural law or philosophical approaches to Christian morality. There is no need for a philosophical basis to Christian morality.

This ethic plays out especially in those theologians like John Yoder (1972; 1985) and Stanley Hauerwas (1975; 1983; 1996) who take a pacifist position on matters of war and peace. For them, the Scriptures provide the norm and the content for Christian morality. Christians are called to be a faithful witnessing minority. Very often, these theologians are in the radical Anabaptist tradition which was in tension with both church and state. For them, fidelity to Jesus, which entails nonresistance to evil, is the fundamental norm for Christians. It is the task of Christian morality not to accommodate the teachings of the Scriptures to the particular historical situations of the time. In their view, the Christian Church went into error when it adapted its teachings to the Constantinian era. It is this tradition of biblical realism that supports the strong pacifist ethics that is prevalent in many Protestant church like the Amish, Mennonites, and Quakers. It is this viewpoint that undergirds the rising movement of Radical Orthodoxy in Christian theology.

Another approach to a Protestant biblical morality is termed Historical Realism, which proposes an ethics of God acting in history. The Bible recounts how God acts in history. God still acts in history; biblical history helps us determine what God wants of us in present situations. God reveals moral ordinances through the medium of revelation. The task of Christian morality is to determine what should be our response to God's present acts in history. Ethics in the mode is more one of command and response, action and responsibility This is the ethic of such prominent Protestant ethicists as Karl Barth, H. Richard Niebuhr (1963), and Paul Lehmann (1963). It also seems to be the ethic underlying the ethics of liberation theology, which is espoused by both Catholic and Protestant theologians.

There is an implied historical relativism in this view of Christian ethics since it is clear that Christians have come to different historical conclusions about slavery, usury, abortion, or divorce by reading the same Bible. Were the teachings of the past in moral error or is God gently instructing us through history about what we are to do? Basic principles appear within the Scriptures but it seems that other considerations must
enter into our decision-making before a final judgment can be made. Just what help does the Bible provide in concrete moral situations? Catholics and some Protestants appeal to a natural law. Questions about this approach abound: how do we account for historical changes? Is the past always a good guide to the present?

Historical realism may have been at the heart of the Social Gospel Movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, which attempted to apply Christian moral teachings to moral problems arising from increased industrialization and the ills associated with it. Such prominent Protestant preachers as William Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch (1912) drew their inspiration from the social teachings of Jesus and the Hebrew prophets. The Social Gospel maintained that Jesus could be a reliable guide for both individual and social life. It stressed the immanence of God, the goodness of humankind, and the coming Kingdom of God on earth. Social Gospelers held the utopian view that the Kingdom of God could be achieved through the social efforts of humans. The ethics of the movement stressed Christ’s way of love that would enable humankind to work for the good of all.

A third approach to Protestant biblical ethics is found in those theologians who have utilized the philosophy of existentialism to interpret the Christian Scriptures. In this approach what is emphasized is humans’ radical freedom and their need to subjectively confirm their moral choices. Each moral situation is a unique occasion calling us to make a choice. Rudolph Bultmann, the theologian and biblical scholar, adopted this approach, which he believed was based on the reading of the New Testament. Each moral situation presents us with a crisis of decision in which we stand before God. This approach is similar to that of Protestant situation ethics of Joseph Fletcher (1963) who placed love at the center of Christian morality.

In the twentieth century, the most prominent ethicist in Protestant Christianity was no doubt Reinhold Niebuhr (1932; 1935; 1953), who developed an approach to Christian theology and ethics that has been called Christian Realism. As his biographer noted:

The twentieth century Christian Church was shaken to its foundations by his piercing voice. So were the secular organizations of often agnostic liberals who flocked to him for inspiration. No one else could
speak with such authority to Christian, Jew, and unbeliever. (Richard Fox, Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography. New York: Pantheon, 1985, p. 293)

Niebuhr's *Moral Man in Immoral Society* written in 1932 remains the most important exposition of his Christian realism and is influential to this day. Both theologians and political leaders have turned to this work in developing realistic moral positions for public life. The work asserts the inevitability of social conflict and the evil behavior of human collectivities. It also treats the resources Christians have for engaging in political action. This work contains the controversial moral principle that there is a different morality for individuals and for collectivities.

Niebuhr's ethics is primarily a social ethics; his theology is in service to ethics. Niebuhr was interested in the traditional Christian doctrines only to the degree to which they related to the ethical and moral life of individuals, communities, and nations. His Christian realism stated that though we live in a sinful world, there are reasons both for pessimism as well as optimism. Both elements are needed for a balanced theology of the world. While he contended on the one hand that the ideals of freedom and equality could not be achieved, on the other hand he held that we should not accept the inequalities of capitalism or other economic systems. For him the principles of love and justice can be achieved in the real world only in their approximations, or what he termed rough justice.

Niebuhr's ethical system is particularly relevant in times of armed conflict among nations as we experience today. His social ethics was shaped by his abandonment of pacifism and development of Christian realism to argue for United States entrance into the Second World War. He did not believe that the Gospel could be reduced to a law of love. He recognized that, at times, forms of coercion were needed to counter institutionalized violence. He admitted that pacifism was an alternative of Christians but rejected the Christian perfectionism of Christian sectarians and liberal Protestants. In his view, the absolute ethic of Jesus could not always be realized in the course of history. His was a theologically based relativism with an emphasis on the limitations of human nature. He argued that in our finitude we cannot grasp all the truth and that our sinfulness permanently distorts the truth that we do grasp and the good that we do express. Robert Bellah (1991) explained that:
He argued with great public effect that because of the tragic limitations of human nature, human beings could not help doing some evil in the course of doing good; yet, he continued, God commanded sinful men and women to bring justice to bear on human efforts, despite the ironic consequences that often meet such attempts. (Robert Bellah et al., The Good Society. New York: Knopf, pp. 33–34)

For Niebuhr moral judgment is the sorting out of the most realistic means to attain the most defensible proximate ends, without precommitment to some means as inherently more moral than others. For example, the decision for or against a war, for Niebuhr, is based on a cost-benefit analysis in which war is seriously considered alongside other alternative means of attaining a desirable end. He argued for the agonized participation of Christians in particular wars.

As might be expected, Niebuhr's Christian realism has received its share of criticism over the years. He is charged with lacking prophetic insights and actually sponsoring policies that have brought human destruction. He leaves unclear the relationship between morality and politics. He is charged with an undue Christian pessimism. Time magazine's cover story on him in 1948 was captioned "Man's Story is not a Success Story." The heart of his pessimism lay in his facing up to extensive self-interest and abuses of power in individuals and especially in nations. The heart of his optimism lay in the biblical warrants of God's fidelity and love and redemption. At a tribute to Niebuhr after his death the following passage from his writings was read to encapsulate his interweaving of human activity with trust in God:

The world community, toward which all historical forces seem to be driving us, is mankind's final possibility and impossibility. The task of achieving it must be interpreted from the standpoint of a faith which understands the fragmentary and broken character of all historical achievements and yet has confidence in their meaning because it knows their completion to be in the hands of a Divine Power, whose resources are greater than those of men, and whose suffering love can overcome the corruptions of man's achievements, without negating the significance of our striving. (In C. Brown, Niebuhr and His Age. Phila.: Trinity Press International, 1992, p. 4)
Orthodox Christian Ethics

Eastern Orthodox Christianity is the least known but the oldest tradition among the three major branches of Christianity. Christianity had its origins in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. The Orthodox Churches originated in the Middle East and spread to countries of Eastern Europe and are now found in the West, including North and South America. The Orthodox Church takes it doctrinal lead from the Christian Scriptures, the Fathers of the early church, especially the Greek Fathers, and the first seven ecumenical or worldwide councils of the Christian Church. Orthodox Christians share many beliefs with Roman Catholics, differing mainly over the papal role and clerical celibacy. While there are many branches among Orthodox Christians the main Orthodox traditions are Greek and Russian.

The Orthodox Church has a profound theological or religious tradition. But when one looks specifically for Christian morality or Christian ethics one does not find a predominance of writings utilizing this terminology. Bishop Timothy Ware’s popular and well regarded introduction The Orthodox Church does not include any references in the index to morality or ethics. One would not find such a phenomenon in examining standard Catholic and Protestant treatments. To find what Christian morality or ethics is for Orthodox Christians one must look to such terms as theology, spirituality, mysticism, and deification. In recent years a branch of theology called Christian ethics has emerged. For sure there are identifiable scholars such as Stanley Samuel Harakas, Vigen Guroian, and Chrestos Yannaras who write on Orthodox ethics, like Catholic and Protestant scholars, but they are few in number and not as influential as the theological and spiritual writers.

What the Orthodox approach to Christian ethics provides to Christian morality is an approach where ethics and moral laws are closely connected with theology, mysticism, spirituality, worship, and art. In Western Christianity there is a tendency to separate these elements of life and to study them as distinct elements, although all scholars make protestations of a basic unity among the various dimensions of Christian faith and theology. Moral formation comes about chiefly through participation in the liturgical services of the church. An Orthodox theologian has expressed this close connection between liturgy and Orthodox moral formation explaining that:
Christian Morality

The Orthodox faith has its most adequate expression in worship and that truly Christian life is the fulfillment of the grace, vision, teaching, inspiration and power that we receive in worship. Therefore it is in the organic connection between the liturgical life of the Church and their educational effort that we find the uniquely Orthodox principle of religious education. (Schmemann, 1983, p. 5)

For this theologian, the Orthodox moral life takes its heed from the words of the Psalms, "O taste and see that the Lord is good!" (Psalm 34.8). Experience comes before understanding and participation before explanation. While this is the ideal and exists in potential, one reads Orthodox leaders who complain that people neither understand nor even sing the beautiful liturgies of the Church.

Another way of expressing the Orthodox moral life is through "the phronema of the Orthodox tradition: an attitude, a position and/or posture which reflects a particular spirit, a theological sentiment or frame of mind. . . . It postulates a scriptural, traditional, doctrinal spirit, a sentiment and frame of mind which is reflected and existentialized in the liturgical life of the individual both within and without the Church." (Nicozis in Vrame, 1999, p. 6) The phronema is the living tradition of practices and customs which are passed down from one generation to the next by examples and personal instruction. It includes not only the vestments, icons, candles, incense, etc., but especially the inner spirit, its way of thinking, its way of living. It is the Orthodox heritage. It gives life, vitality, and meaning to each Orthodox Christian (In Vrame, p, 7).

Orthodox Christian morality has profound theological roots. A classic text Toward Transfigured Life: The Theoria of Eastern Orthodox Ethics (1983) by Stanley Samuel Harakas offers a rich scholarly approach. He emphasizes the close connection between belief and the Christian life. He wrote this book to balance what he considers the overemphasis on mysticism and liturgy as partly responsible for a weak ethical dimension of Orthodox moral theory. Still he admits that icons and hymns have their moral effect. In his well-organized study he deals with both theological and philosophical ethics. Recognizing that Orthodox ethics as a field of study has lagged behind Protestant and Catholic ethics, he attempts to supplement the more pastorally oriented approaches to Orthodox Christian morality.
Orthodox theologians develop an extensive theological and historical background before attending to particular moral issues. In the Orthodox approach to moral theology one finds lengthy quotations from the Bible, the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church, its Theology, and a real and powerful “Spirit of Orthodoxy.” Moral issues are addressed according to the faith, beliefs, and traditions of the Orthodox Church. For Harakas, though, the Orthodox Church has a documented history of ethical teaching; its spirit is not dominated by rules and rigid sanctions. The strict rules and standards of the Orthodox are set within a perspective that is dominated by compassion and love (1990, p. 18).

The Orthodox approach to Christian morality is rooted in tradition; it is rooted in history and its sense of continuity with the past. For the Orthodox, the past is always connected with the present. Harakas explains that “most Orthodox people understand the past to contain within it the seeds of the future and the future to be grounded in the present and the past” (Harakas 1990, p. 4). The past provides the standing place to make judgments about the present. For Harakas, Church Fathers like St. Basil of Caesarea and St. John Chrysostom are contemporaries. He explains:

I view the biblical personages and the church fathers as alive and vividly present to my personal experience of the Christian faith, the Old Testament saints, the apostles, the martyrs, and the Christian saints of every kind throughout history. Above all, through the sacramental life and the mystical tradition of Orthodoxy Christ is also a living contemporary. Nearly every feast in the church celebrating an event in the life of Christ is observed with hymns which begin: Today. . . .” (1990, p. 6)

A distinctively Orthodox approach to Christian morality is found in the work of Vigen Guroian, a contemporary lay professor of theology and ethics. The sources of his theological ethics are the Christian Scriptures, the early church fathers, the liturgical rites of the Church, the classic novels of Dostoevsky and Tolstoi, the religious philosophy of Nicholas Berdyaev, contemporary novelists such as Walter Percy, John Updike, C. S. Lewis, John Cheever, and modern films. In his ethical treatise on living and dying, he utilizes all these sources to present a vision of life and death that is informed by biblical faith and is Church-centered. He also
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draws on the Christian teachings of creation and redemption. This ethic is closely connected with Christian catechetical instruction, preaching, and the rites of the Church. He concludes that caring for the sick and dying begins with caring for the healthy and living. Guroian explains:

The resources that the Christian faith holds for living toward dying in freedom and with hope and courage cannot be instantaneously transmitted to the sick person waiting for death whose flesh is already ravaged and mind tormented with disease. Nor are those resources of faith likely to be helpful to the sick and bereaved who have not been nurtured throughout their lives in that faith. The meaning for living and dying that faith provides must be owned over a lifetime. (1996, p. 194)

The ultimate goal of the moral and spiritual life of Orthodox Christians is theosis, a participation or union with God through Jesus. In the strongest language possible, it is a divinization or deification of the human being, becoming like God. It is a term used to describe the intimate union, communion, and fellowship of the human with the divine (Vrame, 1999, p. 92). The process is a holistic one that includes the entire person. It is, in Vrame’s words, living, acting, and knowing with the totality of one’s being (p. 15).

One concrete way that Orthodox Christians strive for theosis is through their veneration of icons. Icons present a vision of lives lived in union with God. Understanding icons is a valuable way to get a feel for a distinct Orthodox approach to the moral and spiritual life and explore the theology and the use of icons in Orthodox life and theology. Icons serve to socialize and initiate Orthodox Christians into the beliefs and moral values of their church. An early Orthodox writer, John of Damascus, called these icons “the books of the illiterate, the never silent heralds of the honor due the saints, teaching without use of words those who gaze upon them” (Vrame, 1999, p. 1). Icons lead both to the orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxis (right practice) of Orthodox moral life. Icons are sacred images of Jesus, Mary, or one of the saints of the Orthodox Church. Icons are religious art that comes from a spiritual vision and spiritual understanding. They are pervasive in Orthodox life, not only in Churches but also in homes, classrooms, and automobiles. The meaning and use of icons was debated for centuries in the Orthodox
Church between iconoclasts (destroyers of icons) and iconophiles (lovers of icons). The Mosaic prohibition against graven images was at the heart of the controversy.

In Orthodox theology and spirituality the moral value of the icon is that it produces an emotion and understanding that will inspire the worshipper to imitate the virtues of the persons depicted in the icons. In the Orthodox view, iconic art has the power to shape one's moral behavior. The Seventh Ecumenical Council of the Church made this case for the moral and educational value of icons:

These holy persons of all times who pleased God, whose biographies have remained in writing for our benefit and for the purpose of our salvation, have also left the Catholic Church their deeds explained in paintings, so that our mind may remember them, and so that we may be lifted up to the level of their conduct. (Vrame, 1999, p. 54)

It is of interest that many contemporary moral educators have emphasized the power of examples and stories of virtuous persons as having moral formative value. For Orthodox Christians the teachings of Jesus and the lives of the saints of the past as depicted in icons, as well as in words, present the ultimate moral norms for living the moral life. These depict the qualities of love, gentleness, kindness, mercy, and forgiveness that are to characterize the life of believers. Orthodox ethicists do not leave the matter there since they also want to give practical guidance to their congregation. These ethicists also propose rules, commandments, duties and responsibilities that are proper to persons who want to establish the presence of God in their lives. They point out, however, that rules are only guidelines for Christian living and recognize that there are exceptions to many of the rules. But they emphasize that no one can live the Christian moral life without the grace of God and participation in the rites of the Church.

Conclusion

The overriding moral issue for our time and, indeed, for all times is the issue of the morality of war and resorting to violence to settle conflicts.
No issue is more important than that which affects the lives of millions of people, especially those who live in nations that have had a long history of conflict and warfare. The Christian tradition on the morality of warfare has been a diverse one in different times and places. A brief look at how the three branches of Christianity look at the morality of warfare may highlight to some degree the differences I have tried to draw among the three traditions.

The Catholic tradition is well known. For fifteen hundred years it has adhered to the teaching of the possibility of a just war. The tradition began in the West with Augustine of Hippo who developed a set of ethical prescriptions and proscriptions concerning the entrance into war (jus ad bellum) and behavior during war (jus in bello). These principles were ultimately derived from the Roman orator Cicero. The foundation for this theory is natural law morality. This tradition has been enriched by many theologians, notably Thomas Aquinas, and has been utilized by popes and theologians down to the present day. Some attempts have been made to root this theory in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Pope John Paul II has enunciated this teaching in a number of his addresses and pronouncements. Within the Catholic tradition has also been found a justification for a holy war or crusade, but not since medieval times. St. Bernard of Clairvaux preached a medieval crusade.

In our day, beginning with the encyclical Pacem in Terris of Pope John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic response to the Vietnam war, and the 1986 statement of the American Bishops on peace and war; there has emerged an ever-increasing pacifist voice and movement. This theory is more dependent on the Christian Scriptures, which largely endorse a pacifist approach to violence. The development of nuclear arms has also given added impetus to this growing movement. Many pacifists argue that in this nuclear age it is increasingly impossible to meet the conditions for a just war.

The Protestant tradition on the morality of warfare is a wide one. Within Protestantism, with its scriptural based morality, pacifism has had a long history. For centuries there have been peace churches such as the Amish, Mennonites, and Quakers. Pacifism had strong support in many Protestant Churches before the Second World War. However, a just war approach entered into Protestant morality as well as Niebuhr's agonized participation in war as an inevitable evil. Since it is difficult
to make the case for a moral or good war from the Christian Scriptures, many Protestant ethicists developed theories similar to those of Catholic ethicists.

If one examines the statements of the World Council of Churches (WCC), a basically Protestant organization, one sees that it has not been an essentially pacifist organization. However, in 1975 the Council raised the question: how can Christians, children of God’s love and followers of Jesus Christ, live and work in a world where the use of force and violence against the countless forms of human sin seems unavoidable (Muelder 1980, p. 154). Within the WCC there has been a growing movement toward pacifism in this nuclear age, which includes a struggle against militarism and recognition of the ambiguities of wars for national liberation.

The Orthodox tradition on warfare is both “broad and rich. It honors not only princes who gave up their lives rather than resist evil, but also warrior-saints whose icons were carried into battle by soldiers chanting, ‘Grant victory to Orthodox Christians over their enemies’” (Harakas, 1992, 1). The evolution of Harakas’s views may give some insight to the wide range of attitudes and worship celebrating victories in war, even while it also affirms the values of peace. His evolution also shows how Orthodox ethicists arrive at their conclusions. At first he maintained that the Orthodox position was that of the just war. He then pondered the significance of the position that Orthodox clergy were forbidden to engage in military activity, although laity could engage in it. Clergy were to maintain a pacifist witness. At a later stage he came to the conclusion that the just war tradition of Augustine could not be found in the Greek fathers or in the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church. Using patristic sources, Byzantine military manuals and contemporary statements about war, he concluded in 1986 that the Orthodox position had an amazing “consistency in the almost totally negative moral assessment of war coupled with an admission that war may be necessary under certain circumstances to protect the innocent and to limit even greater evils” (1992, p. 2). For him, in the Orthodox tradition, war cannot be just or good but can be seen only as a necessary evil. While war may be necessary, pacifist strains are retained in liturgy and clerical standards. In the Orthodox view of war, the peace ideal remains normative and no theoretical efforts were made to make conduct of war into a positive form.
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Roman Catholic


**Protestant**


Eastern Orthodox


Brian Stiltner

Teaching About the Others’ Ethics: A Response to Professor John Elias

This conference is titled, “What Do We Want the Other to Teach about Our Ethical Traditions?” Professor Elias admirably approached his task by stressing the what question, that is, the content of the Christian tradition. I approach my task by commenting on the context and challenges of the what question, then asking some related questions: why teach about the other, where and how to teach about the other, and who is teaching about the other? This topic is hard to write about, as Professor Elias said, because it is hard to condense accurately “the Christian tradition” or any of its sub-traditions. In addition, it seems presumptuous to tell Jews and Muslims what they should teach about us. But we can all take comfort in being in the same boat on these matters. The ideal way to approach the matter would be as Rabbi David Fox Sandmel described to an earlier CCJU conference in this series: “In an ideal situation, “we” would not teach about the other at all. Rather, when we want to learn about the other we should invite the other into our classroom or onto our pulpit to teach. The presence of the living, breathing other is itself a lesson that we can never duplicate. I recognize that there are many situations where this is either impossible or impractical, but I say it nonetheless to underscore the delicacy, the challenge of teaching about the other as the other would want us to teach about them.” His point is well-taken. What can we do to make such opportunities more common and more practical? And when we can not hear from the other directly, what are some of the beneficial methods and
forums for presenting the other's tradition? Those are questions I will touch on in my response.

It is hardly necessary for me to expand on what Professor Elias wrote. My emendations or interpretations would turn the conversation into an intramural one. He took on this massive task with aplomb. His 30-some pages summarizing the basic methods and paramount concerns of Christian ethics in its three main branches are as good a summary of the field for a nonspecialist as any single article I know. In addressing the what question, Professor Elias started with the big picture: "Christian morality is a normative ethics in that it provides the norms or standards by which persons are to live their lives. To be Christian morality, the norms must be related to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. . . . For Christians, Christian morality must take into account what God has done through Jesus. The ultimate moral question for the Christian should be: How should I live as a follower of Jesus?" Christian ethics occurs when the community that confesses Jesus Christ reflects on values and principles to guide individual and communal actions. Christians seek to pattern themselves after deeds and teachings of Jesus, not so much because he was a great teacher as because he offered a liberating experience of the Divine under the paradigms of freedom and grace. Christian ethics is a thankful response to God.

Christian ethics, similar to Jewish and Muslim ethics, draws upon the sources of Scripture, Tradition, reason, and experience to derive its values and principles. Professor Elias rightly noted that many of our judgments will be the same as yours. This is because we draw upon certain common Scriptures, guard overlapping and parallel traditions, lived through common historical contexts, and especially, because we see our overarching goal as faithfulness to the one God who is the Creator of the universe and who offered a covenant to Abraham.

Professor Elias also rightly noted that there is great variety in the particular judgments arrived at in the Christian community, both as a whole and in the particular denominations. That the sources of Scripture, Tradition, reason, and experience can interact in numerous ways is one of the main reasons for the different patterns found in the three Christian branches. Professor Elias's differentiation of the Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions was adept and helpful in explaining these variations. I want to take a different tack and look at how the ethical variations that
occur within Christianity are parallel to variety of particular judgments found in Judaism and Islam. Thus, we find some Christians agreeing with some Jews and Muslims on a given issue while they disagree with fellow Christians.

Take the example of family life. Jews, Christians, and Muslims have always respected the family as the basic building block of society, the primary vehicle for teaching faith, and the locus of good and holy vocations. None of the traditions have condoned infidelity, rape, incest, or abandonment of spouse and children; none have seen divorce or having children out of wedlock as a preferred path. Yet the traditions work out the acceptable variations differently. So, for example, Catholic and Orthodox Christians have seen celibate life as a worthy alternative to family life; Muslims could historically accept polygamy as a form of faithful marriage; and Jews could build the possibility of divorce into the laws governing marriage. In addition to these tradition-dependent tendencies, we have the phenomenon James Davison Hunter described as the “culture wars”: that progressives have more in common with progressives in other religions than with conservatives in their own religion (and vice versa). For instance, many Catholics, evangelical Protestants, Orthodox Jews, and Muslims agree that homosexual relationships fall outside the scope of acceptable family structures and should not be honored with the status of marriage, especially within the religious community. By contrast, many Christians and Jews, and perhaps some Muslims, regard homosexual relations as morally neutral or morally good and want to see greater acceptance for the legitimacy of these relationships in their religious communities. Some congregations have conferred such legitimacy by blessing gay unions.

There are many reasons for this interesting phenomenon, owing to religious traditions and cultural influences. The point here is not how to frame or resolve the debate as to note that the what question raises consideration of the contexts that shape the teaching and the challenges and opportunities that arise from these crosscutting patterns. The examples of family and sexual ethics I have just described present challenges such as how to talk to others in our communities across differences, how to portray the other traditions fairly, and how to avoid the attitude that it is all politics—that what is most important about religion is our ethical policies and the strategic alliances we make around them. The cross-
cutting pattern also leads to opportunities such as interreligious dialogue leading to a nuanced understanding of the other and finding common cause with believers against cultural and other external threats to faith. The culture wars thesis is in many ways overstated, but even to the extent that it holds, it is not the last word. Religious traditions themselves do much to support and teach cross-cultural principles such as love, justice, and the Golden Rule.

Why teach about the Other? This question was addressed by Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard in his keynote, but each person who addresses the what topic has a why in mind; it is helpful to keep attending to it. The overarching reason is that it has to do with the will of God. Believing in God as Creator and Lord of all, we must have respect for every one of God's human creations. Respect is not possible without some understanding, so we teach about the others in order to understand them better and respect them more authentically. Christians should consider themselves as part of a family of Abrahamic faith; they are called to respect, understand, and indeed facilitate the faith of the Abrahamic others. It would be naïve and misleading if I suggested this was a long-standing concern. For instance, until the 1960s, the Catholic Church prayed on Good Friday for the conversion of the Jews, but now we rightly pray that they remain faithful to their covenant.

I believe there is a threefold purpose in any interreligious dialogue and teaching about the other. We teach about the other's ethics in order that our community might better understand the other, better understand ourselves, and create a context for improved cooperation for common causes. Let me try to illustrate how these three goals are carried out, using the example of debates about human cloning and stem cell research.

When Dolly the sheep was cloned in 1997, all religious traditions felt at sea in trying to address this act that had moved abruptly from science fiction to science fact. The first move of most religious bodies was to affirm rather similar principles—that God is the ultimate creator of human life, that each human being deserves respect and the opportunity to develop as a unique individual, that any individual human, however born, will have an individual soul, and that we should take care not to master the creation of life for selfish ends. In the ensuring years, these traditions worked out particular responses under their respective methods of
reasoning. Though there is now some debate over the propriety of therapeutic cloning, major religious traditions maintain a fairly united front against reproductive cloning and they keep a number of issues on the public agenda that might not otherwise be there.

Religious traditions can also benefit from their disagreements. For example, the Catholic Church's positions on cloning, stem cell research, and reproductive technologies are driven by its basic teachings of full respect for the human embryo as an individual human life from the earliest moments, and its natural law teaching about the unity of procreation and sexual expression in marriage. It is hardly right or fair to say that the Catholic Church takes these positions because it is against medical progress or wants to oppress women. When the other learns about the Catholic tradition and vice versa, they find some broad shared concerns, and both sides benefit. Liberal Protestants and Reform Jews, for instance, may find that they share with Catholic teaching a concern about commodifying reproduction and instrumentalizing human life. Though not all members of the Western faiths believe early abortion is morally impermissible, many have found a shared concern that creating embryos for research erodes respect for human life and the reproductive responsibility. Likewise, Catholics need to learn that most arguments in favor of stem cell research are generated not by a desire for technical mastery over the human condition (though some of the biotech pioneers give this impression) but by real concern for mollifying horrendous genetic diseases and helping childless couples achieve their goals of family life. Many American Catholics, if not the Church, have been influenced by arguments differentiating reproductive cloning from therapeutic cloning and the use of spare embryos from the use of embryos created for research. The outcome of such learning is still unclear, but Catholics are no doubt helped by hearing thoughtful arguments from fellow Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

My example still relies mostly on the paradigm of religious communities offering their own views to an interreligious or public dialogue. Where does teaching about the other take place? How is such teaching carried out, and how could it be done better? A list of the contexts includes: the pulpit, the liturgy, adult education, religious education for youth, official religious documents, institutional religious literature, media communications, universities, and centers and programs affiliated
with religious bodies. In all these contexts, in a variety of ways and to a variety of audiences, a religious community communicates its own views and sometimes presents its understanding of the views of the other. Let me comment on a few of the settings. First, religious education is a formative influence. Religious organizations take it seriously but rely upon families to bring their children to the settings where it can happen and to reinforce it at home. Second, the university. My experience is that it is a daunting task teaching about our own and the others’ traditions, when the students have only a rudimentary knowledge of both. Catholic universities are wrestling today with the balance of helping students learn more about the tradition they represent along with the multiple traditions of culture and religion. How do we go deep, especially when the students may not have much or any religious background, but also present other religious traditions with enough nuance and detail? Third, adult religious education is a valuable setting for members of a synagogue, mosque, or church to continue growing in their faith as well as learning about the other. Although the opportunities are usually punctual, the learning for an individual can go on over many years. But capitalizing on such opportunities varies widely. My experience and impression is that many Protestant churches do a good job at adult education while Catholic churches find it an uphill battle—if they even try. I do not know what it is like among Jews and Muslims, but I would be interested to learn about it from you.

The last area I want to address is who—who is the other in relation to our faith and our ethical traditions? This is not an easy question owning in part to the historical and ongoing inequalities of the relationships. Christians should see Jews as brothers and sisters, in Pope John Paul II’s words, “elder brothers in faith.” Jews are those who gave a patrimony to Christians—the Scriptures, the laws of Moses, the vision of the prophets, the call to justice, the hope of a messiah. Christians celebrate this deposit of faith, but their celebration has also generated overt claims or subtle suggestions that Christians represent the proper fulfillment of Jewish teaching and are the only heirs of the covenant. Christians should eschew this teaching, known as supersessionism, or even an attitude of it. They should remember that they stand in a similar position vis-à-vis Muslims, who claim to have the fuller and complete revelation.

Christians should view both Jews and Muslims as the others who are not so, other, who share overlapping and parallel doctrinal foundations
that therefore, lead to overlapping and parallel teachings and methods regarding ethics. They are ones we want to learn more about and with whom we want to cooperate in more constructive ways. They are ones toward whom we owe respect. They are ones from whom we desire respect, knowing that, in many ways, we still have to earn it. Our intersecting histories are fraught. In most societies, Christians have had the greatest numbers and most or all of the political power; too we often used it to the harm of Jews and Muslims. Aware of this, Christians today should feel awkward trying to shape how our tradition is presented in the fellow communities. But we can move toward a more constructive situation by frankly acknowledging and atoning for wrongs we've committed and by teaching more fully and fairly about the other in our communities.

As we suggest to the other how they might teach about us, Christians will have some concerns about how the teaching is presented. Perhaps the major concern is simply about accuracy; they will want such teaching to present, as Professor Elias did, some of the nuance of the overall Christian approach and its subsidiary traditions. Catholics will want such teaching not to reduce its ethics to a rule-based approach, not to focus only on sins and vices, but on its rich preoccupation with virtue and moral/spiritual development; and they will want such presentations not to misstate how the authoritative process works in Catholicism, not to overstate the role of the hierarchy. Protestants will want such teaching by the other not to overstate the role of the individual, as if every Protestant simply makes up his or her own mind after reading the Bible. The Orthodox, I would surmise, will want such teaching, including that by other Christians, to take more account of their contributions. Christians together will want such teaching not to neglect that the deepest foundation of its ethics lie in a belief that the compassion of God was communicated incarnately in Jesus Christ. Though this claim carries us into a realm of profound theological disagreement, it also reminds us that the ethics of all three traditions are unabashedly theocentric.
What Do We Want the Other to Teach About the Islamic Ethical Traditions?

Prayer
(Moses) Said: My Lord! Open for me my chest (grant me self-confidence, contentment, and boldness). And ease my task for me. And loose a knot (the defect) from my tongue. That they may understand my speech. (Al-Qur'an, 20:25–28)

Introduction

The word “ethics” is derived from the Greek word “ethos” which means habit or customs. The word “morals” is derived from the Latin word “moralis” which means mores or customs (Zaroug, 1999). Ethics, according to The Oxford American Desk Dictionary (2001) means a system of morals. In secular worldviews ethics is separated from morals and linked to professional standards. Textbooks in most social science disciplines include a chapter on ethics emphasizing upon professional standard of conduct agreed upon by professionals themselves and approved by a professional body representing a particular profession. For example, in journalism or public relations, ethical standards are established by the Society of Professional Journalists or the Public Relations Society of America. In contrast to the above, different religious traditions link ethics with morality based on divine guidance derived in many cases from scriptures. Islamic ethical traditions are deeply rooted in,
Qur'an and the Sunnah or the traditions of Prophet Muhammad. Islamic spirituality and morality are the foundations of human action and thoughts. The enduring ethical principles of Islam are at the heart of all human endeavors.

**Ethics in Islam: Values and Principles**  
**Guiding the Human Conduct Pertaining to all Walks of Life and Carried Out in Full Consciousness of God**

In this discourse we will discuss the following themes/concepts to illustrate various aspects of Islamic ethical traditions.

a. Sources of inspiration or authority for Islamic ethical traditions.

b. Salient features of Islamic ethics.

c. Prophet Muhammad's exemplary life as the ideal for promoting and practicing Islamic ethics.

d. The importance, meanings, and understanding of ethics for individual Muslim and the Islamic community.

e. The primary ways Muslims have taught and communicated about Islamic ethics:

f. Ethics and interreligious relations.

The first three topics will be dealt with in somewhat detailed manner and the later three will be discussed more briefly for these are topics that require detailed treatment in a separate paper.

**Sources of inspiration or authority for Islamic ethical traditions**

The two primary sources for understanding Islamic ethical traditions are indeed the Qur'an and the Sunnah because both attach great importance to ethics. The Qur'an and the Sunnah contain the broad principles needed to negotiate the problems that arise in human societies in different ages (Al-Kayasi, 1992). The Qur'an emphasizes the ethical dimensions of sending Prophet Muhammad by declaring: "And we have sent you (O, Muhammad) not but as a mercy to all creatures" (21:107). The Qur'an also states: "And the Word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and in Justice." (6:115).
In the Qur'an, as Ansari (1989) points out, God and the hereafter are not merely postulates of morality as Kant had thought; they determine very much the meaning and content of ethical concepts and values. The famous tradition narrated by the Prophet Muhammad's wife, Ayesha, is a strong testimonial that Islamic ethical traditions are first and foremost rooted in the Qur'an. When asked about the morals and manners of the Prophet, Ayesha replied, "His morals are nothing but Qur'an." The Prophet Muhammad himself described the purpose of his prophethood in these words, "I have been sent so that I can perfect the morals." In chapter 91, verses 9 and 10, the Qur'an clearly points out that "Indeed one who purifies himself/herself (by following God's command) is the one who is successful and the one who corrupts it (his or her soul by disobeying God) is the one who miserably fails." (91:9–10)

The roots of Islamic ethics, as Esposito (1988) has observed, is in the implementation of God's will as ordained in Qur'an: "It is God who has made you (His) agents, inheritors of the earth...." (6:165) Thus, as representatives of God, one can not but fulfill the mission for which God has created human beings; and this can be realized by adopting to the moral and ethical worldview and system that the Qur'an offers and that the Prophet Muhammad fulfilled and exemplified in his life. In numerous verses the Qur'an provides definitive status to Prophet Muhammad as the route through which one can attain God's love and mercy. For example, the Qur'an clearly says, "Say (O, Muhammad) if you really love Allah then follow me" (3:31); and "But no, by your Lord, they can have no faith until they make you (Muhammad) judge in all disputes that they have...." (4:65); and "He who obeys the messenger (Muhammad) has indeed obeyed God" (4:80). Thus, it is clear that the two primary sources of formulating Islamic ethical codes are the Qur'an and the Sunnah. However, many Islamic scholars have pointed out that in order to understand the full scope of the Islamic ethical traditions one has to look into some of the secondary sources as well.

Among the other sources of Islamic ethical traditions are the lives and examples set by the companions of the Prophet, especially the first four caliphs known as the rightly guided caliphs, namely, Abu Bakr, Omer, Othman, and Ali. These companions were the purest, after the Prophet, and they made sincere efforts to excel in the Islamic ethical traditions. They, as Ansari (1989, p.82) points out, "were trained by the
prophet himself, and their lives as individuals and as a society are the best embodiment of Islamic ethical traditions."

Last, but not the least, two other sources of inspiration and directions to formulate Islamic ethics are the sources of Islamic Shariah or the Islamic law. These two sources are Ijma, or the consensus of the scholars on issues that have no direct mention in the Qur'an, and the Sunnah and Qiyas, or analogical reasoning done by a process known asijtihad, which means an effort made by a qualified scholar or body of scholars to formulate a guideline to deal with a new issue or situation. These sources of authority and inspiration provide a dynamic process for both the formulation as well as the preservation of Islamic ethical traditions in all the areas of ethical discourse: descriptive, normative, and metaethics.

Salient Features of Islamic Ethics

1. Islamic ethics is universal, divine and permanent

The basic elements of Islamic ethics are neither a product of a particular culture, nor they are limited to a particular time and space. As mentioned in verse 107, Chapter 21 (quoted above), the Prophet Muhammad was sent as mercy to all creatures, and not to Arabs of his time or to Muslims alone. God of Muslims is the same God who created all human beings regardless of their religion, race, or nationality (Qur'an, 1:1, 3:1, 6:159, 6:165, 7:158, 13:16–18, 49:13, 57:25, among other numerous verses). The ethical conduct that Islam considers good for Muslims is in fact, good for all human beings. Truth, honesty, equality (spiritual as well as social), freedom, dignity and sanctity of human life, love, humility, sharing and giving, patience, fairness, balance, commitment and integrity, cleanliness and purity (both physical and spiritual) are some of the core values that are essential components of Islamic ethical traditions. The Prophet Muhammad once said that, "Those who were good human beings before coming to Islam are the one who are good after becoming Muslim." This saying of the Prophet recognizes the basic values of goodness among human beings.

In a beautiful verse (24:35) God describes himself as the "Light of the heavens and the earth," from whom originates all the goodness that enlightens and inspires the entire world. One of the unique features of
the Islamic values is that it is based on eternal inspirations from God. These values, enshrined in the Islamic ethical traditions, guide and beautify human conduct and social structures, rather than being influenced by the changes in cultures and civilizations. The concept of monotheism brings a universal vision and encourages people to look at humanity as one human race and treat people with love and respect.

2. Islamic ethics is comprehensive

The ethical traditions of Islam aim at both individual as well as societal transformation. It covers personal virtues and also guides on how to establish good societies and better families. Family occupies a central place in the Islamic ethical traditions. Family is considered as the strongest component of a healthy and stable society. The Prophet Muhammad emphasized the significance of marriage by saying, “Marriage is my Sunnah.” The Qur’an describes the relationship between husband and wife as the two garments that protect each other and provide comfort and peace to both (2:187). A number of Qur’anic verses ordain rules and regulations concerning family life and family relations including marriage, divorce, inheritance, roles, obligations, and the duties and rights of each other in the institution of family. In the life of the Prophet Muhammad, says Yahya Emenck (2002, p.234), “Ample opportunity existed for people to see how a prophet coexisted with his family.”

The comprehensive nature of Islamic ethics is also evident from the strong foundations of ethics in the Islamic faith. Strong commitment and reaffirmation to faith is a binding force that enriches the Islamic ethical traditions. Obligatory prayer and laziness in prayers is directly linked with being heartless, being unkind, and being uncharitable. The Qur’an aptly illustrates this in Chapter 107:

Have you seen the one who denies the Recompense?
That is the one who repulses the orphan.
And urges not on the feeding of the poor.
So woe unto those performers of prayers.
Those who delay their prayers from its stated times.
Those who do good deeds only to show to people.
And prevent even the small acts of kindness.
Amartya Sen, a leading scholar of economics, has strongly argued, among numerous others, in favor of an ethics-based economic system. Zaroug (1999, p.49), while analyzing Sen’s arguments, notes that, “Economics, as it has emerged, can be made more productive by paying greater and more explicit attention to the ethical considerations that shape human behavior and judgment.” Islam encourages charity and helping the needy and the poor. One of the basic principles guiding the ethical conduct of wealthy people, as Qutb (1972) has noted, is that “wealth should not remain confined in only fewer and fewer hands, instead it should flow from rich to the poor as Qur’an clearly instructs: It (wealth) may not become a fortune confined among the wealthiest among you” (59:7). As such, there is no compartmentalization of ethics in Islam. Human behavior in every walk of life is governed by it.

3. Positive and practical nature of Islamic ethics

As creator, God has enjoined upon us to fully enjoy the richness and comfort of this life. God says in the Qur’an, “But seek, with that (wealth) which God has bestowed on you, the home of the hereafter, and do not forget your portion of lawful enjoyment in this world” (28:77). Islamic ethical traditions, observes Siddiqi (1997), “are not ascetic, monastic, morbid, or moribund in nature.” It wants people to be free, happy, optimistic and forward-looking.

Another major characteristic of Islamic ethical traditions is its practicality. It is neither difficult nor beyond the reach of people. The Qur’an emphasizes the practicality of Islamic ethical traditions by pointing that “God does not burden a person beyond his/her capacity” (2:286). The Prophet Muhammad repeatedly reminded his companions that God has made Islam easy for people; so do not make it difficult for them.

4. Islamic ethical traditions are free of double standards

Islamic ethical norms are the same for all class of people. Rich and poor, rulers and the ruled, and men and women are all governed by the same standards of moral and conduct. What is forbidden is forbidden for all and what is permissible is permissible for all. Islam, for example, while emphasizing the notion of “justice for all” reminds Muslims:
0 believers! Stand out firmly for God as just witness;
And let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice;
Be just: That is nearer to piety; And fear God.
Verily, God is well acquainted with what you do. (Qur'an, 5:8)

The Qur'an makes it very clear that God does not like people who pretend to say what they do not practice (61: 2–3). Hypocrisy is the most sinful act after polytheism in Islam. Also, Islam is against force and coercion in religion (2:256; 10:99). Human freedom is granted by God and is one of the most valuable assets of an individual. However, once a person discovers Islam or realizes his/her faith to be Islam, Islam invites him/her to become fully committed (2: 208).

5. Islamic ethical traditions are progressive and dynamic

Islamic ethical conduct is, first and foremost, based on God consciousness or Taqwa. According to the Qur'an and Sunnah, there are four stages of Islamic ethical conduct: Faith (Ima'n); Submission (Islam); God consciousness (Taqwa); and the exalted goodness (Ehsan). As a person enters the faith, he/she consciously starts a journey toward excellence in ethical conduct. This journey progress through these four steps that are built upon one another in the above sequence. Without faith, there is no question of belief and submission, and without submission there can be no conscious realization of the will of God and hence no piety; and without piety there is no attainment of the excellence in ethical conduct. In order to fully understand the dynamism of the Islamic ethical traditions, one has to understand that faith is the first step, which begins with a simple declaration that "There is no God but one God, and Muhammad is his messenger." With this declaration the legal requirements of faith are fulfilled but the moral obligations of faith are beginning to provoke a truer understanding of and greater commitment to Islam. The five pillars of Islam, namely, 1) Shahadah or witness that God is one and Muhammad is God's messenger, 2) five daily obligatory prayers, 3) fasting during Ramadan, 4) giving to the poor, and 5) pilgrimage to the House of God in Makkah at least once in a lifetime, provide a vast area of Islamic practices that become less and less ritualistic and more and more an act of life enrichment as one progresses through these four stages.
During the first stage, a person undergoes a conscious mental transformation and becomes a true servant of God, whereas in the second stage his or her understanding of faith manifests through his/her actions. The relationship between the two stages, as Moudoodi (1968) has noted, is that of the seed and the tree. Faith is the seed and Islam is its practical manifestation. The third stage, Taqwa, in fact, brings an order, a system and enrichment to a Muslim’s conduct. The fourth stage is the most qualitative attainment of the Islamic ethical traditions, which is guided purely by a true love of God, his messenger, his divine book, his angels, and everything that he has created including his best creation, human beings. Thus, a true believer cannot have hatred or animosity to any of God’s creation, thereby attaining the most pure and enriched state of Islamic ethics.

The Prophet Muhammad’s Exemplary Life as the Ideal for Promoting and Practicing Islamic Ethics

The actions, sayings, and teachings of Prophet Muhammad show that Islam came to illuminate peoples’ lives by elevating their conduct through the practical guidance that the life of the Prophet provided them. God testifies to this in Qur'an by saying: “Indeed! in the Messenger of God you have the best example to follow; for every person who hopes (for the meeting with) God, and the Last day and remembers God much.” (33:2 1) The life of the Prophet is the most perfect and vibrant aspect of the Islamic ethical traditions. The Prophet is the utmost embodiment of Islam’s moral and ethical teachings as noted by the testimony of his wife, Ayesha, above. Numerous sayings of Prophet Muhammad further clarify his own emphasis on a high ethical and moral conduct: “The best thing given to people are excellent moral character” (Tirmizi); “A Muslim with the best moral character has the perfect faith” (Mishkatul Masabih); and “On the day of Judgment there will be nothing weightier in the balance of a Muslim than his/her goodness of character” (Muslim).

The Prophet Muhammad’s life as a messenger of God, as a husband, as a spiritual, political, and military leader, as a head of state, and as an individual person is glorified by his excellent ethical traditions. It is surprising that in a short span of just 23 years, the Prophet Muhammad was
successful in establishing not only the religion of Islam and an Islamic state in Medina, but he fulfilled the excellence of human conduct in every aspect of human activity. To this, the Qur'an testifies in these words, "This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favors upon you and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." (5:3) In 23 years, the Prophet Muhammad provided the excellence of human conduct in family life, in worshiping God through prescribed acts of worship as well as through voluntary acts of worship, in establishing the rights and duties of neighbors, in detailing the ethics of war and conflict, in outlining the relationship with non-Muslims, in establishing the rules for conflict resolution, in presenting the best qualities of a leader, in providing guidelines for economic and business transactions, political discourse and statehood, and in developing an ethics not only for Muslims but perhaps a charter of human rights when he delivered his speech during his last farewell pilgrimage to Makkah.

It is impossible to even briefly discuss the various aspect of his life in such a short paper, however, a brief portrait of his life is presented here based on numerous authentic traditions narrated by his close companions, his wives, and some of his archenemies.

The Prophet Muhammad was most excellent-mannered, most humble, most soft-spoken, and most philanthropic person. He was the Prophet and the leader; yet he was the first to serve people. He was a commander in chief often found in the front rows of the battlefield. He used to carry the loads of weak people. He was most forgiving even to his staunchest enemies. This was evident on the day he entered victorious in Makkah. He was humble and sothearted. He exchanged ideas with his companions, mixed with them freely and listened and acted upon their suggestions in many instances. He never took personal revenge from any one in his life, never spoke a lie; never accused any one, never uttered an obscene or indecent word, and never humiliated a person in his life. Whenever possible he chose the easy way of doing things and tried to make life easier for others around him. He played with children, took his wives to watch game shows, and always had a smiling face. He never talked without necessity. The world was presented to him with all its allurements and amusements but he was indifferent to extravaganzas and luxurious life. Even when he died, his chosen conditions were humbling and his armor was pledged to a Jew.
Thus, in the life of the Prophet, indeed, is the best manifestation of Islamic ethical traditions. It is worthy of serious attention and study by scholars and common folks alike. The authenticity of the Sunnah has been a focus of scrutiny by many in the West as well as in the East; however no serious reader of Prophet’s life has ever contradicted the Qur’anic assertion that “Indeed in Prophet’s life is the best example to follow.”

The Importance, Meanings and Understanding of Ethics for Individual Muslims and the Islamic Community

Islamic ethics is at the core of individual growth and development. It is also central for the development and continued progress of an Islamic community. As the saying of the Prophet, quoted earlier, emphasizes that the better in faith among you is the one who is better in morals,” all movements that attempted for Islamic revival gave ethical learning and attainment of higher moral conduct a central place in their agendas and plans. Also, in books of Hadith, ethics occupies a central place. Many chapters are devoted to ethics of cleanliness, ethics of neighborly relations, ethics of engagement with non-Muslims, ethics of family discourse, and ethics of economics and politics.

However, given the state of Muslim communities, it seems that the dynamic nature of Islamic ethical traditions and its dynamic relationship with Islamic faith are being lost or ignored. More emphasis is placed on prescriptive and control ethics than on normative and inspirational ethics. Morality at individual level is being emphasized while morality at public and collective level is being ignored. The primary cause of this is the emergence and later prevalence of kingships and elimination of true caliphatehood from earlier Muslim societies to the current kingdoms. Vested interests dictated Islamic discourses and legitimacy was sought by monarchs and kings by ignoring and hiding the true nature of Islamic ethical traditions. Colonialism brought alien thoughts that dominated Muslim minds for centuries. As a result, realism dissipated from Muslim scholars and intellectuals and fantasization of the Islamic glorious past overshadowed any real progress in many walks of Islamic understanding, including that of the ethics and morality. Muslim’s understanding of Islam was frozen in history (Sardar, 1985) and Muslim intellectuals and
scholars lost confidence about Islam’s ability to stand in the marketplace of ideas.

Thus, the Islamic ethical traditions became confined to the Individual and lost its relationship with public and collective spheres. Consequently, the ethical traditions at individual level too became diluted and weak.

The Primary Ways Muslims Have Taught and Communicated About Islamic Ethics

During the days of the Prophet, ethics was not taught through books; it was presented as examples in the real lives of the Prophet and his companions. However, later when the sayings and life of the Prophet were compiled by historians and scholars of Islam, ethical traditions was compiled in the books of Hadith and the biographies of the Prophet and his companions. In early literature of Islam, Muslim jurists and scholars did not discuss ethics separately, instead they discussed it under various subtitles such as the chapter of cleanliness, the chapter of family, the chapter of marriage, etc. In these chapters they discussed the standard of conduct as prescribed by the Qur’an and the Sunnah pertaining to these specific areas. Most earlier works on ethics by Farabi (d. 950 CE), Tusi (d. 1273 CE), and Dawwani (d. 1502 CE) seem to be influenced by the Greek Philosophical scheme of ethics. Explaining the drawbacks of these works, Ansari (1989, p.85) points out that “The real reason why Greek scheme of virtue could not express the entire gamut of Islamic virtues lay deeper in its concept of man. According to it, man was only a rational and moral being. Religion was not a part of his essence; and hence religious virtues could not be treated as a separate class. Muslim philosophers were not able to discern that fact.”

Ansari (1989) has critically analyzed various other schools of thought including Sufi writings and notes that only a few scholars such as Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (d. 1762 CE) have included the religious dimensions as an independent factor primarily influencing the realm of Islamic ethics. Zaroug (1999, p.56) has introduced many contemporary scholars who have published important works on Islamic ethical traditions. These, among others, include Abdullah Draz (1982), Toshiko Izutsu (1966),
Fazlur Rahman (1985), Hourani (1985), Majid Fakhry (1991), Danniel H. Frank (1996), Hossein Nasr (1996), and Rafiq Beekun (1997). These books, as Zaroug (1999) observes, are important in understanding the contemporary Muslims understanding of the ethical traditions of Islam. Some of these discourses are philosophical, some historical and some limited to a specific concern of the author in a particular area of study.

Ethics and Interreligious Relations

The basis for interreligious discourse is founded both in Qur'an and in the Sunnah of the Prophet. The Qur'an advises Muslims in these words: “And do not indulge in disputation with the People of the Book except in a refined way. . . .” (29:46) The Qur'an commands Muslims to show respect and reverence to all prophets of God: “Say, we believe in God, and in what has been revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what was given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them.” (3:84) Sayeed (2003, p. ix) notes that the Qur’an “commands Muslims to invite the followers of Moses and Jesus to help them identify common grounds and promote cooperation for doing good and preventing harm.” Chapter 3:64 makes this explicit point: “Say, 0 People of the Book! Come to common terms between you and us, that we will worship none but God, that we will not associate partners with Him, that we erect not from ourselves patrons other than God.”

It is obvious that beside commonalities, there are differences too. Both the Qur’an and the Sunnah provide fundamental guidelines to deal with differences. In fact, there is an entire set of ethical guidelines that can be termed as “ethics of disagreement.” Faith communities have a moral obligation to actively engage in interreligious discourses on issues such as religious freedom, human dignity, and the disintegration of families, human rights concerns worldwide, poverty, and hunger. To begin with, Muslims, Jews, and Christians can go back to their respective scriptures and find out common ethical grounds to deal with the issues of love, wisdom, God, faith, charity, sin, and the hereafter.

The most common Islamic ethical principles that guide active interreligious relations are love, respect, tolerance, mutual cooperation,
freedom, and understanding. These same ethical principles are part of the Christian and the Jewish ethical traditions. Whereas Muslims themselves must strengthen their ethical conduct, and as Nasr (2003, p. 315) has noted, "We must draw ever more from these inner springs of Wisdom." Nasr finds it important to mention that the essence of human worth is in the basic goodness enshrined in all religious traditions. He continues, "... the West must seek to understand Islam in the light of these central truths, which are also to be found in Judaism and Christianity, and other religions. ... The heart of Islam is none other than the witnessing to the oneness of the Divine Reality, the universality of truth, the necessity of submission to His Will, the fulfilling of human responsibilities, and respect for the rights of all beings."

Thus, the Islamic ethics of interfaith relations, it can be said, is based on a true love of God, a real concern for the betterment of all people, mutual love and respect, tolerance, a commitment to strive for what is universally good for all people and a struggle against what is essentially bad for every one. This, by no means, is an easy task. It is a challenge to come out of hypocrisy, arrogance, racism, hatred, and to accept the truth that all human beings are in fact, one community and one nation in the service of God. It is not rhetoric. It is, if we may use the term, a real jihad to which you all are invited.

References


PART V ~ WHAT DO WE WANT THE OTHER TO TEACH ABOUT OUR ETHICAL TRADITIONS?

For Further Discussion and Study

Does each tradition have a notion of conscience or that divine values or virtues are imprinted on the human being as part of being God's creation? If so, what are such values? Are these normative for all people?

What is the function of law in fostering the identity of each religion? Is there a hierarchy of laws or a scale on which laws are based? Is there a propensity in the Abrahamic faiths toward becoming too legalistic and is this tendency related to their being religions that place an emphasis on the study of sacred texts?

Is there a methodology for ethical decision-making that is grounded in the experience of the contemporary world? To what extent have advances in science and medicine influenced ethics and moral behavior for Jews, Christians, and Muslims? How has each religion refashioned new ethical understandings consistent with traditional ethical insights?

What is the proper place and priority for each tradition of action, contemplation, mystical prayer and union with God, or right intention in ethics?

Are there absolute ethical prohibitions in each tradition? If so, what are they?

How does each religious tradition understand legal imperatives found in sacred texts and their relationship (if any) to natural law or contemporary theological study? How do Judaism, Christianity and Islam remain faithful to the literal authority of their scriptures when confronting problem texts that have nefarious ethical implications?
What does each tradition teach about witnessing by one’s life to the love of God, thus being a light to the nations? What is the ultimate goal of the moral life of a Jew, Christian, or Muslim?

What are the sources of inspiration or authority for each tradition’s ethics? Does the balance and application of sources of ethical decision-making vary between religions? What help and how much weight are the sacred texts given in concrete moral decision-making? Similarly, what is the weight given to tradition, natural law, authority, holy people, and present historical contexts? Is there a general overarching principle for ethical decision-making or is each situation unique and stands on its own merits?

Who has the final authority in each tradition in deciding and disseminating conclusions on the morality of human actions such as personal conduct, the conduct of society/nations, sexual relations, laws, and issues of peace and justice?

How does focused study, contemplation of art, singing, dancing, meditation, teaching, worship, and/or prayer have the power to shape one’s moral convictions and behavior?

How does one formally learn about ethics as a child other than from one’s parents? What are the ways the values of right and wrong are taught—memorized principles, stories, liturgical experiences, lives of holy people, scriptural texts, others? Is it possible or even desirable to separate the autobiographical and communal religious experiences of a person from his or her ethical decision-making?

**For Action in the Community**

How does each religion describe the good society? What can believers do to help bring about a just society? Can the language of natural law morality be more effective in influencing public policy debates than religious language?
What are the challenges to traditional religious values posed by contemporary society and how can local efforts on the part of Jews, Christians, and Muslims respond to such threats against religious values? What are the emerging future challenges in collaborative Jewish, Christian, and/or Islamic ethical decision-making?

What justifications do some so-called religious leaders give when they teach tyranny, terrorism, discrimination, or violence? How can such teaching be appropriately confronted and overcome?

Do faith communities have a moral obligation to pursue interreligious dialogue on issues such as religious freedom, human dignity, justice, peace, and human rights? Why, and what can local communities do to promote such conversations?

Is it the right and responsibility of religious leaders to make authoritative decisions on the morality of human actions both for its own members and for the broader society? If so, what are the positive contributions of such efforts toward promoting the common good as well as for the rights and freedoms of individuals? What are possible negative results of such political engagements? How can religious voices appropriately work together with each other and civil leaders to promote the common good?

How does each tradition understand sin or failures of individuals? What are the ways that each tradition facilitates (privately or publicly) reflection, repentance, and reconciliation? Are there opportunities for Jews, Christians, and Muslims to pray together for reconciliation? When and where?

How are religious leaders trained to assist individuals and families making difficult ethical choices? How can synagogues, parishes, and mosques assist their members in promoting religious values and principles of ethical decision-making?

What are the ways that Jews, Christians, and Muslims can organize communal learning around ethical issues and topics? What are some resources, curricula, bibliographies, commentaries and study guides for individuals or groups to use when wrestling with contemporary ethical issues?
Can members from each religious tradition sponsor lectures and educational programs in the community on important ethical issues? Can the results of these lectures or educational programs be published and distributed through a local newspaper or other means?
APPENDIX A

Suggestions for Further Reading
What Do We Want the Other to Teach About Us?

Happily, there is a wealth of resources on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, both in print and on the World Wide Web. To the students and teachers who wish to continue learning about the Abrahamic faiths in dialogue, these sources will be helpful but certainly not exhaustive. They were chosen because of their continued interest to both university students and religious educators. See also Appendix B for web resources on interreligious issues.


Appendix A


APPENDIX B

Websites Concerned with Interreligious Understanding and Dialogue

Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding of Sacred Heart University
www.ccju.org

Common Ground Global Initiative Interreligious Engagement Project
http://cg.org/cgis.asp

Council of Centers on Christian-Jewish Relations
www.ccjr.us

The Elijah Interfaith Institute
http://www.elijah.org.il/

Global Ethic Foundation
www.global-ethic.org

Islamic Studies: Internet Curricular Resources (Academic Organizations)
http://www.unc.edu/depts/islamweb/organizations.html

www.jcrelations.net

The Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations
http://macdonald.hartsem.edu/

Marywood University: Tools for Prophets in the Information Age
http://ac.marywood.edu/skb/prophets/resource2.html

The Near East Collection at Yale University
http://www.library.yale.edu/Internet/neareastern.html

PBS Religion and Ethics
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/

Religion and Intellectual Life Association (ARIL)
http://www.aril.org/World.html

SIDIC: International Jewish and Christian Documentation Service
www.sidic.org

Yad Vashem: The Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority
www.yad-vashem.org
Appendix A


