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**The Centrality of Jesus Christ for Moral Theology: A Critical Appraisal of the Distinctively Religious-Moral Theology of Bernard Haring**

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THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST FOR MORAL THEOLOGY:  
A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE DISTINCTIVELY  
RELIGIOUS-MORAL THEOLOGY OF BERNARD HÄRING

VOLUME I

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School  
of the University of Notre Dame  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Lindsey Alison Esbensen

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Abstract

by

Lindsey Alison Esbensen

This dissertation seeks to develop the beginnings of a Christocentric ethic that, as such, can be distinctively Christian while also speaking universally to those outside of the Christian tradition. In order to do this, the distinctively religious-moral theology of Bernard Häring will be retrieved. Häring's moral theology is a foundation for constructing a Roman Catholic ethic that leaves room for both the person of Jesus Christ and critical engagement with people outside of the Christian community. The imitation of Jesus Christ is central to Häring's explication of the meaning of Christian discipleship. For Häring, Christian moral formation and development requires ongoing conversion to the life of Jesus Christ. Häring's focus on response and responsibility, personalism, value theory, and his examination of the virtues emphasize the importance of the distinctively Christian religious convictions in the formation of the Christian moral life. The

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call-and-response model serves as the recurring motif throughout Häring's work that underscores the significance of Jesus Christ for moral theology, because Jesus Christ is the invitation of God and, at the same time, the response of humanity to God's offer of grace.

In order to retrieve Häring's Christocentric ethic for contemporary moral theology, certain deficiencies in his work must be addressed, particularly the lack of social context throughout his work. The work of noted Protestant ethicist Stanley Hauerwas provides a social location as well as concreteness to the otherwise abstract and sometimes vague moral theology of Häring. Likewise, a contemporary retrieval of Häring's moral theology will serve as a corrective to elements of Hauerwas' Christian ethic. This project thus offers a critical analysis, re-appropriation, and development of Häring's moral theology for contemporary ethics by maintaining his insistence on the centrality of Jesus Christ in moral theology and on the significance of engagement with those outside of the Christian community.

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## PREFACE

In recent years, many Christians have begun to wear their faith on their sleeves, literally, as they wear bracelets (necklaces, charms, and all other kinds of accoutrements) that display the letters “WWJD,” or “What Would Jesus Do?” The question is an important reminder that one’s Christian convictions must serve as the foundation for one’s moral decision-making, particularly if the Christian seeks authentic imitation of Jesus Christ in one’s own life. The problem with such a question, however, is that the disciple of Christ already knows what Jesus has done in a whole host of difficult situations. The real question, then, is not “what would Jesus do?” Rather the question is, “What does Jesus Christ’s life and overall message teach us about who we are to be precisely as disciples of Christ?” Or perhaps more succinctly, “What kind of person does Jesus Christ want me to be?” Contemporary moral theology and Christian ethics insist that Christians must not be concerned primarily with moral actions or moral choices; rather, the concern for the Christian moral life must be who one is, or what kind of person one is, as a moral agent living in the Christian community.

This dissertation offers a critical examination and reappraisal of the moral theology of Bernard Häring, considered on its own terms and as a resource for contemporary, ecumenically-oriented Catholic moral theology. The central concern motivating this project, however, is the ethical significance of Jesus Christ, which is a concern that informed Häring’s work from beginning to end. With this fundamental issue

at the heart of this work, I presuppose that the figure of Jesus Christ does have distinctive relevance to moral theology. If an ethic is to be distinctively Christian, then it must be based on some kind of specifically Christian principles, values, or ideals, which presumably will be connected to Jesus Christ in some way. This project seeks to address the issue of the ethical significance of Jesus Christ for Roman Catholic moral theology, in particular, and for Christian ethics, in general. Fundamental to this purpose, then, is to examine the meaning of the imitation of Jesus Christ for the Christian individual and the Christian community.

The life of the Christian is lived in assimilation to the life of Christ. As a disciple of Christ, the Christian becomes a new person through the ongoing conversion to the life of Christ, such that the person is renewed and converted in each and every moral act that instantiates the being of the kind of person performing the action. Each moral action is a response to God's offer of grace and fellowship with Christ and with one another.

Although even the acronym does not fit as easily on a bracelet, the question is not so much "WWJD," but "Who ought I to be precisely because I am a disciple of Christ?" Therefore, the Christian community looks not only to the historical or scriptural Jesus, but to the living Jesus Christ who invites us to grace and to constant conversion as Christian individuals and as the Christian community.

For Roman Catholics, unlike Protestants, the person of Jesus Christ has not been given a central role in moral theology. In the past, Roman Catholic moral theology relied on the "moral manuals" to attest to what qualifies as a sin, the degree to which each act counts as a sin, and what our responsibilities are in particular circumstances. Thus, Roman Catholic moral theology generally emphasizes the role of reason as the basis for

ethics, over the role of the person of Jesus Christ. The emphasis on reason serves the larger society in that reason underscores what is universal to all human beings. Thus the focus on reason is central to engaging those outside of the Christian faith community in moral deliberation. The fundamental rationalistic orientation in Catholic moral thought, however, tends to de-emphasize the commitment to the specifically Christian aspect of Christian ethics. Therefore, taking Häring as a starting point, I seek to develop the beginnings of a Christocentric Catholic ethic, which, as such, can both be distinctively Christian, yet which still speaks to those who are not Christian. I shall examine whether or not there might be a way to develop a Roman Catholic moral theology which preserves the commitment to service to and engagement with the world as a whole, while still leaving room for a more positive role for Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the constructive recommendations that I make will focus on ethics from a Roman Catholic perspective, but will also emphasize the need for ecumenical dialogue in order to give a greater place to the person of Jesus Christ in moral theology and Christian ethics.

In order to resolve the tension between a specifically Christian ethic and an ethic that has universal implications, the reference point to which I shall turn throughout this project is the moral theology of Bernard Häring. Häring is a pivotal figure in Roman Catholic moral theology for many reasons. His influence in the renewal movement of Roman Catholic moral theology during the period surrounding the Second Vatican Council largely stems from his own life experiences and the continued development and strengthening of his Christian convictions throughout his life in a variety of circumstances. An overview of Häring's life is warranted in order to understand more

fully how Häring develops his Christocentric moral theology for the Roman Catholic Church.

The eleventh of twelve children, Bernard Häring was born into a loving and pious family in Böttingen, Germany on November 10, 1912. Häring describes his childhood as filled with family and love, with parents devoted to each other, to their family, and to living their faith in actions as well as in words, as examples to their children. Häring says that his “parents’ faith was the air we breathed,” a healthy devotion “without a breath of sentimental piety.”<sup>1</sup> While Häring admits that the idea of a family life with a wife and children was appealing, he says that his decision to enter the priesthood was meaningful only as long as it allowed him to remain capable of love and gratitude. In his decision to become a priest, one can recognize Häring’s fundamental religious convictions at work. Häring states, “Precisely because I valued highly the other way, that of marriage, the choice of unmarried chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven was for me, as for most, a sacrifice, a renunciation deeply felt. It was meaningful only in view of a completely free availability for the work of the Gospel, for love precisely for the unloved and troubled.”<sup>2</sup> The heart of Häring’s Christocentric moral theology is the love of God for all creation, manifest most perfectly in the sacrificial obedience and loving adoration of the person of Jesus Christ for the Father and for humanity. Just as Jesus Christ is the call of God and the response of humanity, so our lives must be the response of love and

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Häring, *My Witness for the Church*, trans. by Leonard Swidler (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992): 12. This book is an English translation of the German edition, *Meine Erfahrung mit der Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1989), which was Häring’s own translation of the original Italian interview-based volume, *Fede Storia: Morale Intervista di Gianni Licheri* (Rome, Edizioni Borla, Via delle Fornaci, 50, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid: 206.

gratitude to God in, with, and through Jesus Christ, a response given to God and to our neighbors.

Grounded in his parents' faithful and loving devotion to God, each other, and their family, Häring chose to devote his life in priestly service at an early age. Häring admits that as a young boy he was more interested in playing and riding horses than with studying. Although Häring had considered training with the Jesuits, he had no desire to become an academic theologian. Rather, Häring sought to become a missionary. Häring's academic abilities, however, were apparent early on in his career; after having entered the seminary at Gars am Inn at the age of twelve, Häring graduated first in his class. In 1933, Häring entered the novitiate with the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, the Redemptorists, where he believed he would most likely be able to pursue his dreams of missionary work rather than academic work. After his ordination in 1939, Häring had expected to travel to Brazil to do missionary work, but his superior immediately informed him that he wanted Häring to pursue studies in moral theology. Häring readily admits his disappointment, saying, "I told my superior that this was my very last choice because I found the teaching of moral theology an absolute crashing bore."<sup>3</sup> Häring's superiors informed him of their desire that he contribute to a radical change in the way in which moral theology would be taught in the future. Häring states, "Given this enormous advance of trust, I said *Yes*. The idea of an 'advance of trust' was destined to play a large role in my theology, as it would in my life. I thought of it especially with regard to the salvific action of God: anticipatory grace, the divine advance

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid: 19.

of trust, became part of the core of my theology and view of the world.”<sup>4</sup> Häring refers to this confidence in him as a moment of grace, which he calls a “downpayment of trust” or an “advance of trust,” that deeply influences his moral theology, and life, at all levels.

Almost immediately after Häring had (reluctantly) begun his studies in moral theology, the Second World War began. Häring’s family had already been impacted directly by the First World War, when Häring’s oldest brother had died on the front, while another had been taken prisoner and subsequently suffered from lupus. The Second World War, likewise, had an immediate and lasting effect on Häring’s life, as well as an enormous impact on his moral theology. In November of 1939, Häring was among the first Catholic priests called into the German army’s medical service. Although his religious superior obtained a temporary leave of absence for Häring to teach in the Redemptorist seminary in Gars, for one semester, Häring was called back to serve as a medic in the army in September 1940. Häring’s book *Embattled Witness: Memories of a Time of War* offers a striking account of his life as a priest and medic in the German army during the Second World War. As a medic – not a chaplain – for various divisions within the army during the war, Häring was forbidden to minister as a priest while serving in the German army’s medical corps. Häring, however, understands his role as medic and priest as an “inseparable synthesis” which allowed the soldiers to turn to him for medical services as well as for pastoral care. Häring recounts several instances of his disobedience toward the directives of the Führer and his superiors forbidding his service as minister to soldiers and civilians, as he ministers to persons of all religions, which he

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<sup>4</sup> Bernard Häring, *My Hope for the Church: Critical Encouragement for the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Peter Heinegg (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1999): 7. This book is a translation of the German edition, *Meine Hoffnung für die Kirche: Kritische Ermutigungen*, published by Verlag Herder Freiburg im Breisgau, 1997.

describes as moments of grace in which he was called to courage over cowardice. Such courage as the true meaning of freedom becomes an ongoing theme throughout his life experiences, both in the war as well as in his later years as he contributes to the renewal of moral theology.

The synthesis of the role of priest and medic during the war gave Häring the opportunity to encounter persons of different faiths in such a way that his life, and his moral theology, took on a decidedly ecumenical thrust. Häring points out that his wartime service as a medical helper brought him to “a deeper understanding of Christ as savior, as physician, as the one who comes not to judge but to heal.”<sup>5</sup> Häring was impressed constantly during his various interactions with not only soldiers, but civilians as well, who maintained an incredible spirit of faith in the midst of the violence of war, and many without contact with any priest for many years. These experiences of Christian devotion and courage, particularly among the Russian Orthodox peasants, served to bolster Häring’s understanding of living and active faith, humility, and the importance of prayer. Such themes abound throughout Häring’s Christocentric moral theology.

In addition to his witness to the living faith of lay people of all denominations, Häring encountered many personal offenses against his own faith convictions. Häring was appalled by the blind obedience to ruthless tyranny in the name of seeking power. His experiences in the war proved to him the necessity of nonviolence, courage, devotion to one’s religious convictions, and, perhaps above all, the importance of responsibility rather than obedience in the moral life. Häring states, “All my training, from childhood to priesthood, had made me keenly aware of my mission and obligation, both as a

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard Häring, *Embattled Witness: Memories of a Time of War* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976): 9.

Christian and as a priest, to give witness to my religious convictions and to the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. It had also stressed nonviolence and gentleness: virtues that have nothing to do with weakness.”<sup>6</sup> For Håring, nonviolence and adherence to faith convictions requires courage over cowardice, genuine forgiveness rather than obedience to authority, and, above all, responsibility. True freedom is the courage to give strong and confident resistance against the persecution of one’s convictions. Gentleness and nonviolent actions can attain victory, according to Håring, when done in the imitation in Jesus Christ. Håring admits to several occasions on which he reacted with wrath rather than love towards the effrontery of others, particularly during the war. He explains that, while even Jesus acted with wrath against the money changers in the temple, “we should be aware that we do not at all match the discretion of Christ; therefore, we cannot allow ourselves to judge others. And finally, we have not his authority and could easily become abusive.”<sup>7</sup> From early on, Håring recognizes the way of the Christian disciple as an ongoing journey in pursuit of the imitation of Jesus Christ, even when we may often fail to actually attain that goal in each and every action. According to Håring, however, what is essential for the Christian life is the witness to the life of Christ in a life of responsibility and freedom in loving response to the offer of grace made by God in the person of Jesus Christ. This becomes the leitmotif for Håring’s life and moral theology.

While Håring’s experiences as a medic and priest on the battlefield deeply influence his work, his encounters with various theologians during the war also impact the direction of his moral theology. Of particular importance is Theodore Steinbüchel.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid: 41.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid: 45.

In 1940, prior to Häring's service in the army medical corps, Steinbüchel had taken temporary refuge from Nazi persecution in Gars. Steinbüchel encouraged Häring to study moral theology from a more ecumenical perspective. Steinbüchel's suggestion led to Häring's dissertation topic that explores the "reciprocal relations of faith and morality,"<sup>8</sup> a topic that Häring continues to develop throughout his career and in all of his works. After the war, Häring returned to his studies in moral theology, studying with the most respected Catholic and Protestant theologians of his time. Along with Steinbüchel, Häring studied under such great theologians as Karl Adam, Otto Schilling, and Romano Guardini. His studies with these theologians served to invigorate the ecumenical orientation in his work and his drive to bring about a renewal for moral theology. Häring explains his admiration for what can be learned from other religions when he states, "My pronounced enthusiasm for Orthodox theology and spirituality is rooted in my pastoral involvement with the Orthodox Christians of Russia during the war. But I have also taken pains to study Orthodox theology and tradition as carefully as possible. As I did, I always had the feeling that this was an inner enrichment of genuine catholicity."<sup>9</sup>

Häring earned a Doctorate in Sacred Theology at the University of Tübingen in 1947 with the completion of his dissertation, *Das Heilige und Das Gute (The Holy and the Good)*, with Theodore Steinbüchel as his dissertation director. Following his

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<sup>8</sup> *My Hope for the Church*: 8.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Häring, *Free and Faithful: My Life in the Catholic Church: An Autobiography* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1998): 71. This book is a translation from the German *Geborgen und selbst frei: Mein Leben*. A secondary source that provides a helpful presentation of how Häring's experiences on the Russian front influenced his moral theology can be found in Viktor Schurr's *Bernhard Häring: Die Erneuerung der Moraltheologie* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1970): 9-55. Schurr was one of Häring's professors during his graduate studies and remained a life-long friend. Of particular interest in Schurr's book is his emphasis on Häring's synthesis of the life of faith and the moral life as a unified and unifying concept for the renewal of moral theology. Another secondary source that emphasizes the refreshing turn in Häring's moral theology with specific emphasis on Häring's virtue theory is a reference made in Konrad Stock's *Grundlegung der protestantischen Tugendlehre* (Gütersloh: Kaiser; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag-Haus, 1995): 127-131.

graduation, Häring taught at the Redemptorist Seminary in Gars am Inn until 1949, at which time he became one of the early faculty members who helped to establish the diverse faculty at the Academia Alphosiana. He remained on the Alphonsian Academy faculty until 1986. Fluent in several languages, Häring quickly established himself as a major force in Roman academic circles.

In 1954, Häring's first major work in moral theology, *The Law of Christ*, was published. This work offered a new approach to Roman Catholic moral theology that diverged from the moral manuals, which were concerned primarily with the training of confessors for sacramental penance. From his wartime experiences of the faithfulness of the lay people who maintained devotion to God throughout the midst of suffering and tragedy, Häring proposed a Christological moral theology based on the Bible, the liturgy, and the sacraments that was meant to speak to the people of God, the laity as well as the clergy. For Häring, moral theology must no longer be concerned primarily with obedience to the law, or blind legalism; rather, faith and morality must work in concert in order to live a life of responsibility before God and others. The Christian moral life is the life of faithful response, a life of continual conversion in the person's many relationships with God, neighbor, self, and world. *The Law of Christ* is a pioneering work in moral theology that has been translated into fourteen languages, and which helped to establish Bernard Häring as one of the most influential and important moral theologians of the twentieth century.

After the election of Pope John XXIII to papal office following the death of Pope Pius XII, Roman Catholic moral theology stood at a crossroads. Häring embraced the announcement of an ecumenical council with great joy, enthusiasm, and optimism. Pope

John XXIII named Häring to the Preparatory Commission for the Second Vatican Council that began the significant renewal of Roman Catholic moral theology.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Häring's prominent role in the Council greatly influenced the path that Roman Catholic theology was to take leading up to the Council, during the Council, and in the period following the changes enacted by the Council itself. Even after the death of John XXIII, Pope Paul VI acknowledged the significance of Häring's involvement with the Council when, during his first year as pope, he chose Häring to give the annual retreat to him and the Roman Curia.

Being fluent in Latin and teaching in Rome, Häring understood the "Roman style" that dominated the Preparatory Commission which gave him an advantage over other bishops and theologians coming from outside of Rome at the time. Häring served as a consultant on the preparation commission for questions of faith and morals. He later worked with two subcommissions, one concerned with the moral order and the other on chastity, marriage, and the family. Häring's work clearly engendered a great deal of resentment toward him among his more conservative colleagues, who were less inclined to accept his counter-proposals to the drafts which had already been written by the time Häring had been appointed to the two subcommissions. Nonetheless, Häring persevered in his hopes for collegiality among the members and a renewal of spirit as well as a renewal for Roman Catholic theology. After the Second Vatican Council had begun, Häring was assigned to do the final editing of Chapter Four, n. 30-38 (dealing with laypeople in the Church) for the dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. The reworked text "following the commission's instructions, was accepted almost

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<sup>10</sup> See esp. Häring's own accounts of his Council experiences in *My Witness for the Church*, pp. 40-69; *My Hope for the Church*, pp. 16-19; and *Free and Faithful: My Life in the Catholic Church*, pp. 87-106.

verbatim.”<sup>11</sup> Although Häring never met with the commission regarding the decree on priestly education, he was asked to look over the “juxta modum” (“qualified approvals”) for the text, and suggested the final wording which was approved, unchanged, for n. 16 of *Optatam Totius*. Häring’s contributions to the Second Vatican Council are evident in his work both prior to and during the ecumenical council.<sup>12</sup> As is noted by observers before and during the Council, however, and as expressed by Häring himself, his desire for a renewal of Catholic theology and his involvement on various commissions surrounding the convening of the Council was not welcomed by all participants.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Häring endured what can only be considered personal attacks with little relation to matters pertaining to the Council, but with regard to grievances with his theology outside of the commission’s primary concerns.<sup>14</sup> Yet Häring persevered and attempted to gain a consensus for his work throughout his involvement with various commissions prior to and during the Council.

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<sup>11</sup> *Free and Faithful*: 94.

<sup>12</sup> Viktor Schurr’s *Bernhard Häring: Die Erneuerung der Moraltheologie* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1970): 65-76 provides a particularly helpful examination of Häring’s involvement in the preparation for the Second Vatican Council, with further details regarding Häring’s role during the Council itself. This book also provides a useful glimpse of how Häring’s renewed moral theology was received immediately following the close of the Council (see pp. 77-97).

<sup>13</sup> For a thorough account of Häring’s extensive contributions to the Second Vatican Council, see Joseph A. Komonchak’s *History of Vatican II*, 5 Volumes, gen. ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995-2006): *Volume I* (1995): 235, 247, 248, 254, 256, 355, 369, 419, and 453; *Volume II* (1997): 79, 93, 410, 427, 531-532, and 548; *Volume III* (2000): 46, 62, 74, 115, 181, 187, 210, 281-282, 313-314, 396, 401-407, 410-414, and 457; *Volume IV* (2004) 13, 35, 289, 292-3, 330, 460, 520-22, 525, and 571; and *Volume V* (2006): 183, 268, 394, and 488.

<sup>14</sup> See especially the account of Archbishop Heenan’s highly personal attack against Häring as presented in Xavier Rynne’s *Vatican Council II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999): 348. See also pp. 165, 244, 249, 343, and 348. Rynne previously reflected on Heenan’s scathing criticism of Häring as a “veritable declaration of war against Fr. Häring” in his work, *The Fourth Session* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1965): 56.

Häring's most significant contribution to the Council is from his tireless work as the secretary for the commission on the Church's pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*. Indeed, the co-president of the mixed commission – made up of bishops, experts from the theological commission (*periti*), and coworkers from the conciliar commission for the laity, including laypeople – Cardinal Fernando Cento, has called Bernard Häring the “quasi-father of *Gaudium et Spes*.” Indeed, Häring's influence is apparent throughout many aspects of this important document for the Church. William McDonough argues that Häring's personalism “is to be appreciated precisely for its Alphonsian ‘pastoral’ character, for its conviction about the ability of human beings to find and live moral truth even in challenging and changing times. This emphasis would have been less evident in *Gaudium et spes* had the Redemptorist influence been absent.”<sup>15</sup> McDonough proceeds to suggest that perhaps Häring's most noticeable contribution to the final text of *Gaudium et Spes* is the section regarding marriage and the discussion of conscience, as these topics address one of Häring's constant concerns throughout his moral theology: how ordinary human beings experience truth in a changing world that encounters unchanging truths.

As with all of his work, both on the Preparatory Commission as well as his involvement during the Council itself, Häring's work on *Gaudium et Spes* was a difficult task, requiring great time and energy, optimism, patience, and a constant drive for consensus. From the beginning of this important commission, one group sought to speak primarily to those theologically trained within the Church, while another group (including

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<sup>15</sup> William McDonough, “‘New Terrain’ and a ‘Stumbling Stone’ in Redemptorist Contributions to *Gaudium et Spes*: On Relating and Juxtaposing Truth's Formulation and Its Experience,” *Studia Moralia* 35 (1997): 11. This paper provides a particularly helpful evaluation of the development of Häring's own thought on the issue of marriage and marital chastity, prior to the Council, in the final text of *Gaudium et Spes*, and in Häring's subsequent work on this issue, as well as a consideration of Häring's influence on contemporary moral teaching. See pp. 9-48 of McDonough's article for a full account.

Häring himself) desired authentic dialogue with people in the contemporary world. At stake was the very definition of the meaning of “the Church,” whether this meant primarily the clergy and the religious, or whether it was to include also “the laity.” Häring struggled to maintain a sense of the Church as including laypersons as well as the hierarchy, for his experiences of the faith of the laity assured him that the People of God necessarily included all persons of faith, not merely the clergy and religious. As such, Häring sought to bring onto the commission contributors from the Second and Third World, which included noteworthy participants such as Karol Wojtyla of Krakow as well as a group of women. As the commission sought to describe the Church as building up the modern world and in dialogue with the modern world, Häring was concerned to stress “the close connection between the lives of human beings and the ‘signs of the times.’”<sup>16</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* begins with a distinctively Christocentric orientation, with an emphasis on the Good News of joy and hope for disciples of Christ. Indeed, Häring’s fingerprints are evident throughout the Church’s Pastoral Constitution, particularly in regard to the Church’s understanding of itself.

After the close of the Second Vatican Council, Häring remained busy with lectures, writing, and teaching, as well as retreats and visits to houses of prayer throughout the world. In 1978, Häring published his second three-volume work on moral theology, *Free and Faithful in Christ*. Rather than merely an expansion of his *Law of Christ*, Häring sought to present a renewed moral theology in keeping with the ecumenical accomplishments of the Council, with a greater emphasis on the importance of the relational model for the moral life and a rejection of the legal model of the past.

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II: Volume III: The Mature Council: Second Period and Intercession, September 1963-1964*, gen. ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000; Leuven: Peeters, 2000): 406.

Then in 1968, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* created quite a stir within the Roman Catholic Church. Häring publicly disagreed with the encyclical which condemned artificial contraception as inherently sinful and disordered. Häring insisted that Catholic couples must discern together, after careful consideration of magisterial teachings as well as prayerful and faithful examination of their own circumstances, the appropriate moral decision based on a truthful following of conscience. In an interview, Häring states his opinion regarding legalism in the Church, saying, “The whole matter with regard to absolutes and the absolute application of laws has to be restudied according to a personalistic frame of thought. The decisive criterion must be the scale of values: the person’s sincerity, the good of the persons involved, and their growth in the capacity to love.”<sup>17</sup> Following his public disagreement with the Vatican, Häring was investigated from 1977 through 1981 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith.<sup>18</sup>

In the midst of the doctrinal trial begun against him by the CDF, Häring was diagnosed with cancer of the throat in 1979. Despite several surgical treatments, Häring lost his larynx and could no longer speak normally. He was very weak throughout his prolonged recovery, but he continued to fight not only his cancer but also his inquisitors in the Vatican. Häring was ordered to avoid every explicit dissent from Vatican teachings, and every appearance of dissent as well. Häring refused to dishonor his personal and ecclesial conscience and consciousness by acquiescing to unrepentant, militant, and triumphalistic inquisitors who “scarcely understood (and still don’t

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<sup>17</sup> John T. Catoir, JCD, *Encounters with Holiness* (Staten Island, NY: St. Paul’s Press, 2007): 133.

<sup>18</sup> For Häring’s detailed account of his experience of the doctrinal trial by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, refer to his *My Witness for the Church*, pp. 90-188; and *Free and Faithful: My Life in the Catholic Church*, pp. 169-176.

understand) that ones' suffering under such circumstances is in direct proportion to one's love for the Church."<sup>19</sup> Häring goes on to wonder if his throat cancer was in some way his body's response to the fact that the congregation was "going for the jugular." Despite his illness and his inability to speak normally, Häring continued to give retreats and lectures, although to a much lesser extent. Ultimately no censures or any other actions were taken against Häring by the CDF. Häring retired from the Alphonsiana Academia in 1986 to Gars am Inn, Germany, where he died July 3, 1998.

Häring's moral theology was influential during the period surrounding the Second Vatican Council, but for various reasons his moral theology has been neglected in contemporary Christian ethics. My aim in this dissertation will be to retrieve the Christocentric moral theology of Bernard Häring for contemporary Catholic moral theology. More specifically, this project argues that Häring's moral theology is a foundation for constructing a Roman Catholic moral theology that holds the person of Jesus Christ as central to Christian moral formation, but also allows for critical engagement with people outside of the Christian community.

Three aspects of Häring's moral theology are particularly important for contemporary Catholic ethics. First, Häring contends that a Christian person comes to know what constitutes right moral action through specific knowledge of Jesus Christ. In knowing that Jesus Christ has called us to "abide in" Him, one attains the moral knowledge to perform right moral actions. Second, Häring emphasizes the transformation of the human heart through the presence of Jesus Christ in the community through the promise of the Holy Spirit. The ongoing conversion of the person takes place in a community. This community is one in which the character of the person is formed

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<sup>19</sup> *Free and Faithful*: 171.

through the development of the virtues. Of particular importance for Häring is the development of the virtue of charity, according to the example of Jesus Christ, and the centrality of the virtue of religion which serves as the bridge between the theological and moral virtues. Third, while Häring emphasizes the significance of the person of Jesus Christ for moral theology, his specifically Christocentric ethic also engages those outside of the Church. These three aspects of Häring's moral theology must be retrieved in order to maintain a Catholic moral theology that is "Christian" at its core, that is, based on the person of Jesus Christ.

In order to retrieve Häring's moral theology for contemporary Christian ethics, and particularly for Catholic moral theology, certain deficiencies in his moral theology also must be addressed. Of particular relevance to this project is the concern that Häring gives too little attention to social location throughout his moral theology. Thus, in retrieving Häring's work, this project intends to bring his theology into conversation with the Christian ethic of the noted Protestant ethicist, Stanley Hauerwas. As in Häring's Christocentric moral theology, the person of Jesus Christ is the foundation for Hauerwas' Christian ethic. His greatest contribution to a reconstruction of Häring's moral theology, however, lies in Hauerwas' emphasis on the importance of social context for the development of the virtues for the Christian moral life.

For Hauerwas, the social location for the moral formation of the Christian individual is the specific context of the Church community. The individual develops his virtues in accordance with the community that is a witness to the narrative of Jesus Christ. While Häring's moral theology lacks a social location, Hauerwas contends that Christian ethics can be done properly only in the particular context of the Church

community. Hauerwas also contributes to a retrieval of Häring's moral theology by emphasizing the importance of the character of the agent rather than just the actions of the agent. While Häring's moral theology is concerned with the actions of the agent done in accordance with the virtue of charity, as evidence of the transformation of the heart of the individual, Hauerwas contends that the continued development of the character is as important as the resulting actions. Thus, a retrieval of Häring's moral theology can benefit from the increased awareness of the ongoing development of character within the narrative of the community, while maintaining Häring's emphasis on the ongoing conversion of the heart in the imitation of Jesus Christ.

Although Hauerwas' Christian ethic can serve as a corrective to Häring's moral theology, I shall also argue that a contemporary retrieval of Häring's moral theology can serve as a corrective to elements of the Christian ethic of Hauerwas. As such, I suggest that Häring's moral theology has the potential to serve as a resource for ecumenical dialogue. While Hauerwas views Jesus Christ as central to Christian ethics, he tends to envision the Christian narrative of Jesus Christ in a way that further separates the Christian community from the secular world. Hauerwas understands Jesus Christ's relationship with the Christian community as an exclusive relationship based on the development of the virtues of the moral agent alone. Häring, however, contends that the individual's relationship with Christ must transform the agent's actions through a transformation of the heart, and a transformation of the world. Hauerwas denies that the task of the Christian community is to change the world; rather, the task of the Christian community is to witness to the narrative of Jesus Christ in such a way that the peaceable Kingdom of God is made a present reality.

Häring portrays Jesus Christ as transforming all persons through constant conversion in all moral-religious actions that are responses to God's invitation to participation in the divine life. The centrality of Jesus Christ for moral theology is important for contemporary Christian ethics because Häring's moral theology can further contribute to ecumenical dialogue within the Christian community. Häring's development of a Christocentric ethic allows Catholic moral theology to become more accessible to those outside of the Catholic Church precisely because Häring, like many of his Protestant counterparts, focuses on the role of Jesus Christ in his moral theology. Thus, for Häring, Jesus Christ serves as the foundation for participation in critical moral dialogue among various communities within the larger Christian community as well as within the world as a whole.

This project thus seeks to offer a critical analysis, re-appropriation, and development of Häring's Christocentric moral theology. A retrieval of Häring's moral theology will elaborate his emphasis on engagement with those outside of the Church, which corrects the sectarian temptation of Hauerwas' Christian ethic. Rather than a mere survey of Hauerwas' ethic, or even a straight-forward comparison between Häring and Hauerwas, this project intends to provide a critical examination of Hauerwas' contributions to Häring's moral theology. With a renewed understanding of the social context within which moral theology is to be done, and an increased awareness of the importance of the narrative aspects of the life of Jesus Christ, I suggest that Häring's moral theology can have a significant impact on the development of a Catholic moral theology in which Jesus Christ is central to the moral endeavor, and in which critical engagement with those outside of the Christian community is still possible in light of the

centrality of Jesus Christ. In this way, this project is meant to promote not only ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and the Christian community as a whole, but interfaith dialogue with those outside of the Christian community as well.

It goes without saying that the completion of this work would have been impossible without the tireless efforts and continued guidance of my director and mentor, Jean Porter. I have been blessed and honored to have studied with her throughout my time at Notre Dame. The influence of the many professors with whom I have worked has been invaluable. Of particular importance for the continued development of my academic interests have been Maura Ryan, Todd Whitmore, Bob Krieg, Catherine Hilkert, and Lawrence Cunningham.

I also would like to offer special thanks to my parents, Donna and Chris, and to my sister, Kari, for their constant love and encouragement throughout my own moral development. They have shown me consistently what life in the imitation of Christ entails. I would also like to thank my husband, Henry, and our son, Aidan, for supporting me throughout the development of this project. Their companionship on this journey is appreciated more than they could ever know!

## CHAPTER ONE

### JESUS CHRIST: FOUNDATION FOR MORAL THEOLOGY

Jesus Christ is the revelation of God who invites all persons to participation in the divine life. At the same time, Jesus Christ is the human person whose life is lived, and sacrificed, in utter devotion to God for humanity. Jesus Christ is the fully divine and fully human being who embodies perfectly the divine-human relationship. The task of Roman Catholic moral theology is to present an ethic that is relevant for all people throughout the world, based on theological principles that consider the fundamental aspect of what it means to be a human being in relationship with God. Central to this task, then, must be an examination of the significance of the figure of Jesus Christ for moral formation and development, not only for the Christian community, but also for dialogue with the world at large.

In order to provide a universal ethic for all people throughout history, many recent approaches to moral theology are based on the essence of the human person – what is shared in common by all people regardless of time, place, or culture. The search for a universal ethic that is all-inclusive and true for all people of all times, however, can often lead one to neglect the specifically Christian, and often the distinctively theological,

aspect of Christian ethics.<sup>1</sup> In reaction to the danger of forfeiting the particularity of Christian ethics, some contemporary moral theologians define Christian ethics as an ethic for the Christian community first and foremost; only secondarily is that ethic applicable to the world at large. The primary concern is for the morality of the Christian community, while concern for the moral behavior of “the rest of the world” is secondary. In these types of ethics, the kingdom of God is presented as more fully present, although not perfected, in the Christian community, while the role of the secular world in the seeking of the kingdom is insignificant at best, and a hindrance to the fullness of the kingdom at worst.

To be a truly Christian ethic, however, the two extremes of universalism and particularity must be balanced. The Christian person lives in the secular world, but also lives as a member of the Christian community. Therefore, a balance must be maintained between the temptation to follow a merely “humanist” ethic and the temptation to escape the rest of the world in order to live in an isolated community that seeks only the kingdom of God for that particular community. The debates surrounding the universality and specificity of Christian ethics can create a false dichotomy between the universal and distinctively Christian aspects of the Christian person. The Christian person is both human and Christian, but these two aspects of the person need not be at odds, as some of the recent conversation may suggest.

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<sup>1</sup> While “moral theology” generally is associated with Catholic approaches, and “Christian ethics” commonly refers to Protestant approaches, these two terms will be used interchangeably throughout this work in order to suggest that moral theology and Christian ethics have a shared task: theoretical reflections on moral action that also encompass the practical task of the actual behavior of the human person. Thus, the terms moral theology and Christian ethics both indicate the scientific study of the fundamental principles of the human experience of the reality of God and how this experience affects the moral judgments of the Christian individual and the Christian community.

A vast array of literature is available regarding the distinctiveness of Christian ethics. Rather than providing a comprehensive survey of all of the work, however, this chapter seeks to examine the ways in which some natural law approaches have addressed the universality/specificity debate. I shall then suggest that a distinctively Christian ethic can (and does) exist which examines the essential nature common to all humanity throughout all times, places, and cultures, while being developed based on specifically Christian principles, values, and ideals. Bernard Häring's Christocentric moral theology provides a noteworthy advance over the previously one-sided ethics presented by more universal or more sectarian alternatives, precisely because Häring holds that Jesus Christ is the center, source, and norm of theological ethics.

## I. The Specificity and Universality of Christian Ethics

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, Catholic moral theology focused largely on the acts of the person rather than the person as an agent living in the world. The classicist approach prevalent in Christian ethics from the Middle Ages until the mid-twentieth century relegated moral theology to the confessional rather than allowing it to develop fully as an independent branch of the science of theology. The Second Vatican Council, however, shifted from a primarily static and closed approach to moral theology to a more dynamic approach open to dialogue with those outside of the Christian community. While this move to greater dialogue with the world is a positive step for a truly catholic moral theology, it also creates tension between the universal aspect of Catholic moral theology and the more distinctively Christian principles, values, and ideals that shape and structure moral theology within the Christian community.

Although the problem of framing a distinctively Christian ethic while maintaining the universal mission of the Church may appear to be a dilemma faced primarily in the Catholic Church, some Protestant ethicists have joined in the debate throughout the end of the twentieth century. With a renewed sense of historical consciousness and involvement with the secular world, almost all Christian ethicists agree that the Church is not meant to influence only Christian morality, but all of humanity living within the history of salvation. Since human history and the history of salvation are one and the same history, the concern of moral theology must be the experience of the reality of God for all of humanity, Christian and non-Christian alike.

Within Catholic moral theology, discussions regarding the specificity of Christian ethics largely focus on whether or not there is or *can* be a distinctively Christian ethic. The primary concern is to maintain universal ethics that are shared in common with all humanity. All Christian persons are human persons; therefore, does a specifically Christian ethic produce anything different than a human ethic would suggest concerning moral behavior or moral formation? Some moral theologians fear that the identification of an ethic as distinctively “Christian” may cause the Christian community to so fully separate itself from the rest of the world that any ethic espoused by the Christian community will have no implications for the secular world in which Christians live.

Although moral theology must recognize the importance of maintaining some influence in moral deliberation in the secular world, moral theologians also realize that a further danger lies in losing the distinctively or specifically Christian identity inherent in all Christian ethics through too much emphasis on the global impact of moral theology. While the moral theologian recognizes that the Christian person is a human being whose

nature is common to all humanity and whose experiences are shared with other persons, the moral theologian also must be concerned with the fact that the Christian person belongs to a specific community with particular beliefs and practices distinctive of the Christian community. Christian ethics, therefore, must address the reality of the specifically Christian aspects of the human person. The contention is that being a Christian should have a specific impact on the way that a person acts, for the Christian person derives her identity from being a Christian more than the mere fact of being a human person.

The distinctiveness or specificity of Christian ethics is fundamental to the discussion of any Christian ethic that is founded on the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ. To begin the discussion, a brief clarification of terminology is warranted. James Walter distinguishes the terms “distinctive” and “specific” in his examination of the universality debate when he states, “whereas the term ‘specific’ connotes exclusivity, the term ‘distinctive’ only connotes a characteristic quality or set of relations which are typically associated with any given reality.”<sup>2</sup> This distinction between the terms is important for discussions regarding the universality of Christian ethics, for I would like to suggest through this project that a moral theology based on the person of Jesus Christ necessarily will have elements of specificity as well as distinctiveness, but can also offer universal elements shared with all persons, Christian and non-Christian alike. For instance, certain behaviors are particularly associated with the Christian person, such as the love of one’s neighbors, but these same qualities are not limited specifically to the Christian person alone. Indeed, a non-Christian is just as likely to love his neighbor as a

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<sup>2</sup> James J. Walter, “Christian Ethics: Distinctive and Specific?” *Readings in Moral Theology No. 2*, eds. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1980): 101.

good Christian is. While this charity should be distinctive to the Christian community in terms of being a principle generally identified with members of the Christian community, this charity is not specifically (or “exclusively”) limited to the Christian individual or community. For Christian disciples who seek perfect imitation of the life of Jesus Christ, however, what may be unique to persons in the Christian community is a particular kind of charity or other specific behavior or fundamental disposition that is specific precisely because it is characteristic of a particular kind of discipleship. Therefore, for example, the love of enemies is specific to the Christian disciple; while anyone can love one’s neighbor, the love of one’s enemy requires a specific and particular kind of moral formation and development based on distinctive religious principles, values, or ideals in accordance with one’s Christian convictions as a disciple of Christ. In this regard, I suggest, Christian ethics has distinctive and specific elements not necessarily shared with all human persons in common. As such, throughout this work the terms “distinctive” and “specific” will indicate the more characteristically Christian principles, ideals, norms, and behaviors, for I contend that Christian ethics has both distinctive and specific elements, as opposed to the more universal characteristics common to all human persons.

The primary question in the universal/specificity debate is whether or not there can be a specifically Christian ethic, or if all ethics are ultimately universal ethics in which Christian principles, ideals, and values are merely added to what is already known through universal human nature. The debate, then, appears to center around the content of Christian ethics, as opposed to the practice that flows from such an ethic, although this is not a particularly sharp distinction. Thus, the question primarily is whether a “Christian” ethic has a content which is exclusive to the Christian community, and

secondarily whether or not the moral behavior or actions of the Christian community are exclusive to the Christian individual or Christian community.

On the one hand, some moral theologians argue that a specific content for Christian ethics exists that is exclusive to the Christian community. This particular content is decisive for Christian actions that spring from a new way of being based on Christian faith. While the content of Christian ethics is specifically Christian, based on particular convictions, a distinctively Christian ethic leads to behavior or actions that can also be performed by non-Christians. Although the actions appear to be similar, however, the Christian's actions are unique to the Christian because the actions derive from a source or content that is not foundational for the non-Christian. While the non-Christian can act in a morally right manner, the action is specifically Christian action when performed based on underlying Christian principles or values.

On the other hand, some moral theologians contend that Christian ethics do not have a specifically Christian content, because there is no distinctiveness or difference in the moral convictions that inform one's actions. Therefore, the behavior of the Christian and the non-Christian can be the same. Christians and non-Christians can (and often do) share the same dispositions, intentions, goals, moral judgments, and moral behavior. Christian convictions may add a motivation distinctive to the Christian community, but the behavior is not specific to the Christian person. If this is the case, however, what difference does the content of Christian ethics make for Christian action? In other words, why is it important to have a specifically Christian content in Christian ethics if all human beings have the potential and ability to essentially "act the same"?

The determination of the specificity of the content is significant precisely because the practical element of Christian ethics derives from the content of that ethic. Therefore, the first task of Christian ethics is to analyze the fundamental principles of the Christian life. This is theoretical reflection on moral formation and development. Christian ethics, however, cannot remain merely at this level of reflection. The second task of Christian ethics is to interpret the actual life of the Christian individual and the Christian community in order to determine what should be done in light of Christian ideals. Christian ethics is concerned with the practical task of the actual conduct of the human person, and how the person should make moral judgments that lead to behavior consistent with one's faith.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the content of Christian ethics is as significant as the conduct of the Christian individual or the Christian community. The content of Christian ethics must determine the conduct of those who adhere to the Christian principles which are the foundation of what moral judgments should be. Although Christians and non-Christians can and do conduct themselves in similar ways, the Christian may do so based on an ethic that has different content than the non-Christian's ethic.

If a Christian ethic has a content that is exclusive to the Christian community, then the exterior acts of the Christian person may appear to be the same as the actions of the non-Christian, but the inner intent or motivation of the action may make the action specifically, or exclusively, Christian. The first approach which posits the specifically Christian content of ethics begins by reflecting on the human person as the starting point for ethics. The Christian is not merely a person, but a person living under the guidance of faith and grace. Because the Christian lives under faith and grace, the person has a

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<sup>3</sup> See especially James M. Gustafson, *Christian Ethics and the Community* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1971): 85.

specifically Christian identity that leads to a new way of being. The person's actions reflect this new way of being in the world. According to this approach, a philosophical or theological anthropology is the starting point of all Christian ethics. The Christian acts in a different manner than the non-Christian because they act according to different aspects of their being, even at the ontological level. The specificity of the content of Christian moral theology outweighs the universal aspects to the extent that even Christian actions are specifically Christian, according to this approach.

The second general position regarding the specificity of Christian moral theology denies that a specifically Christian ethic exists for the Christian individual of the Christian community. While the first position is largely based on a specific understanding of the human person, this second position engages two distinct approaches in order to deny the specificity of Christian ethical content, based on a particular understanding of either creation or of redemption and grace. The approach based on a doctrine of creation insists that the metaphysical structure of all human beings is the same, whether the person is Christian or non-Christian; therefore, Christian ethics adds nothing new to human ethics that cannot be known already by reason and experience. The approach based on the doctrine of redemption contends that authentic human nature without the presence of grace can never be understood fully; therefore, all human beings seek authentic or full humanity, which Christians will recognize as embodied in the historical occurrence of the person of Jesus Christ, but which need not be recognized as such by non-Christians in order to strive for authenticity. According to the creation and the redemption approaches, human morality is based on reason and experiences common to all persons of all times. Because all human beings live in history, specifically in the

history of grace and salvation, Christian ethics does not have a specifically Christian ethical content. The universal and human elements of Christian ethics are of greater significance than the more specifically Christian, or even theological, aspects of this approach to moral theology.

James Walter identifies the primary divergence between the affirmation of specifically Christian ethics and the denial of specificity as a question regarding the moral order or moral orders. He states,

Those who maintain that there is only one possible moral order (an engraced ground of ethics) tend to agree that there is no distinctiveness and/or specificity to Christian ethics at the level of dispositions, intentions, actions, principles and norms. On the other hand, those who tend to maintain that there are two orders operative in man's moral life, one based upon creation and the other based upon redemption, tend to believe that there is indeed distinctiveness and/or specificity on the level of dispositions, etc.<sup>4</sup>

While these two “camps” clearly come to different conclusions regarding the specificity of Christian ethics, the theologians involved in the discussion generally address the same principles, values, or ideals as the basis for their positions. Although the discussion seems to rely on similar concepts, these concepts are employed in different ways. Walter suggests that the theological understanding of the moral order is the main point of contention for each side of the debate. In order to evaluate the different understandings of the moral order, however, the theological presuppositions or principles that serve as the foundation for each respective position must be considered. Two significant elements of each interpretation of the moral order must be examined: 1) the role of revelation and reason in moral deliberation – the importance given to each “source” of Christian ethics; and 2) the role of grace in discussions of the “nature” of the human person – the

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<sup>4</sup> Walter: 94-95.

ontological foundation and further anthropology developed regarding the human being. The description of the moral order necessarily entails an evaluation of the role of reason/revelation and nature/grace. The two positions regarding the specificity of Christian ethics tend to diverge in relation to the primary emphasis given to either reason *or* revelation, and to nature *or* grace.<sup>5</sup>

Two specific moral orders are relevant for Christian ethics. Universal human ethics attempts to define the metaphysical, or “absolute,” elements without which the human person would no longer be human and which exist in every historical period of realization. The more historical, or “contingent,” elements of the human being are also considered in the unique existing historical order. In a universal ethic founded on the human qua human, the non-Christian must attain moral values and norms based only on reason and individual life experiences, while Christian action is influenced by the guidance of faith and grace. Although specifically Christian sources at the subjective level can produce what may appear as “merely” human values and norms, ethics at the objective level must lie in the ontological foundation of the human person and the Christian person. Because moral activity is the expression or actuation of one’s existence, ethics necessarily must begin from history, namely, the history of salvation. The Christian person and the Christian community accept the history of salvation, not through human nature or through reason, but through faith. Therefore, the specificity of

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<sup>5</sup> Special note should be made of the fact that reason/revelation and nature/grace are the theological principles that tend to cause a rift between Protestant and Catholic theology, as well. Protestant theology is usually identified with an emphasis on grace and revelation, while Catholic moral theology is generally associated with an emphasis on human reason and human nature. In the debate regarding the specificity and universality of ethics, however, it is of no little significance that reason/revelation and nature/grace do *not* serve as the dividing line between Protestant and Catholic ethicists.

Christian ethical content is the historical fact of God's initiative, God's call to salvation, which requires specific conduct in the Christian response to salvation.

In recent discussions, relatively few moral theologians defend the position that Christian ethics is specifically, or exclusively, Christian in regard to content. Rather, the prevailing view tends to be that which maintains a limited specificity to moral theology with an overarching emphasis on what is universal in human ethics. The danger with the development of an exclusively Christian ethic, according to most moral theologians, is that the ethics of the Christian community will have no bearing on the ethics of the world at large. The term "Christian" added to "ethics" may imply that the ethics proposed by the Christian community are for the Christian community alone, while the rest of the world will have to figure out its own ethics. Christian ethics, however, does not imply that only Christians live this way. Therefore, moral theology seeks to develop a Christian ethic that has universal implications that are common for all human beings, not just for Christians. The solution to the problem of maintaining a balance between the specificity and universality of Christian ethics has tended to be a denial of specifically Christian ethical content, while still developing moral theology based on various theological models and principles. The theological concepts used, however, are less focused on specifically Christian values, norms, principles, and ideals; the greater concern is for universal aspects of human nature throughout all ages, cultures, times, and places.

Rather than providing a comprehensive examination of the enormous amount of literature on the subject of the universality and specificity of Christian ethics, I have tried to identify the general positions given as responses to the issue. Moral theologians are faced with the task of providing a distinctively Christian approach to moral formation and

development that has relevance for the secular world. Finding the appropriate balance between the specificity and universality of moral theology seems a daunting task, indeed. While many Catholic moral theologians have developed ethics which focus on nature and reason as fundamental to the moral enterprise, others have emphasized revelation and grace as essential for determining appropriate Christian moral formation and development. The traditional natural law approach attempts to address both the emphasis on natural reason as well as give genuine consideration to revelation and grace in the moral life of the Christian. In this way, the natural law tradition seeks to present a balanced approach to the question of universality and specificity in moral theology. I shall now provide a general examination of the traditional natural law approach.

## II. Natural Law and Roman Catholic Moral Theology: Universal, Not Specific

By its very nature the Catholic moral tradition is concerned with not only the moral life of Catholics or Christians in general, but with the common good of humankind. In its drive for universalism in ethics, Catholic moral theology has used the natural law tradition, based on the fundamental concept of the doctrine of creation, as its primary approach to moral theology. Because it is based on a theological vision of creation, what seems to be a specifically Christian principle serves as the foundation for a universally relevant ethic. The problem with this approach is that it retains little of the specifically Christian principles upon which Christian ethics are founded, in favor of more universal principles that appeal to the broader human society. The Christian message risks being diluted to ordinary human ethics, and all humans who strive for the good are classified as “anonymous Christians.”

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church traditionally relied on natural law theories, based on the doctrine of creation, for moral theology. The form that the natural law took was that of a natural morality available to the knowledge of all rational persons. Reason was (and remains) important for moral theology, particularly because it moves the human person from the natural and created world to the divine. The order of the created world shows the human being the all-knowing Orderer who created it. The goal is a universal apprehension of “the good” in a morality that can be understood and accepted by the whole of humanity, Christians and non-Christians. The further goal of moral theology is certitude, and reason can attain certitude in morality by following right reason. The focus is on human nature itself, but historicity and change within human existence generally tends to be neglected. The natural law tradition suggests that Christian ethics can rely on reason, looking at the created order as an expression of God’s goodness and divine will for humanity, as the primary source for moral truth. At the same time, according to the natural law tradition, reason is used most effectively when informed by faith.

At times, however, the goal of universality has overshadowed the specifically Christian elements of moral theology. In his work that examines the debate regarding the specificity of Christian ethics, John Mahoney criticizes contemporary moral theology for aiming too directly at identification with humanist ethics based on a natural law approach that emphasizes reason and nature to the detriment of revelation and grace. By neglecting specifically Christian principles, particularly the significance of Scripture, he states, “What would then be specific to Christian ethics, rendering it distinctive from human ethics, would be simply its confirming the content of human ethics and at the

same time adding considerations to intensify both the motivation and the urgency of human ethical considerations.”<sup>6</sup> At times the natural law tradition has been abused to the point that it seems as though reason, common to all of humanity, is the sole and sufficient arbiter of moral deliberation. From this standpoint, revelation serves only to correct human failings that hinder the natural exercise of ordinary human reason. This relegates Christian ethics to merely “humanist ethics.” Humanist ethics imply that the best the human person can do is actuate oneself as an authentic human being, which can be accomplished adequately through the right use of reason. By accentuating the capacity of human reason, Christian ethics is in danger of setting aside the presence of revelation and grace, which are as much a part of the human condition as are sin, nature, and reason.

Largely based on one aspect of Aquinas’ theology and philosophy, the natural law tradition underscores the importance of reason, often to the extent that revelation is neglected almost completely. According to this interpretation of Aquinas, Scripture adds nothing to natural law and nothing that human reason could not attain on its own, in principle. The impetus in moral theology, therefore, is to minimize the difference between moral philosophy and moral theology in order to develop a Christian ethic that has more universal implications. Christian morality is viewed as human morality at its best, or human morality which has reached its fullest potential in the authentication of the self. Reason and nature are sufficient for arriving at moral truth. As Mahoney suggests, one of problems with this approach to Christian ethics is that “it appears to presuppose a clear and adequate distinction between reason and revelation, and underlying that, between nature and grace, whereas recent thinking in other areas of modern theology

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<sup>6</sup> John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987): 338.

tends to regard all reality and historical experience as a source of divine revelation and as bathed in grace, whether consciously or not.”<sup>7</sup> Mahoney suggests that, rather than the classicist approach of natural law morality, a more adequate interpretation of Aquinas would emphasize the interrelation of moral theology and moral philosophy, and thus a closer association between reason and revelation, and nature and grace.

On the one hand, if reason and nature are imbued with revelation and grace, it seems as though all human beings are anonymous Christians. Whether or not they are conscious of their transcendental orientation as a basic decision for or orientation toward (or away from) God, all human beings are invited by God and obligated to respond. If revelation and grace subsume reason and nature, Christian ethics faces the further danger that all of human ethics will be classified as “anonymous Christian” ethics. On the other hand, while Christian ethics may draw from and engage with philosophical, humanist, or rational ethics, moral theology must acknowledge that human nature includes more than just reason alone. Indeed, if Christian ethics is to be Christian, it cannot rely on merely universal principles or ideals, because the ideal of human nature without grace neglects the reality of the supernatural end of all of humankind. Therefore, for a Christian ethic to be truly Christian, it must acknowledge “twin sources of action, the natural and the supernatural so in the sphere of moral knowledge man has two resources of information, his natural reason and supernatural Revelation.”<sup>8</sup>

While the natural law presents many beneficial reflections for Christian ethics (such as universal appeal to what is the common “essence” of all human persons), a

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<sup>7</sup> Mahoney: 338.

<sup>8</sup> Mahoney: 103.

moral theology based on the natural law is not sufficient for an ethic that seeks to reflect on the reality of the specifically Christian aspects of the human person. One concern with the natural law approach to Christian ethics is that it fails to recognize that “God’s goodness in the world is still confined by human finitude, sinfulness, and nonconformity to the fullness of God’s reign.”<sup>9</sup> A moral theology that ignores the reality of sin and grace, and the significance of revelation, does not address adequately the reality of the human condition: living *in* the natural world, but living *for* the supernatural end that is not fully present here and now. Philosophical ethics, purely natural law ethics, and human ethics are not sufficient for the development of Christian ethics because they do not account fully for the reality of the human condition. As Karl Rahner suggests, there are not two histories, but the one history of the human being that is salvation history. The human being lives in salvation history, and non-Christian ethics do not account for the supernatural destiny of all humankind, but only for the natural or earthly end of the human being. Christian ethics transcend human ethics because they see the transcendent reality of the human situation. While ordinary human morality contends that the human becomes most fully human by actualizing herself beyond mere existence, Christian ethics calls the person to more than mere authentication of human nature. Christian ethics is a “maximalist” ethics that calls the person to go beyond the minimum human action required by ordinary rational or human ethics; the person is called to transcend human nature and to strive for the supernatural end of salvation history.

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<sup>9</sup> Charles E. Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999): 16. Much of Curran’s work echoes traditional Protestant critiques of the Catholic natural law tradition.

Natural law theories tend to neglect the powerful effects of sin, viewed as alienation from God rather than the acts themselves, in the world. More significantly, natural law theories tend to ignore the reality of the supernatural destiny of the human person. History is seen as the place in which the “authentication of selfhood” occurs, rather than the place in which salvation is begun, yet not fulfilled. Because they begin with the person, the danger of relying on natural law theories for Christian ethics is that morality will move “too quickly, rapidly, and easily from the human to the divine.”<sup>10</sup>

In addition, one cannot abstract “pure” human nature from the reality of the human condition as we know it, and have always known it since the beginning of creation. Grace and sin must be considered as essential aspects of the human condition, as well. The human person’s moral knowledge is limited by sin, but also assisted by grace. The human cannot fully attain moral knowledge without the assistance of grace. Without God’s invitation to respond in a basic orientation toward “the good” as understood by ordinary human morality, the human person would only be able to attain a limited version of the good, the natural human good rather than the supernatural good that is God. Natural law approaches that deny specifically Christian ethical content do not prove convincingly that human morality can come to the same conclusions of Christian morality. How can reason arrive at the same conclusions as the specifically Christian ideals of the Cross, suffering, the love of enemies, “turning the other cheek,” and other values that Christians maintain as distinctive in their ethics?

Following the Second Vatican Council, moral theology has moved from the classicist notion of natural law to historical consciousness. This has led to greater

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<sup>10</sup> Curran: 40.

dialogue with other Christians as well as non-Christians throughout broader human society. *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium* address the Church, but more importantly they address the Church as a part of the world, not as set apart from the world. The Church believes that salvation is for all people, and thus it expresses its solidarity with the whole human family through a renewed theology that demonstrates a unique responsibility to and care for all of God's creation. While the Catholic Church acknowledges that there are common elements essential to the very nature of the human person as person, however, moral theology cannot address the person merely in essentialist terms. Rather, moral theology recognizes the Christian person as both person and Christian, and thus must speak to the Christian in light of this specifically religious identity.

Far from denying the significance of rational approaches to morality, contemporary Christian ethics, particularly in the Catholic Church, reflects more the historical consciousness of the human condition and approaches the human person in light of the person's varied relationships throughout (and with) the world. While these perceptions of the human person can be understood by reason, however, Christian ethics must not begin with "pure" human nature as the primary locus of morality. Rather, Christian ethics must interpret the reality of revelation and grace in the moral order alongside nature and reason.

Catholic moral theology continues to accept the important contributions of the natural law, but it incorporates them into the totality of the human experience. Natural law approaches to morality are not to be discarded from contemporary moral theology, but they must be considered in light of the most prominent principles and values

distinctive of Christian faith. “Pure” reason is no longer the primary source for Catholic moral theology, for faith, grace, and Jesus Christ must have a greater role in the Christian moral life. Human reason and creation are sources of wisdom and knowledge, but these must be considered within the broader approach that recognizes the reality of the presence of sin and grace as revealed in the Scriptures and the figure of Jesus Christ. Grace and nature, as well as revelation and reason, are considered in a balanced relationship that was lacking in classic natural law approaches. Faith, grace, and the figure of Jesus Christ must be the center and focus of contemporary moral theology.

In light of this view of human history, all ethics must more fully recognize the reality of sin and grace in the human condition. Moral theology is concerned not primarily with human behavior, but with the kind of person whose life is a reflection of her beliefs and religious convictions. Ultimately, moral theology is concerned with the salvation of the human person, which is not attained through acts alone, nor faith alone, but through the kind of person and the kind of life that is lived in conjunction with one’s convictions regarding one’s relationship with God and one’s location within the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the human person must be considered not only as a sinner, but also as redeemed through Christ. While the Christian and the non-Christian can share the same intentions, dispositions, values, and behavior, the inner motivation of the Christian person is specifically Christian and thus produces extrinsic actions that are human (in terms of being possible by all human beings universally), but distinctively Christian (in terms of reflecting that which is generally associated with the particular group of individuals identifying themselves as Christians). In other words, while the Christian and non-Christian can share the same morality in appearance, the intrinsically Christian aspect of

the Christian person instantiates itself in extrinsic attitudes and actions that are specifically Christian because those intentions, dispositions, values, etc. stem from a person who recognizes herself as both sinful and redeemed, both human and Christian. The Christian understands oneself as a person living in, with, and through Christ.

With Jesus Christ as central to the discussion, however, one can see a transformation of the conversation. Rather than a concern for what is specific and universal about Christian ethics, the focus is on how Jesus Christ's relationship with God and with humanity fundamentally alters the way that we understand the meaning and task of moral formation and moral development for the Christian individual and Christian community in conversation with the world at large. The question is not focused on whether or not moral theology can be specifically Christian and at the same time universal. Rather, the question is how the person of Jesus Christ has a distinctive and specific significance for the moral formation of the Christian community, in terms of content as well as motivation. Only after the distinctiveness of Christian ethics has been established can one address the further issue, which is a concern for how the Christian community that lives according to the imitation of the life of Jesus Christ, in authentic discipleship, can contribute to the moral dialogue with the secular world in a way that can have universal implications while still maintaining an adherence to the specific principles of the Christian community that lives in assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ. The identity of the Christian person is derived from one's discipleship in Jesus Christ. Therefore, if Jesus Christ is not central to the discussion, then all ethics is merely human ethics, and all action is merely human action, regardless of one's religious affiliation.

My reservation regarding a traditional natural law approach to Christian ethics is that such a position tends to appraise inadequately the figure of Jesus Christ in moral theology. Jesus Christ is not merely, or even primarily, a human being who shows us how to live as authentic human beings. According to Christian faith, Jesus Christ is both fully divine and fully human at the same time. Jesus shows us authentic personhood, but also the reality of the divine life, and God's intentions for humanity. The importance of Jesus Christ for moral theology is, in part, that Christ shows the aspirations of the person of faith who seeks the supernatural destiny of participation in the divine life. Because they start with human nature, natural law theologians often place too much emphasis on humanity, both in terms of human beings and the human aspects of Jesus Christ, with too little recognition of the divine nature, in creation and in the person of Jesus Christ. A truly Christian ethic must show greater appreciation for divine love and God's offer of grace to humanity that invites and requires human response. The person of Jesus Christ in Christian ethics must be considered in terms of both human and divine nature, for both are significant for Christian ethical reflection and moral deliberation.

If an ethic is to be truly Christian, it must be based on specifically Christian principles, values, or ideals that address the reality of the human condition. The human person lives in history, but this history is the history of salvation. The human person is not merely nature, but engraced nature. The human person does not come to moral truth through reason alone, but through revelation, through reason informed by faith. Natural law is not enough to help the person come to moral knowledge. In fact, Jesus Christ is the measure of our natural law, so the natural law must be considered only in relation to the revelation of God's relationship to humanity in the person of Jesus Christ.

Rather than using reason/revelation or nature/grace as the starting point for Christian ethics, moral theology must begin with the person of Jesus Christ as the fundamental source for Christian moral formation and development. For moral theologians who affirm the specificity of Christian ethics, morality cannot be equated with an elevated form of universal human ethics because Christian ethics is based on specifically Christian principles. Indeed, fundamental to all Christian ethics and moral theology is the person of Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ is viewed as God's call to humanity, then the Christian person is responsible for responding to God's initiative. What a specifically Christian ethic adds to universal human ethics in a "responsibility" model is a newness in response to God's initiative in the historical fact of God's salvific love, given in the historical fact of the person of Jesus Christ. The Christian is characterized by a transformation: the Christian is a new creature in Christ Jesus, and this experience of faith reveals the true nature of the person to oneself. Not only is this experience of faith revelatory, but it is also transformative because the experience leads to renewed activity formed in the imitation of Jesus Christ. The Christian is motivated to respond to God's initiative in the covenant between God and humanity in Jesus Christ, because the goal of the Christian life is no longer the "natural," as is the goal of universal human ethics. The Christian has the specifically religious motivation to respond to God's salvific work because the goal is the supernatural realm. Without the supernatural goal of salvation in Jesus Christ, the human being would not be able to attain salvation by one's own "moral effort" using reason or other "natural" human resources. As such, all authentic ethics are Christian ethics because grace is present even without being expressed explicitly as faith in Jesus Christ. The reliance on the motivational aspect of

Jesus Christ for Christian morality, however, is not an adequate description of the moral significance of Jesus Christ for moral theology. Nor is the claim that grace is at work even for those who do not have explicit faith in Jesus Christ a satisfactory depiction of the importance of religious principles, based on our fundamental convictions in the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, for the moral life of the Christian community.

I agree with the traditional natural law position that some aspects of the content of Christian ethics can be known by the person through the right use of reason. I also agree that the specificity of Christian ethics does not lie exclusively in the actual behavior of the Christian person, given the similarity between the actions of Christians and non-Christians. I would suggest, however, that Christian ethics necessarily must have some specifically Christian elements not shared in common with a merely universal or humanist ethic. Christians and non-Christians can, and do, share similar intentions, dispositions, values, and behaviors. Christians, however, act according to specific principles based on a faith or certain convictions that cannot be fully understood or realized by reason alone. Although I see the benefits of developing a more universal ethic, as suggested by those theologians who argue against specificity, the merits of Christian ethics that argue for a specifically Christian moral theology cannot be overlooked in a truly Christian ethic. If ethics is to be authentically Christian ethics, then the figure of Jesus Christ must be central to the discussion.

Catholic moral theology is faced with the dilemma of striking a balance between an approach to Christian ethics that relies on Scripture and tradition alone as the sources for specifically Christian moral theology and an approach that relies primarily on the right use of reason to guide the person in moral deliberation. I suggest that a third

approach is available within Catholic moral theology itself. An authentically Christocentric moral theology is one in which all of the sources for Christian ethics are given a prominent role in the moral formation and development of the Christian person and community. The person of Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human. We learn of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ through the Scriptures and tradition, and yet Jesus Christ can also be understood as assisting and informing human reason through His continued presence in the ongoing life of the community guided by the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the revelation God and the revelation of humanity to itself. Jesus Christ offers grace, and at the same time is the acceptance of God's grace by and for humanity. All Christians, Catholic and Protestant alike, hold the person of Jesus Christ as central to the life of faith and grace. Rather than turning to the Scriptures and tradition *or* reason and experience as the primary sources for the development of Christian morality, I suggest that Jesus Christ is the fundamental source, principle, and norm for Christian moral formation.

This suggests a third approach to moral theology, in which Jesus Christ is the central concern for the moral development of the Christian individual and Christian community. This third approach upholds specifically Christian principles and values which cannot be established by human reason or experience alone. The significance of the person of Jesus Christ for the divine-human relationship cannot be understood by reason alone. Indeed, revelation and grace must not have secondary roles to reason and human nature, for the human condition is neither *natura pura* nor simply redeemed. Through the person of Jesus Christ the Christian comes to understand that every human being living in salvation history lives within the situation of sin, grace, and redemption.

In this sense, Christian ethics is both universal and specifically Christian, for the truth of human existence is the truth of engraced nature, whether or not one explicitly understands life as such a state of existence.

Can a Christocentric approach to moral theology maintain the distinctiveness of a Christian ethic, particularly one with specifically Catholic commitments, while still having influence and application to universal morality? Catholic moral theology does not need to look far in order to find such a Christocentric ethic. Indeed, not only *can* such a moral theology exist, but indeed one already exists within the Catholic tradition itself, in the Christocentric moral theology of Bernard Häring.

### III. Jesus Christ Is the Answer

In conjunction with the first approach to Christian ethics that argues for the specificity of the Christian content of ethics, Häring's Christocentric approach to moral theology suggests that Christian moral behavior expresses the faith that is exclusive to the Christian believer. Unlike the first approach, however, this third option contends that all human actions are not equivalent to Christian actions. Rather, human actions are human actions, although they may at times share certain characteristics with specifically Christian actions. Likewise, Häring's Christocentric approach contends, in accordance with the second approach, that the behavior of the Christian is not exclusive entirely to the Christian, as non-Christians can and do have similar intentions, dispositions, and behavior. At the same time, however, the Christocentric approach to moral theology claims that the principles and values of the Christian person are unique to the Christian and therefore lead to distinctively Christian moral behavior specific to the Christian.

More than merely a motivational difference between Christian and non-Christian action, Häring's position argues for a different material and formal content to Christian ethics that is not available completely to the non-Christian. That is to say, non-Christians are capable of a moral epistemology similar to that of the Christian to a certain extent, but Häring is careful to point out that the content of non-Christian morality is somewhat limited. While the non-Christian can engage in actions similar to those of the Christian, Häring says that the moral formation of the Christian takes place in a different way than that of the non-Christian. For Häring, all authentic Christian acts are specifically religious-moral acts, for the moral life cannot be utterly separated from the religious life of the Christian. More specifically, the Christian moral life cannot be understood or lived apart from the imitation of the life of Jesus Christ.

Häring's approach to the specificity of Christian ethics suggests that what is unique to Christian ethics is the content of ethics, namely, the faith that instills particular values and principles that cannot be known or understood adequately through human reason or any other human capacity without the assistance of grace and revelation. Likewise, the actual conduct of the Christian also is specifically Christian because it is based on specific values and principles which the Christian chooses to uphold in living a new lifestyle consistent with these beliefs. Christian moral content is specific to Christian ethics, and in keeping with this content, the Christian person chooses to live in a particular way in which these values and principles are evident to all who encounter the Christian person. While Christian ethics have some specific values and principles distinctive of those ethics, ordinary human values and principles do not conflict with those of the Christian. Rather, the Christian respects the precepts of a shared human

morality, but the life of the Christian is distinguished by the values and virtues distinctive to the Christian community. Thus, the Christian and the non-Christian can and do share similar intentions, dispositions, values, and behaviors (such as in the life of virtue), but those of the Christian are distinctively Christian due to the unique content of theological convictions that are foundational for the Christian moral-religious life.

For instance, a person may choose to perform an act that can be considered morally right or “good” by any observer. In performing this action, the person may be acting on various principles, but in each moral action the person transcends one’s self to become “more fully human.” For the non-Christian, the good or right moral action is simply one which allows the individual to actualize oneself as a person. For the Christian, however, this same exact action is both the actualization of human personhood *and* an expression of faith-based values and principles unique to the Christian.

Häring presents the person of Jesus Christ as the fundamental revelation of who God is for humankind. Thus, according to his view, the figure of Jesus Christ is essential to any moral theology seeking to understand humanity in relation to God. Häring moves beyond the natural law tradition generally espoused within Roman Catholic moral theology which, as we have seen, emphasizes reason rather than focusing primarily and fundamentally on the person of Jesus Christ. While Häring allows room for the role of reason and moral epistemology in his ethic, the role that these play in moral deliberation are secondary to the importance of Jesus Christ in moral theology.

According to Häring, Jesus Christ reveals charity as the source of Christian witness to the gracious gift of God manifest in Christ, and this love is expressed in the spiritual life of the Christian through outward actions of love toward the neighbor. For

Häring, Christian ethics is Christian precisely because it is based on the person of Jesus Christ as the exemplar of human action and the very being of authentic humanity. Christian ethics is accessible to those outside of the Christian faith, however, precisely because actions performed in charity are authentically human actions, whether the agent is Christian or not. The moral formation in which the person develops the virtues, however, takes place in the particular community of the Church for the Christian person, whereas the non-Christian person can attain to the same content for Christian moral development only in a limited way.

Christ reveals God's command, as well as the virtues by which only the Christian can witness to the life of the person of Jesus Christ in the Christian community.

According to Häring, however, the most significant aspect of the life of Jesus Christ is that He reveals God's relationship with humanity. Ultimately, the God revealed in Jesus Christ is the God of love. In Häring's moral theology, Jesus Christ also reveals authentic humanity; thus, humanity knows itself as sinful, but also as infinitely loved by God the Father who reveals Himself in Christ Jesus. While Jesus Christ is the wholly obedient human being, according to Häring, His main role in Christian ethics is to reveal infinite love and to teach humanity the right way to live. Thus, Jesus Christ functions, in part, as prototype, model, and example for humanity.<sup>11</sup>

The authentic human response to God who reveals God's self in the person of Jesus Christ is one of love of self, love of neighbor, and love of God. The entire life of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is a life of service. The Son obeys the command of the

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<sup>11</sup> The way in which Häring examines the ethical significance of Jesus Christ will be developed and more fully documented in subsequent chapters, but for now it is important to lay the groundwork for Häring's vision of the role of Jesus Christ in Christian moral formation as a viable "third approach" to the question of specificity and universality in moral theology.

Father not out of a desire to keep the law or command of God, but out of pure sacrificial and obedient love for the Father. This love is expressed in his service to others, and this life of charity serves as an example of how the Christian is to live in assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is our model for the authentically human action of love for neighbor and love of self, and thereby love of God. For Häring, Jesus Christ continues to dwell in the heart of the Christian by the promise of the Holy Spirit as the guide for the Christian life. The Christian life is not merely one of obedience to the divine command, but one of authentic charity toward the God who is revealed as love in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ calls us to “Abide in” him and to “Love others” as he has loved us; that is, the Christian life of assimilation to Jesus Christ is lived in joyful service to others and with gratitude to God. In Häring’s moral theology, the person of Jesus Christ serves as the example of who and what we can be as authentic human beings in the world. Rather than merely knowledge or openness to the command of God, Jesus Christ gives us his life of loving service as an example of how we are called to live, how we *can* live, and what a life of loving service entails. The Christian response to this love is through actions that emulate Jesus’ life of service.

For Häring, a person can act toward an object (person, perceived good, etc.) because of a command or a law that tells the person that the object is good. Only when the person acts toward this object because he or she recognizes its innate goodness, however, is the person acting freely. According to Häring, then, freedom is not the capacity to say “yes” to a command, but to act toward something in an authentically human way, which is by recognizing something as good and therefore acting toward that good out of an affective response, which then employs reason to attain the good in

question. The Christian and the non-Christian alike can see something as good, and can act toward attaining that good. What makes the action distinctively Christian, according to Häring, is more than merely the motivation behind acting toward that good. The difference for Häring seems to be that the Christian acts in true freedom because the Christian has the Holy Spirit as his guide. The Christian recognizes the innate value within the object towards which he acts as having Jesus Christ as its source, norm, and principle. In Häring's moral theology, what distinguishes the Christian action toward the good from that of the non-Christian, then, is that the Christian's response to value is grounded in an entire life lived as a moral-religious response to God's offer of grace made known and accepted in the person of Jesus Christ.

In their contributions to the specificity/universality conversation following Vatican Council II, theologians such as Karl Rahner and Josef Fuchs seek to provide an alternative to the traditional natural law approach to moral theology. In their work, they argue for the importance of the fundamental option in moral deliberation. Fuchs and Rahner contend that the transcendental aspect of the human person is the specifically Christian element in Christian ethics. Thus, at the transcendental level, the basic orientation of the person is either for or against God, in a momentary decision that informs consequent action once and for all. The fundamental orientation of the person is the basis of a "Christian intentionality" that is the specifically Christian ethical content of Christian morality. Although the categorical acts of the Christian are shared in common with the non-Christian person and are not specifically Christian, the transcendental element of the Christian is distinctively Christian, according to Rahner and Fuchs.<sup>12</sup> At

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<sup>12</sup> See especially Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), as well as his "The Theological Dimension of the Question

the same time, however, they further contend that non-Christians can achieve the same transcendental orientation toward or away from the invitation of God, so the specifically Christian aspect of the transcendental level can be considered “anonymous” Christianity for the non-Christian who does not state explicitly her faith in Jesus Christ. Fuchs and Rahner found their work on more humanistic or philosophical principles rather than on purely religious convictions. What Jesus Christ adds to human morality is more of a motivation for right use of reason rather than a fundamentally new or radical content for Christian morality. Häring responds that theologies in which religion merely is added, or secondary, to shared human morality inadequately present the necessity of religious convictions for Christian moral formation and ongoing moral development.

Like many other theologians after the Second Vatican Council, Häring maintains a distinct concern for the fundamental option in the moral formation of the person. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, Häring emphasizes that the moral formation of the Christian person requires a fundamental option, or basic orientation, that is developed throughout the ongoing and explicit conversion of the life of the Christian to the life of Jesus Christ. The fundamental option is thus not a once and for all decision, for Häring; rather, it is an ongoing process of development and enrichment of the Christian person whose entire life is lived in continual development and conversion to the life of Jesus Christ. For Häring, then, the fundamental option is the response to value

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About Man” in *Theological Investigations, Vol XVII: Jesus, Man, and the Church* (Helicon Press, 1981). See also Josef Fuchs, “Is There a Distinctively Christian Morality?” in his *Personal Responsibility and Christian Morality* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1983): 53-68; Fuchs, “Christian Morality: Biblical Orientation and Human Evaluation” in his *Christian Morality: The Word Becomes Flesh* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1987): 3-18; Fuchs, “Natural Law or Naturalistic Fallacy?” in his *Moral Demands and Personal Obligations* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1993): 30-51. Fuchs’ work draws heavily from the theology of Karl Rahner, particularly in light of Rahner’s development of the fundamental option.

given throughout the development of the life of Christian virtue specifically shaped by the life of Jesus Christ.

While all human beings have the capacity to accept or reject God's love in some way, the Christian person recognizes in the life of Jesus Christ the vocation of a life of service to God. Häring distinguishes between categorical acts and transcendental acts in the Christian moral life. Therefore, even if not all of our acts on the categorical level are directed toward loving service to God and to others, our transcendental acts toward participation in the triune life of God can lead to a transformation of our hearts. Thus, when we have made the fundamental option to respond to God's love with our own acts of loving service, we can convert our hearts so that doing good categorical acts will become easier and less burdensome. The conversion of our lives, when our hearts are turned from stone into flesh, takes place when we follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and when we try to emulate his life in our own lives.

For Häring, the Christian life is one of love, first and foremost. The spirit with which the person serves others and acts lovingly toward the neighbor is the indwelling of Christ. The Christian is being-in-Christ, following the example of Christ and the teachings that Christ has given in his life of service and love. Rather than being slaves to the law, Christians are called to bear the light yoke of Christ by doing works in a spirit of love and solidarity. Thus, the distinctively Christian life is one that has been shaped by this conversion through the transforming presence of Jesus Christ in the person's life. This leads to a life of continued growth and conversion through the spiritual transformation of our present lives.

Häring thus moves beyond natural law morality within the Catholic moral tradition, yet he maintains important aspects of the older Catholic tradition at the same time. Häring views the distinctive aspect of Christian ethics as this life of constant conversion of heart through loving service to the other and to God. The Christian in Häring's moral theology can attain the knowledge of what love concretely involves through reason. Jesus Christ provides the motivations and the zeal for doing the good out of genuine love for the God who is revealed in the life of faithful, loving service by Jesus Christ. What makes Christian ethics distinctively Christian for Häring, however, is that Christian moral formation requires a specifically religious-moral response to God's offer of grace. That is to say, the Christian identifies herself as a disciple of Jesus Christ first and foremost; she is a Christian disciple, and all actions that issue from this life of discipleship are transformed as the loving response to God's offer of grace in the person of Jesus Christ. What is most important in Häring's Christocentric moral theology is that the Christian life is not distinctively, or even specifically, Christian only in terms of the external actions of the Christian person; rather, the inner dispositions, attitudes, and principles of the Christian person are continually converted to the loving and obedient will of Jesus Christ. The two aspects of Häring's moral theology that are distinctively Christian are the referent or motivation for our loving service and the shape of the life converted through the figure of Jesus Christ due to the specifically Christian convictions which form and shape the person according to the life of Jesus Christ.

While Häring does not deny that non-Christians can do good deeds and act lovingly, then, he contends that the Christian acts lovingly because of a fundamental love for God who is revealed as the all-loving God who acts for humanity in the person of

Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ points to a life of loving service toward others as the way that God is for humanity. Therefore, the Christian vocation is to perform acts of love, which come from a heart that is constantly converted to the life of love. The actions of a Christian person (as opposed to a non-Christian person) are acts that have been transformed because of their reference to the God who has been revealed as a God of love in the person of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the Christian attains to a different kind of knowledge of what is Ultimate Value in the religious-moral response to God's offer of grace. While non-Christians can live a virtuous life and can recognize the value of that which lies outside of the self, Häring insists that the Christian comprehends in the value of another the Ultimate Value that is the source and principle of value, namely, Jesus Christ. Häring believes that the Christian person cannot know the meaning of "God is love" until or unless he or she has been transformed by the experience of the love of God. One cannot love unless one has had the experience of being loved. While Häring believes that all persons have been loved and redeemed in the Father's gracious gift of the Son, only the Christian experiences this love, this indwelling of the Spirit, as a transformation of the heart into a response of loving service to the one who has loved us. The experience of God's transforming love leads to a response of gratitude and love in joyful and faithful service to God through a life of loving service to others. This response of love is possible by all people, because all people have been loved by God, as shown in the life of love of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The complete or authentic life of love, however, is unique to the Christian who understands Jesus Christ as the fundamental meaning of God's love for humanity and humanity's loving response to God. In the life of charity, the Christian

not only understands himself as a new kind of person, a disciple of Jesus Christ, but also understands that his life is a participation in the divine life of the triune God.

The person of Jesus Christ is the crucial figure who reveals God as the God who is *for* humanity by giving all people the grace and the freedom to respond to this grace. For Häring, Christian ethics is distinctive because Jesus Christ reveals the affective desire to serve God and others in love, as a response to the experience of the love of God, the gracious gift of the Son of God. More than merely a motivation for action, Jesus Christ serves as a new way of understanding the divine-human relationship and one's own participation in that relationship in the life of the imitation of Christ. Häring's Christian ethic leads to a transforming conversion of heart in loving response to the experience of the love of God in Jesus Christ. For this reason, Häring also insists that Christian ethics must not be concerned with the penitential rite which focuses on the individual and the confessor. Rather, he contends that moral theology must emphasize the role of Christian practice in the formation of the Christian moral-religious life. Perhaps the most important aspect of Häring's Christocentric moral theology that deserves renewed attention is his focus on the moral life of the Christian as inseparable from the religious life of the Christian. Moral theology cannot discuss the moral life without examining the religious life; likewise, the religious life of the Christian cannot be understood apart from the moral life. These aspects of Häring's Christocentric moral theology will be discussed with much greater detail in subsequent chapters.

While Häring's moral theology provides an attractive vision of the Christian moral life, it does raise certain questions that must be addressed if we are to appropriate his work for contemporary moral theology. Häring's moral theology has not been fully

integrated into Roman Catholic ethics. One problem with Häring's ethic is that it does not seem to locate the context of our experience of God within a particular social location. While he allows for dialogue with non-Christians, Häring does not indicate the form in which this particular communication can or should take place. At this point, we may see a point of fruitful contact between Protestant ethics and contemporary Roman Catholic moral theology. Protestant Christian ethicists emphasize the importance of the Christian community that is the Church. Only in the community of the Church can the individual learn how to follow the way of Jesus Christ by hearing and living the narrative of Jesus Christ. Protestant ethics can contribute to the re-appropriation of Häring's moral theology by giving moral theology a particular social context or location in which ecumenical dialogue can and must take place. While agreeing with Häring's emphasis on a person's motivation toward the good being found in authentic freedom, experienced specifically through having the Holy Spirit as the guide for the individual, what Protestant ethics adds to Häring's moral theology implies a social ethic as well. At the same time, while Roman Catholic moral theology can learn from various aspects of Protestant ethics, I contend that Roman Catholic thought can also contribute to a reassessment of specifically Catholic commitments when the ethical significance of Jesus Christ takes the place of primary importance in Catholic moral theology.

#### IV. Ecumenical Dialogue: Stanley Hauerwas' Contributions to Christocentric Ethics

The noted Protestant ethicist Stanley Hauerwas serves as a particularly helpful interlocutor for Häring's Christocentric moral theology. While Hauerwas is not representative of mainstream Protestant ethics, and indeed he intends *not* to be considered

as such, Hauerwas' Christian ethic provides an important example of how the figure of Jesus Christ can be given a more prominent role in moral theology. Hauerwas envisions a Christian community in which the community's seeing and hearing of the world is shaped by the narrative of the Scriptures. The Christian is not meant to change the world, but to announce to the world that Jesus Christ has made possible a new social order. For Hauerwas' ethic, then, the person of Jesus Christ serves as an example and teacher for the Christian community, for how the Christian community is to embody the virtues of the Christian disciple.

The most significant aspect of the Christian ethics of Hauerwas is its emphasis on character. Thus, Christian ethics ought to be concerned primarily with the agent, rather than the act, when discussing moral issues. Throughout much of the history of moral theology, the act has been the primary focus for ethical deliberation, with little attention to the agent who performs the action. Hauerwas views this lack of focus on the agent as a threat to the integrity of Christian ethics. The moral act cannot be considered adequately without reference to the acting person who acts according to a specific intention, pursuing a particular end, under certain circumstances. Therefore, Hauerwas' greatest contribution to Christian ethics is his emphasis on the importance of character in the way that the Christian community shapes the virtue of the individual within the community.<sup>13</sup>

Hauerwas also highlights the importance of the historicity of the person as essential for understanding Christian morality. According to Hauerwas, the agent who acts cannot be separated from her history, her narrative. Rather than determining the

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<sup>13</sup> Chapter Four of this project will develop the contact between the Christian ethics of Häring and Hauerwas at greater length, and will provide further documentation.

rightness or wrongness of an act, one must first look at the agent who performs the action in her whole history and narrative. Thus, the idea of virtue is central to the Christian ethics of Hauerwas. The community cannot be separated from the narrative; the individual cannot be understood apart from the community that shapes her; and, therefore, the person cannot be separated from the narrative that forms the individual as well as the community. The person who develops a specifically Christian character within the community not only acquires a new vision, but develops her virtues so as to attest to the narrative that shapes the community in which she lives, specifically, the narrative of the life and ministry, death and resurrection of the person Jesus Christ. The Christian adopts this narrative of the Christian community as her own.

The formation of the Christian person takes place in a community that is shaped by the particular story of Jesus Christ, the narrative of God's saving action for us. Rather than giving solutions to problems in the world, this narrative expresses the shape which the life of the Christian community is to take. Thus, the Christian is given a radical new vision of the world. The community of Christians is not called to change the world at large, but to witness to the narrative that shapes the community, the story of Jesus Christ. Most significantly, the truthfulness of the narrative is found in the witness of the Church. More than just speaking one truth among many, the Church is the witness of *the* truthfulness of the narrative, shown in the life of the community that lives the narrative in truth.

Hauerwas contends that the new social order that is attested to in the Christian narrative is specifically a peaceable kingdom. Because the vision of the Church is inherently one of peace, since it is shaped by the narrative of the person of peace who is

Jesus Christ, the Christian vision is unique. Separated from the world, the Church is the real peaceable kingdom, already in the world witnessing the truthfulness of the narrative which is one that gives the community the vision of peace. Because the Christian community is formed by the Scriptures, it attests to the new social order that is “already” and “real” in the life of the Church. Thus, Hauerwas separates the Church from the world at large.

In large measure, Hauerwas is reacting against a trend in moral theology to move to “universalizables,” an attempt to develop an ethic based on commonality, universal human principles common to all human experience (largely associated with the Catholic emphasis on natural law morality). According to Hauerwas, this is the wrong move for the Christian community to make. The modern mistake is to attempt to develop an ethic that is based on anything other than what is specifically Christian, which for Hauerwas is the particular narrative of the Christian community that is the particular story of the person of Jesus Christ. Rather than basing an ethic on what is universal human experience, according to Hauerwas, a truly Christian ethic is one which is distinctively Christian because it is grounded in and formed by the narrative which shapes a moral vision that cannot be understood outside of the narrative of Jesus Christ and the virtue developed by the Christian community that is witness to this story. The Christian story is not one that appeals to reason, but is one that relates the narrative of God’s choosing the community and the community’s attempts to embody that story in its life.

Any attempt to speak to the world at large using the language of the world, rather than the language of the Christian narrative, leads to an ethic that does not convey the truthfulness of the Christian story. For Hauerwas, then, truthfulness cannot be found in

reason or universal experience. Truthfulness is found in the Church alone, in the witness of the Church whose community life *is* the truthfulness of the “already real” Kingdom of God that is here and now. Unless this story has been adopted by the individual, the person cannot understand the truthfulness of the kingdom, and no language or stories or experiences common to all of humanity can make this particular story intelligible to one outside of the Christian community.

We shall have occasion later to examine Hauerwas’ views in greater detail, and to take account of criticisms of these views. At this point, however, I want to call attention to the similarities between Hauerwas’ views and Häring’s moral theology. At the same time, Hauerwas’ Christian ethic does present significant problems for Roman Catholic moral theology. Catholic moral theology seeks to be universal, as suggested by the meaning of “catholic” (universal) ethics. Roman Catholic ethics seeks to speak to all people, Catholics, Christians, and non-Christians alike. A sectarian-leaning ethic such as that presented by Hauerwas threatens to exclude those very people to whom the Catholic Church strives to speak, namely, those outside of the Church who have not embraced the faith of the Catholic Church. While Roman Catholic moral theology has found it difficult to balance the universality and the distinctiveness of Christian ethics, many of Hauerwas’ critics see him as presenting a too specifically isolationist Christian ethic that excludes those outside of the Church community.

According to Roman Catholic ethics, the purpose of the Church is to embody the Kingdom of God as already present, yet not fully complete in the present world. For Roman Catholicism, the Church is more than just a body of people that sustains the virtues of its members. The Church embodies the virtues necessary to attain the

kingdom, but the Church is primarily the embodiment of the kingdom already real and present, though not fully instantiated in the present. The Church is present for *all* people, not just Christians or specifically the Catholic Christians who are members of the Body of Christ. The Roman Catholic commitment is to service to and dialogue with society at large, not just those within the Church community. Thus, the ethic presented by Hauerwas may too fully separate the Church from service to and engagement with the world.

Nonetheless, Hauerwas' approach has much to offer Roman Catholic moral theology, and to Häring's theology in particular. As we shall see, he suggests a way of providing a social context to Häring's theology. In addition, his Christian ethic gives a prominent role to the Jewish community in the moral formation of the Christian community. The role of the people of Israel in Häring's moral theology, and much of Roman Catholic moral theology in general, is rather limited (at best) or altogether set aside. Hauerwas also provides a narrative language that is neglected throughout much of Häring's work. While Häring purports to be concerned for developing a moral theology based on the vision of wholeness given in the Scriptures and the life of Jesus Christ integrally considered, Häring's work largely focuses on key Scriptures and key aspects of Jesus Christ's life throughout his moral theology. Hauerwas' ethic provides an interesting and helpful counterpart to Häring's moral theology. All of these aspects of Häring's and Hauerwas' Christocentric ethics in conversation will be developed at greater length in the pages to come, but it is important to emphasize that Häring's Christocentric moral theology can benefit from the input of Hauerwas and other Protestant ethicists.

## V. Distinctively Catholic Christocentric Moral Theology: Specific and Universal

“Christ is the light of humanity,” and therefore all human beings are called to “union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and towards whom our whole life is directed.”<sup>14</sup> With these words the Roman Catholic Church makes clear its renewed focus on the figure of Jesus Christ in theology, with a particular emphasis on the importance of a Christocentric approach to moral theology. I suggest that Häring’s Christocentric ethic, in which Jesus Christ is the starting point, the center, and the end of moral theology, provides a fruitful springboard for the continued renewal of moral theology in the Catholic Church.

A genuinely Christocentric ethic examines not only a phenomenology of moral experience in light of a belief in Jesus Christ, but it analyzes Christ as the foundation for all ethics, universal and specific. To return to Walter’s distinction, the person of Jesus Christ has significance for *both* ethics and morality, that is, for the clarification of the fundamental moral principles of Christian life (ethics) and for the interpretation of how the Christian and the Christian community need to make moral judgments and to act in accordance with faith (morals).<sup>15</sup> Although the figure of Jesus Christ is a specifically Christian principle, value, or ideal, the Catholic Church suggests that grace, faith, and the person of Jesus Christ are the starting points of moral theology. At the same time, however, Christ’s salvation is universal: Jesus came to save all humankind, God’s grace is offered to all people, and faith is possible by all human beings. All persons live in

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<sup>14</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1; *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, Vol I*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992): 350.

<sup>15</sup> Walter: 93.

salvation history, in the created order of the natural, but the goal is the supernatural redemption that will come only at the end of time.

In this light, however, moral theology must be careful not to be too optimistic. As Curran says, “The danger in attempting to overcome a false dichotomy between the supernatural and the natural, between grace and the human, is to have no distinction — that is, that the eschaton will be collapsed and human sin forgotten. One acts as if the fullness of God’s reign is already present in this world.”<sup>16</sup> Rather than attributing all right moral action to “anonymous Christian” ethics, contemporary moral theology must recognize that all human beings strive for a supernatural destiny. The terms and reasons used to explain the supernatural destiny of all human beings, however, may have to incorporate a universal language according to the needs and comprehension of each individual person or community, whether believer or non-believer, Christian or non-Christian. At the same time, the Christian message of salvation must be witnessed to all persons throughout all times, but the universal language used to convey the good news of salvation to all humankind must not dilute the specifically Christian principles, values, and ideals to the extent that the message of salvation is no longer distinctive to the Christian community. Catholic moral theology acknowledges that specifically Christian principles are essential for moral theology, but they can be justified, or at least defended, in terms of the reason and experience of all human beings who seek moral truth. Distinctively Christian principles can be explained in universal terms, but Christian ethics must not become merely human ethics in its drive for universality. To be Christian is to be human, but being human is not the same thing as being explicitly Christian.

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<sup>16</sup>Curran: 42.

Rather than simply denying or affirming the specificity of Christian ethical content, a Christocentric approach to moral theology suggests that what is specifically Christian is the thematic and reflexive aspect of Christian ethics, and also the specific religious convictions that shape and form the person in the life of Christian discipleship. Therefore, the Christocentric approach to Christian ethics necessarily must incorporate revelation (the Scriptures and tradition) and grace into a fuller reflection on the human person's experience of the reality of God's presence and invitation in the figure of Jesus Christ. The difference between this approach and the approach of Rahnerian traditional natural law theorists, and others who deny the specificity of Christian ethics, is that the transcendental level of the human being is based on a specifically Christian content that necessarily leads to a specifically moral-religious consciousness reflected in all aspects of the Christian life, not merely in Christian behavior. To be Christian is to be fully human, but to be human does not necessarily mean to be Christian. The fundamental difference between Christian and non-Christian morality is an altered understanding of reality based on an explicit belief in Jesus Christ. This approach to Christian ethics, then, suggests that Christian ethics must be developed according to the founding person of Christianity, namely, Jesus Christ. In this sense, all Christian ethics should strive to be Christocentric ethics.

The question is no longer whether or not ethics can be Christian. The question now concerns why Christian ethics *must* be based on specifically Christian principles or values rather than ordinary human principles or values. If a person considers himself Christian, then this identification necessarily influences the manner in which the person lives, in the way that he develops intentions, dispositions, virtues, and his moral behavior

in particular circumstances. A person can develop “right” moral dispositions, virtues, and the like, but the Christian specifically and explicitly identifies these same aspects of his life in relation to his faith. While all moral behavior or attitudes can attain a certain “goodness” or “rightness,” it can be attributed to specifically religious *or* ordinary human morality. The Christian person recognizes the figure of Jesus Christ as the center of all morality and ethics, at both the level of reflection and action, for it is only through Jesus Christ that authentic personhood is understood, and it is only through Christ Jesus that the salvation of the world is attained. Natural law, philosophical, human, and rational ethics are limited because the human situation is limited by sin. Christian ethics emphasizes the reality of grace which is the only way that human limitations can be overcome in order to come to true moral knowledge and the reality of the experience of the invitation by God and the responsibility required of humanity, known in the person of Jesus Christ.

Although Christian ethics distinguishes itself from ordinary human ethics, Christian ethics must continue to strive for universality. Moral theology, developed according to specifically Christian principles or values, must be *articulated* in such a way that these can be apprehended and accepted in the broader human society. This may necessitate the use of rational or philosophical or humanist language, but the fundamental principle remains the specifically Christian identification of Jesus Christ as the source of salvation for all humanity. Moral theology is concerned with human behavior, but more importantly, it is an interpretation and articulation of salvation. The immediate medium of salvation is the natural world in which humanity resides, but the goal is the supernatural destiny of the human being that begins in the natural realm and is completed only at the end of time. Therefore, moral theology is concerned not only for the Catholic

or the Christian, but for the salvation of the world. In this sense, Christian ethics and moral theology must strive to interpret and articulate the salvation of humankind in a universal language with this specifically Christian principle as its foundation. Jesus Christ must serve as the bridge between this universality and specificity for moral theology.

Through Christian ethics, the Christian and the human person discern what God is inviting to and requiring of humankind. For Christian ethics, morality is qualified by faith in Jesus Christ as the reality of authentic human selfhood and as the reality of God's intention for all of humanity. The central symbol for Christians has been, and must continue to be, Jesus Christ. This primacy must be acknowledged, and embraced, in Christian ethics.

In addition, the renewal of contemporary moral theology calls for a heightened emphasis on the significance of the Scriptures in moral reflection. Hauerwas reminds us that it is through the accounts of the early Church that one comes to the fullest knowledge of the historical life of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures serve as the first written witness of the experience of God, and they are the witness of the early Church's experience of the continued presence of Jesus Christ in the midst of the Christian community even after his death and resurrection. In close association with the Scriptures, contemporary moral theology must continue to hand on the good news of salvation throughout the developing tradition of the Christian community.

While greater emphasis is given to revelation in the Scriptures and tradition, contemporary Christian ethics must continue to espouse reason and experience as valid sources for moral reflection. Indeed, in light of its universal mission, reason and

experience may be the initial ways of relaying the Christian principles, values, and ideals to non-believers. Faith and revelation reinforce the knowledge of the natural code of morals known through ordinary morality. Furthermore, the natural law tradition must not be abandoned in favor of an ethic founded on scriptural principles. Indeed, the natural law tradition is already based on the Christian interpretation of the doctrine of creation in light of biblical grounding. The contributions of natural law theology can be incorporated into a Christocentric ethic which acknowledges the specifically human element of salvation. Reason and the various relationships that are the media through which God can and is experienced are both necessary for human morality. Christian ethics include human morality along with the specifically religious beliefs and moral conduct distinctive of the Christian. Thus, reason and revelation will never contradict each other in a Christocentric ethic, but will have a mutually reciprocal relationship in which they build from each other and dialogue with each other to inform Christian moral reflection and action.

In the proposed Christocentric approach to ethics, nature and grace have a similarly reciprocal relationship for moral theology. Although the human being is regarded as “engraced nature,” one aspect of the person does not have greater emphasis than the other. Rather, the person is considered according to his or her human nature, but grace is constantly offered to and responded to by the person. The person is not regarded according to nature alone, as if “pure” human nature can be abstracted from the reality of the personal existence of the individual before God. The reality of the human condition includes nature, sinful and limited, but also given the offer of grace. The offer of grace for all humanity, as revealed in the figure of Jesus Christ, must be recognized along with

the limitations of human nature, for it is through grace that the human person attains full freedom to respond to God's offer in Jesus Christ. Thus, a Christocentric approach in moral theology acknowledges the limitations and freedom of the human person as integral to authentic human personhood. The person becomes authentically human by overcoming the bonds and limits of human sinfulness and finitude by responding to the gift of freedom offered in the invitation of God's grace. Through grace, the human being overcomes obstacles to authenticity and is given not only the possibility, but the responsibility, to respond to God's invitation in her interactions with others. The person is an individual, but an individual living within the world, within a variety of communities and with various relationships in (and with) the world. Jesus Christ is encountered throughout all of these relationships, not only as the medium of God's love, but as the authentic human being for whom the Christian is given the care and responsibility to love as Jesus Christ loves.

Christocentric ethics thus manifest a balanced approach to moral theology. Reason is informed by revelation, and revelation is comprehended through the right use of reason. The limitations of human nature are overcome by the offer of and response to grace, while grace is offered by God and accepted by the human living in history but seeking a supernatural destiny. Central to the moral life, then, will be the virtues that drive the person toward the supernatural through the natural world. By developing habituations which are consistent with a life of engrafted nature, the person responds to revelation through his rational apprehension of authentic personhood and true moral knowledge known most adequately through the response to the divine offer of grace.

This takes place in the particular historical situation of each individual, yet it takes place throughout all times in the history of salvation.

The clear and organizing principle that holds together all these values and concepts for Christian ethics is the figure of Jesus Christ. In light of the above criticisms of various approaches to Christian ethics, the phrase “the figure of Jesus Christ” must be clarified for Christocentric approaches to moral theology. One must not be too focused on the historical Jesus rather than the continued presence of Jesus Christ in the living Christian community. Jesus is not recognized as the Christ because he embodies the fullness of humanity. Jesus is the Christ because he is the revelation of true God and true humanity. Christ Jesus is the fullness of our present nature and our supernatural destiny. As John Macquarrie states, “if indeed Christ is understood as the revelation of God, then this surely strengthens the argument for a basic affinity between Christian and non-Christian morals, for what is revealed or made clear in Christ is also implicit in the whole creation.”<sup>17</sup> Although Christian ethics must be distinguished from ordinary human ethics because of the specifically Christian principle of Jesus Christ as its foundation, the salvation promised by Jesus Christ is for all humanity, and thus Christocentric ethics are universal. In light of Jesus Christ’s role in creation, Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end of human salvation, the past, present, and future of all humanity.

Thus, when I claim that special attention must be given to the “figure” of Jesus Christ, I indicate not just the historical person Jesus of Nazareth, but the God-Man who is God Incarnate. In this sense, the whole of the Scriptures must be taken into account in Christian ethics; not just the Christian Scriptures, but the Hebrew Bible that foreshadows

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<sup>17</sup> John Macquarrie, “Rethinking Natural Law,” *Readings in Moral Theology No. 2*, eds. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1980): 128.

the coming of the Messiah (who Christians believe is Jesus the Christ) must inform a Christocentric approach to ethics. Jesus Christ is the Logos who speaks creation into existence. As John begins his Gospel,

In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
He was in the beginning with God.  
All things came to be through him,  
and without him nothing came to be.  
What came to be through him was life,  
and this life was the light of the human race.<sup>18</sup>

The Jesus Christ of Christocentric ethics is not viewed through the lens of low Christology *or* high Christology; but as with nature *and* grace, reason *and* revelation, the Christology informing Christocentric ethics must be an all-inclusive Christology that reflects both the divine and human reality of Jesus Christ. Rather than just the historical Jesus, Christocentric ethics looks at the unity of the life of Jesus the Christ.

The life of Jesus Christ is not rational by “natural” standards, and his teachings are not rational. His life is not ordinary or natural as we would know it. Jesus Christ’s life is more than merely ordinary human life. Jesus’ life is rational only in terms of the supernatural end of the human reality. Jesus is God *and* human, not just human. For this reason, a Christocentric approach to ethics does not examine only the human aspect of Jesus Christ, just as it does not only evaluate the purely “natural” or simply rational elements of the human person. Christians are called to a supernatural end, to recognize our own divine elements, as created in the *imago Dei*, and to respond to the offer of grace as our salvation in and through Jesus Christ. Christians and all humanity are called to live for the kingdom, as the kingdom is already present as instituted by Christ, but not

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<sup>18</sup> John 1:1-4.

fully perfected because of the limitations of sin to which all are subject in the natural world.

In the past, Catholic moral theology distinguished itself from Protestant approaches to ethics by focusing on the natural law tradition, reason, law, and a privatized (as opposed to truly personalistic) moral theology. Likewise, Protestant ethics focused on revelation, grace, gospel, and “*sola scriptura*.” The separation of the two sides of moral theology and Christian ethics was caused by an emphasis on “one side of the coin” to the exclusion of the other aspects of moral reflection. This language would imply that the two concepts are at odds, rather than recognizing the fact that they must work together to bring about the fullness of truth. The Christocentric approach to moral theology and Christian ethics integrates all “sides” of the discussion so that Christian ethics more fully acknowledges the reality of the human person, situated in the present but striving for the supernatural end. Christian ethics should not involve a discussion regarding an the “either/or,” but all parts as parts of a whole, striving for true moral knowledge and action that reflects this moral truth.

In fact, rather than suggesting that a dichotomy exists between law or Gospel, nature or grace, and reason or revelation, a Christocentric approach to ethics insists that there are no dichotomies, but only various springboards for discussion. The figure of Jesus Christ thus serves as a bridge between Protestant ethics and Catholic moral theology, as well as between universal human morality and specifically Christian ethics. A Christocentric ethic maintains both Protestant and Catholic elements, but never one to the exclusion of the other. With Christ as the central figure or principle of moral theology, the emphasis is on God’s interaction with humanity, not just with Catholics,

Protestants, or even Christians alone. The focus is on God's fullest encounter with creation in the person of Jesus Christ, and God's continued presence in the world through the workings of the Holy Spirit. This approach is Christocentric because Jesus Christ promises his continued presence in the world through the Holy Spirit which guides the Church in its universal mission to proclaim the salvation of humankind.

In light of a renewed sense of the need for a unified Christian ethic, the Roman Catholic Church calls for a renewed emphasis on the role of the Scriptures, a fuller understanding of grace, and a greater emphasis on revelation in moral theology. In fact, the Second Vatican Council's *Decree on the Training of Priests* states that moral theology must "must learn to seek the solution of human problems in the light of revelation, to apply its eternal truths to the changing conditions of human affairs, and to express them in language which people of the modern world will understand."<sup>19</sup> This drive for universality in light of specifically Christian principles (revelation, grace, etc.) is not unique to the renewal in Catholic moral theology; it is apparent in contemporary Protestant approaches to ethics, as well. The concern for all moral theology and Christian ethics must be the moral principles and interpretation of these principles that lead to right moral conduct, not just for the Christian community, but for humanity as a whole. Moral theology and Christian ethics must not be concerned with reason or revelation, but reason and revelation; not with nature or grace, but graced nature. Morality is not about the law or the gospel, but the law and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, the perfection of the human and the incarnation of the divine, teaches us how to be completely human, but more important than that, He teaches the

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<sup>19</sup> *Optatum Totius*, no. 16; *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Vol. 1, ed. by Austin Flannery, O.P. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992): 720.

person how to live in God's kingdom here and now. Again, this reflects the reality of all humans living life in the *imago Dei*. Therefore, we need a specifically Christian ethic because we are not merely humans, but humans who live, as *Lumen Gentium* says, directed toward the salvation that has already been attained for us by Christ. If we are to call ourselves Christians, then we must live according to specifically Christian principles based on our belief that this is not the life for which God created us. This life is not our end, but our beginning. How we live here and now shows our belief in the supernatural end that is the perfection of the kingdom of God offered in the figure of Jesus Christ. A Christocentric approach to ethics is not for Christians alone, but for all persons who are one in Christ, all loved by God, saved by Christ, and have our origin under the impetus of the Holy Spirit. Thus, all people must respond to God's offer of grace by living in, through, and for Jesus the Christ, whether explicitly in our daily lives as a profession of faith, or implicitly through a life that seeks the highest moral truth that is the fullness of the kingdom of God. In light of this understanding of Jesus Christ, there is a growing sense, particularly among Roman Catholic moral theologians, that a more scriptural and Christocentric moral theology needs to be developed. One already has, in the Christocentric moral theology of Bernard Häring.

Contemporary Christian ethics faces the difficult, if not impossible, task of trying to balance the distinctiveness of Christian principles and the universal principles of humanity at large. The problem is trying to maintain an ethic that is based on Christian principles that have meaning for Christians and non-Christians who do not hold the same principles. If a Christian ethic is to merit the title "Christian" ethics, however, then it

must maintain principles central to the Christian faith, regardless of its impact on people not within the Christian tradition.

The method I shall employ in this project seeks to make a case for the importance of both distinctively Christian ethics and the catholicity of Roman Catholic moral theology. In order to retrieve a more specifically Christian ethic, it is essential for Roman Catholic moral theology to develop an ethic that is more Christocentric. The last major Roman Catholic moral theologian to develop a Christocentric ethic was Bernard Häring. Therefore, this project will serve as a retrieval and constructive reformulation of Häring's Christocentric ethic, which develops a moral theology that gives appropriate weight to the person of Jesus Christ. This project is intended first of all to serve as a critical and constructive analysis of Häring's moral theology. In addition, I hope to highlight the significance of his moral theology for contemporary moral theology and Christian ethics, drawing on Hauerwas' Christian ethic as a complement to Häring's work. I examine Häring's and Hauerwas' theological ethics in order to illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of the other. What both Häring and Hauerwas contribute to contemporary moral theology, however, is an undeniably Christ-centered focus on the moral-religious life of the Christian individual and the Christian community.

## CHAPTER TWO

### JESUS CHRIST: GOD'S INVITATION TO HUMANITY

Bernard Häring's Christological moral theology is not for the faint of heart. According to Häring's theology, the mature Christian adult is called to respond to God in the world through not only doing the good, but in particular the good that reaches its summit in perfection. The response of the Christian to the summons of God can be nothing less than the response of the whole person, giving oneself in the imitation of Jesus Christ, the Son, in the sacrificial spirit of loving obedience to the Father, guided by the Holy Spirit in the Christian community. The implications of Häring's Christocentric ethic are specifically for the sacramental community that lives in fellowship in the imitation of Jesus Christ. The only response to the invitation of God in the world is the perfect imitation of Christ, a life in, with, and through Christ.

Häring's contributions to moral theology are numerous. Throughout his moral theology, Häring develops a Christocentric ethic based on various aspects of theology, philosophy, and sociology. His use of Scripture, development of personalism and value theory, emphasis on the virtues (particularly the virtue of religion), and integration of the sacraments into the moral life of the community of faith all point to the central concern of

Häring's moral theology, namely, the significance of the figure of Jesus Christ for the Christian person and community.

The imitation of Christ is the core of Häring's Christocentric ethic. Häring best summarizes his own approach to moral theology with his opening words in the first volume of *The Law of Christ*:

The principal, the norm, the center, and the goal of Christian Moral Theology is Christ. The law of the Christian is Christ Himself in person. He alone is our Lord, our Savior. In Him we have life and therefore also the law of our life. The Christian may not be viewed solely from the point of formal enactment of law and not even primarily from the standpoint of the imperative of the divine will. We must always view it from the point of the divine bounty: God wills to give Himself to us. In Christ, the Father has given us everything. In Him and through Him the Father manifests the profoundest depths of His love. In the love of Christ and through the love of Christ for us He invites our love in return, which is a life truly formed in Christ. The Christian life is following Christ, but not through mere external copying, even though it be in love and obedience. Our life must above all be a life in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

For Bernard Häring, moral theology is not merely an analysis of duty and obedience, but the practice of responsibility and dialogue in the Christian life of virtue in the following of Christ. The moral life of the Christian is a call to holiness and perfection in seeking salvation in communion with God. Häring's specific concern is the adult Christian pursuing a faithful response to God's invitation in the world by living in the imitation of Christ Jesus. Häring's most significant contribution to moral theology is the development of a Christocentric ethic focused on the moral-religious life of the sacramental community of the Holy Spirit, lived in the imitation of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Häring, *The Law of Christ: Moral Theology for Priests and Laity, Volume I: General Moral Theology*. Trans. by Edwin G. Kaiser (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1961): vii. The edition of *The Law of Christ* used throughout this project is the English translation of Häring's third edition of the original German text, *Das Gesetz Christi : Moralthologie. Dargestellt für Priester und Laien* (Freiburg: Erich Wewel Verlag, 1954).

I shall begin with an examination of Häring's vision of how God's invitation takes place through the universal offer of grace to all persons in the person of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ is central to Häring's moral theology, I shall indicate the general role of Jesus Christ in Häring's work and how Häring's understanding of Jesus Christ can influence Roman Catholic moral theology. I shall then proceed to examine the role of Jesus Christ in relation to the Scriptures in Häring's moral theology. Finally, I shall evaluate how Häring's Christological focus leads to his distinctive approaches regarding such familiar themes as personalism and value theory as they relate to the person of Jesus Christ, who is God's invitation to grace for humanity.

#### I. Häring's Relation to Traditional Catholic Moral Theology

Bernard Häring is one of the most important Catholic moral theologians of the twentieth century. His moral theology provides a transition from the primarily legalistic and normative approach to Christian ethics characteristic of Roman Catholic moral theology from the thirteenth century to the less penitential moral theology arising from the Second Vatican Council. Prior to the renewal movement in Catholic moral theology, the manual tradition had lasted for over three hundred years. Häring's Christocentric moral theology, in many ways, precipitates the changes in moral theology a full decade prior to Vatican Council II, when his *The Law of Christ* develops a shift from the manual tradition to a more dialogical and Christ-centered moral theology. Indeed, one could argue that Häring's greatest contribution to moral theology is the foundation that his

Christocentric work provides in order to open up new horizons for the future of moral theology.<sup>2</sup>

Häring's two most systematic works, *The Law of Christ* and *Free and Faithful in Christ*, maintain the style of the moral manuals, and in many ways still serve as moral manuals, but Häring significantly changes the context and content of the manuals by emphasizing the more pastoral, scriptural, and experiential elements of Christian morality over the legalistic and metaphysical aspects of the manual tradition. Rather than focusing

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<sup>2</sup> John A. Gallagher asserts that Bernard Häring is one of the most important theologians to develop an alternative to the manual style of theology, but he further contends that Häring's Christocentric work is most significant for its contribution to moral theory because of its focus on values, as well as Häring's emphasis on personalism. Gallagher discusses Häring's historical influence on the development and renewal of Catholic moral theology in his *Time Past, Time Future: An Historical Study of Catholic Moral Theology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990); see especially pp. 11, 36, 158, 162, 163, 169-176, 180, 203, 204-207, 224, and 270. Of particular interest, however, is Gallagher's statement, "Häring's writings were probably the most important source for the notion of Christian personalism which was to dominate much of Catholic moral theology for the next twenty-five years. As introduced to American readers and then further developed in the writings of Charles Curran, Häring's theology was to have a significant impact upon American Catholicism" (176). One can see Häring's influence on Catholic moral theologians in America. Conspicuously influenced by Häring's work are Charles Curran and Kathleen Cahalan, two of the most reliable sources for Häring scholarship in America. Curran discusses Häring throughout his work, building especially on Häring's theme of responsibility and conversion. For Häring's impact on Curran, see especially Curran's *Catholic Moral Theology in Dialogue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976): 27, 31-32, 156, 159, 162, 165, 221, and 225-226; *Transition and Tradition in Moral Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979): 4-7, 9, 204, 210, and 224; *Moral Theology: A Continuing Journey* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982): 69, 73, and 74; *Directions in Fundamental Moral Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985): 64, 70, 78, 83, 87, 121, 159, 234, 264-267, and 269; and *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999): 49, 95, 118, 193, and 212. Cahalan emphasizes the importance of Häring's sacramental-moral theology for contemporary Christian ethics, especially evident in "The Sacramental-Moral Theology of Bernard Häring: A Study of the Virtue of Religion," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1998; and *Formed in the Image of Christ: The Sacramental-Moral Theology of Bernard Häring, C.Ss.R.* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004). Gallagher's insight regarding Häring's influence on American Catholic theology is particularly interesting, as one can readily see Häring's impact on Catholic moral theology in the scholarship of many American moral theologians, while his influence on European moral theology seems to decrease following the time soon after the close of the Second Vatican Council. Although many dissertations in theology have been written regarding various aspects of Häring's moral theology, most of the work is written in English with very few works written in German, Häring's native language. Indeed, the dearth of interest in Häring's work following the renewal of moral theology after the Second Vatican Council is shocking. Of particular interest, the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1995) has a glaring omission of any reference to Bernard Häring and any aspect of his contribution to moral theology and its renewal in the Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Second Edition*, Vol. 6 (Detroit: Gale, 2003): 645-646, devotes an entire page to Häring, with particular reference to Häring's contribution to a renewed approach to moral theology.

primarily on the law and norms in moral theology, Häring emphasizes the significance of imitation of the life of Jesus Christ for the moral life of the Christian person.<sup>3</sup> (As we shall see, imitation should not be understood too literally in this context in the sense of copying the actions of Jesus Christ, but as being the presence of Christ Jesus to others.)

Prior to Häring's Christocentric moral theology, Roman Catholic teaching in the modern period tended to err on the side of emphasizing the "catholicity" or universality of ethics at the expense of the importance of the distinctive motivations and shape of the lives converted by faith in Jesus Christ. In order to retrieve a more specifically Christian moral theology, Häring proposes the development of a more Christ-centered religious-moral ethic for Roman Catholic theology. The primary purpose of his theology is to develop an adequate Catholic moral theology that can be used by all adults in the Christian community.<sup>4</sup> In the Foreword to Volume One of *The Law of Christ*, Häring specifically states that he intends his theological work to be "profitable to the educated laity as well as to theologians or students of theology preparing for the clerical state."<sup>5</sup> He does not intend that his systematic account of ethics will be used primarily by confessors, but rather by the Christian community as a whole. In fact, by maintaining a pastoral focus in his work, Häring seeks to renew moral theology for all Christians,

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<sup>3</sup> The recent book *50 Jahre Das Gesetz Christi Studien der Moralthologie 14*, eds. Augustin Schmied and Josef Römelt, (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005) suggests that Bernard Häring is one of the most important moral theologians to address the significance of Jesus Christ for moral theology in such a way as to present a lasting influence for contemporary moral theology.

<sup>4</sup> John Mahoney suggests that one of Häring's greatest contributions to the renewal of moral theology is the way in which he upholds tradition and yet brings about a revival of "an earlier Christocentric tradition in moral theology and a type of systematic moral writing, as distinct from devotional literature, addressed directly to the laity in the Church." *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987): 306.

<sup>5</sup> LC 1: ix.

whether ministers or laypersons in the Christian community.<sup>6</sup> Häring seeks to “form a Christian mind set and that profound vision which is essential for Christian maturity.”<sup>7</sup>

Häring clearly wants his moral theology to be an advance over the previously static and impersonal moral theology of the past. Although Häring suggests that the development of a universal ethic for all people of all times is a possibility, his primary intention is to develop a distinctively religious ethic for the moral formation of the mature adult Christian. In the development of this religious ethic, Häring employs the traditional categories in moral theology, particularly agency, conscience, sin, and virtue. While both *The Law of Christ* and *Free and Faithful in Christ* are developed along the lines of the genre of the “moral manuals,” Häring’s work particularly emphasizes the Scriptures, grace, the sacraments, and personalism – themes otherwise lacking, or at the very least under-emphasized, in traditional Catholic moral teaching up to Häring’s own time. The neo-Thomistic approach in moral theology, in Häring’s view, was too legalistic and emphasized too heavily the minimal standards for the Christian moral life. The manualist tradition focused on man-made laws and “presented a rather static code morality or an ethics of principles and norms which could be well controlled,”<sup>8</sup> because, Häring suggests, the self-understanding of the Church was static, “as was also the understanding

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<sup>6</sup> Häring’s specific concern is the adult Christian, and therefore his primary emphasis is on an adequate Christian moral theology that can be used by adults in the Christian community. Häring provides little discussion of non-Christian ethics, although he does address non-Christians at various points in his theology (but always as a side-note and never as a primary question). Häring provides a few suggestions as to how Christ and Christian morality matters for non-Christians, but this is never presented as a fundamental concern for Häring.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ: Moral Theology for Clergy and Laity: Volume 1* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982): 6.

<sup>8</sup> FFC 1: 23.

of human nature and natural law.”<sup>9</sup> This static approach to morality minimized or altogether excluded a specifically Christian content of normative moral theology. As a distinct alternative to this approach to moral theology, Häring insists that Christian moral theology must be developed with religion, and specifically devotion to Christ, as the heart and center of morality, not as an accessory to Christian morality. Häring’s moral theology is a significant advance over more philosophically oriented approaches to ethics because it is a Christian morality developed in light of the Scriptures with a more thoroughly integrated understanding of theology that maintains a dynamic, faithful, and relevant morality for Catholic Christians in their search to become holy as they strive for salvation in communion with God.

Prior to Häring’s Christocentric ethic, dogmatic, spiritual, and moral theology were considered as separate and exclusive realms of theology. Catholic moral theology had become a discussion of rules, laws, and norms primarily intended for the confessor in relation to the penitent. Moral theology was concerned with obedience and duty, while dogmatic and spiritual theology were considered distinct entities apart from moral theology; thus “fidelity to God’s compassionate love,” which this approach lacked, “was over-compensated with thousands of rules that served neither the witness of faith nor growth in holiness.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, moral theology was concerned more with the external acts of the person than with the internal spiritual life or beliefs of the person. Häring argues, “Whenever theology remains faithful to the biblical approach, there will be no separation between dogma and morality, and no theology severed from

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<sup>9</sup> FFC 1: 47.

<sup>10</sup> FFC 1: 31.

evangelization and pastoral ministry. Rather all theology will affirm and serve the primacy of salvation truth.”<sup>11</sup> Häring’s theology significantly changes the whole understanding of the person as seeking salvation, seeking to be holy, in each and every moral act rather than seeking self-perfection to avoid punishment.

Häring insists that moral theology must concern itself with the person as an integral human being, such that the holiness of the person is of utmost concern rather than secondary to the acts that issue from the person. Häring’s moral theology stands out against previous moral theology specifically because of his focus on the relationship of responsibility between God and human persons, particularly in the person of Jesus Christ. He says, “Moral theology is interested not only in decisions and actions. It raises the question, ‘What ought I to do?’ but asks, first of all, ‘What ought I to be: what kind of person does the Lord want me to be?’”<sup>12</sup> The person seeking holiness knows that the answer to this latter question is, “we have to become responsible and creative persons in the discipleship of Jesus Christ,” and therefore “the highest ideal of the disciple of Christ is to be conformed with the loving will of God.”<sup>13</sup> In the following of Christ, the Christian does not merely imitate the actions of Jesus Christ throughout his historical life. Much more than that, “If we look to Christ, we do not ask first what his actions were, but, rather, who he was. We want to know his relationship to God and to people.”<sup>14</sup> Häring’s moral theology is significant precisely because it insists that the imitation of Christ is not imitation of actions, but true conformity to the life and person of Jesus Christ, the

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<sup>11</sup> FFC 1: 33.

<sup>12</sup> FFC 1: 85.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> FFC 1: 86.

obedient, free, creative, and loving God-man. The life of the disciple of Christ must be the life of Jesus Christ. For Häring, however, to be Christ does not mean to live according to exact imitation of the daily life of Jesus Christ. The concern for the Christian disciple is not to live as a carpenter, hang out with tax payers, or even to die on a cross. Rather, what Häring means by being Jesus Christ is to live a life assimilated to the way of Jesus Christ by being the presence of Christ to others. This involves not only the adoption of the attitudes or dispositions of Jesus Christ, but allowing Jesus Christ to dwell within the heart, as one who seeks loving communion with the triune God.

Aware of the potential criticisms regarding his focus on the themes of responsibility, imitation of Christ, and love as the key concepts for his moral theology, Häring makes clear from the outset that he does not intend his Christocentric moral theology to be one-sided, or representational of only one aspect of theology. Therefore, before proceeding, we must acknowledge Häring's admonition that one concept alone is insufficient for the full development of Christian morality. While Häring views the obligation of the imitation of Christ as essential for Christian morality, he concedes that "we must carefully guard against the erroneous notion that we can deduce from one concept (such as the imitation of Christ) all particular obligations."<sup>15</sup> Häring sees his task as providing a moral theology that seeks the fullness of divine revelation. Essential to this task is faith, for faith makes understanding possible. Faith is added to reason, and that is what distinguishes Christian moral theology from more generally philosophical endeavors to attain truth. Faith gives reason insight into all individual revealed truths or

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<sup>15</sup> LC 1: 230.

precepts in the divine revelation in the quest for understanding the whole fullness of divine revelation. Häring explicitly states,

It is not at all my intention to present a comprehensive moral theology as a rigid system in which everything is flowing from a single concept or idea. We are not dealing with abstract ideas but with discipleship in Jesus Christ. He is always the center, origin, and purpose of our life. This does not, however, prevent us from looking for a leitmotif and for key concepts that would help today's Christian to understand what it means to live one's moral life as witness to Christ.<sup>16</sup>

Häring's develops his Christocentric moral theology in light of his analysis of "biblical patterns and after discerning, in view of those patterns, the special signs of God's present action and call in history."<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, although the concept of love is essential for Häring's Christocentric moral theology, he insists that Christian moral theology must maintain a proper balance between universal principles and individual circumstances. Thus, in his rejection of the extreme utilitarianism of Joseph Fletcher, Häring pointedly insists that "in practice, an ethics that operates with love and situation alone is unrealistic and impractical. Very seldom do persons reach such high connaturality with the good by pure and strong love that they can approach all situations without attention to norms, traditions and rules."<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Häring suggests that such an ethic is impossible. While Häring seeks to reinterpret the traditional categories of Catholic moral theology, he recognizes the value of such categories as helpful in bringing the Christian to a fuller understanding of divine revelation. In Häring's estimation, then, Christian morality emphasizes freedom and fidelity in discerning God's invitation to grace, because all of the Christian life is lived in

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<sup>16</sup> FFC 1: 59.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> FFC 1: 358.

response to God's initiative. Häring presents the moral-religious life of the Christian as distinctively marked by listening and responding in creative freedom and fidelity in the imitation of Jesus Christ.

Häring insists that an adequate Christian moral theology must give more attention to ongoing conversion and the essentially dynamic dimension of salvation truth – themes which are found throughout the Scriptures – than was given in prior moral theology that attended more to the importance of obedience to legalistic norms. Rather than considering natural law as the primary source of moral knowledge, the Scriptures must serve as the fundamental approach to moral theology precisely because they point to the law of the spirit, the law of Christ. Häring's moral theology is distinctive particularly because, in his Christocentric ethic, worship is the heart of the Christian life, not a moral obligation flowing from the moral life. He contends that moral theology must give greater attention to the prophetic tradition in the Bible and emphasize the need for ongoing conversion throughout the life of the Christian person and community.

Religion is the heart of, not accessory to, Häring's moral theology. Häring suggests that moral theology has tended to become too philosophically oriented, neglecting a full vision of the Scriptures as integral to a fully developed Christian moral theology. Rather than focusing his theology primarily on the legalistic and normative aspects of traditional Catholic moral theology, Häring introduces the theological theme of invitation and response. Häring insists, "Response, responsibility, dialogue belong to religion essentially. We have religion only if man conceives of the Holy as a Power which advances toward him and to whom he can turn in dialogue."<sup>19</sup> Häring's

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<sup>19</sup> LC 1: 35.

Christocentric moral theology is based on the principle that all truly Christian moral acts are specifically religious-moral acts because they are marked by the character of response to God's invitation to the human person. Thus moral theology is not concerned primarily with obedience, but with responsibility.<sup>20</sup> Ethics based on the law, even the natural law, lack focus on the ideal of the Christian life as response to the invitation of God. Legalistic ethics further lack the true spirit of creative freedom inherent in the Christian life, as well as the dynamism and dialogue necessary for a moral theology of responsibility.

Häring identifies two types of religious-morality: "the first springs from religion which animates it essentially; the second is given form and sanction by religion which is rather accessory and super-imposed from without."<sup>21</sup> Häring sees a tendency in moral theology, particularly the manualist tradition, to separate moral theology from its dogmatic foundations and therefore to super-impose Scripture and the fundamentals of theology from outside of the actual discipline of moral theology itself. The moral life is thus defined largely according to metaphysical notions and in legal terms rather than seeing the moral life as continually changing and progressing. Häring believes that the manualist tradition distorts the Christian life by separating the moral from the spiritual, thus separating the sacred from human reality, the supernatural from the natural. The manualists were concerned primarily with acts, understood in terms of a theology of grace emphasizing the metaphysical transformation of the natural to the supernatural. Häring is concerned primarily with the agent, or more accurately, with the individual

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<sup>20</sup> I will discuss the theme of responsibility at length in subsequent sections of this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> LC 1: 35.

person who lives and acts within a community in history, who experiences God in unique ways that bring about conversion and transformation. For Häring, morality is not about self-perfection, but about the transcendent. The heart of religion, according to Häring, is “the point of encounter between the word of God and the response of man.”<sup>22</sup> The Christian is not alienated from God, but lives in constant relationship with God in a continuing dialogue of invitation and response.

Christian morality is entirely concerned with encounter and fellowship with God and the Christian community, according to Häring. Häring uses two generally philosophical categories, personalism and value theory, in the development of his own Christocentric ethic, but he transforms these by interpreting them within the framework of theological convictions. Häring identifies the philosophical theory of personalism as the quest for perfection of the self in the order of creation, particularly in the advancement of knowledge of the true and the good. He also highlights value theory, particularly that as developed by Max Scheler, as important for moral theology because this philosophical theory focuses more on the emotive or sensible aspect of the human person in the moral experience.<sup>23</sup> Häring integrates more specifically religious themes into the philosophical categories of personalism and value theory precisely in order to focus on the experiential aspect of Christian morality. In his Christocentric moral theology, Häring advances Christian personalism (largely as developed in the theology of Karl Rahner) combined with the value theory elaborated by Max Scheler to describe moral experience as more important than nature, or the metaphysics that was

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Because “Value Theory” is so important for Häring’s Christocentric moral theology, I shall address this issue at much greater length in a later section of this chapter.

predominant in the legalism of Catholic morality. The essence of what it is to be a human person in history is more important than metaphysics in Häring's moral theology.

Häring develops a moral theology that advances more philosophical systems beyond concern merely for the obligation of self-perfection of the human person; he insists that a truly religious ethic must concern itself with the salvation of the soul. Häring explains that fellowship with God, rather than individual perfection or rectitude, must be the center of morality because "salvation of soul in the Christian sense is something altogether different. It is not a blessed solitude of existence nor a blissful absorption into an impersonal essence, but loving community with the living God."<sup>24</sup> Häring's Christocentric moral theology is a genuine alternative to more philosophically oriented approaches to Christian ethics because its goal is the religious-moral response of the human person who seeks fellowship with God in a loving community with God. Therefore, rather than a secondary or accessory motivation for the human person, religion is the heart of Häring's moral theology. For Häring, religion is more than just public cult and worship in the liturgical life of the community; Häring views religion as closely tied to the virtue of charity, such that all moral acts are at the same time religious acts that are directed toward the glory and honor of God in the loving response to God's offer of grace, particularly in the person of Jesus Christ. The person seeks loving communion with God above all else, including self-perfection, to attain salvation of the soul in eternal bliss. For Häring, "Ultimately morality and religion must have the same center:

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<sup>24</sup> LC 1: 40.

community and fellowship with God.”<sup>25</sup> By the same token, communion with God takes place in the entirety of one’s life, not merely in the public cult of the community.

A wide range of sources contribute to the development of Häring’s Christocentric ethic. By bringing together elements of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and psychology, Häring’s moral theology integrates the ideas of value, personhood, and personalism into a more cohesive moral theology for the Christian community. From within theology, he brings Scripture, dogmatics, and spirituality into dialogue with the moral theology that previously had been separated from these other disciplines. In particular, Häring insists that sacramental theology is integral to the Christian moral life. In Häring’s Christ-centered ethic the sacraments are not moral or legal obligations, but forms of personal and communal response to God’s summons. Thus, Häring provides a more biblical and pastoral approach to moral theology than the juridical model of traditional Catholic moral theology. In Häring’s moral theology the spiritual and the moral are no longer considered as separate aspects of the same reality, but are integrally related in the response of the whole person to the divine invitation in the world. By bringing dogmatic and sacramental theology into dialogue with moral theology, Häring develops a dynamic ethic in which the moral life is response and responsibility in creative and free dialogue in the world. Such a dynamic ethic is essential for contemporary moral theology precisely because it allows for ongoing conversion for the person in moral acts and in the person’s life of worship in the community of faith.

Perhaps Häring’s greatest contribution to moral theology is the development of a dynamic theology of response and responsibility, in which every act of worship is a

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<sup>25</sup> LC 1: 41.

moral act, and every moral act is an act of worship. Häring insists that responsibility and dialogue are essential concepts for a Christ-centered ethic. Häring's emphasis on relationality based on the imitation of Christ is a unique aspect of his Christocentric moral theology that sets him apart from most other contemporary approaches to moral theology. Unlike the more philosophical or legalistic ethics that focus on duty, norms, and the law, Häring's Christocentric moral theology develops a distinctively dialogical religious ethic viewed always in light of divine revelation and the human response to this revelation through the imitation of Christ. Häring insists that Christian moral teaching is not anthropocentric or theocentric; rather, Christian morality "centers in the grace-endowed fellowship of man with God, in the dialogue of word and response, in 'responsibility'."<sup>26</sup> The fullness of God's love and invitation to fellowship is revealed in the Word of God made flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ. Our moral-religious response to God's Word is the response of love, which can be our response only in, with, and through Jesus Christ. The person attains the fullness of liberty, and at the same time is fully faithful to God's call to fellowship, in Christ. As an individual, however, this liberty and fidelity requires the use of the individual's unique talents and gifts in the creative and responsible use of freedom to respond to God's invitation to grace through the imitation of Christ.

Häring explains that his Christocentric moral theology is a synthesis of theocentrism and Christian anthropocentrism. Fellowship with and participation in the life of the triune God through imitation of Christ is the goal of Christian morality, according to Häring. The first step in a Christocentric ethic, then, is to examine

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<sup>26</sup> LC 1: 52.

humanity's relationship to God, not to the law, norms, or duties and obligations, or even to self-perfection. Unlike most other contemporary moral theology prior to his own work, Häring insists that neither natural ethics nor theocentric ethics alone can serve as the starting point for moral theology. Rather, Häring contends,

The point of departure in Catholic moral theology is Christ, who bestows on man a participation in His life and calls on him to follow the Master. Our moral theology is consciously a dialogue. And since such dialogue is possible only if God first speaks to us, and since He speaks to us in Christ, the Word of God, it follows that the person of Christ, His example, and His grace must be the focal center of moral teaching.<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, any adequate approach to moral theology, if it is to be an authentic Christian morality, has the divine-human fellowship as the center, not the individual human being alone.

With Christ as the focal point of Christian moral reflection, one understands that the “very origin, countenance and goal of freedom is love; and we cannot understand the fullness of love revealed in Jesus Christ unless we see it as given in total freedom, total fidelity, and with its specific quality of creativity.”<sup>28</sup> In turn, the perfect imitation of Christ requires the total freedom, faithfulness, and unique creativity of the individual in each moral situation whatever the circumstances. As Häring explains, “To be responsible, free, creative and faithful in Jesus Christ is a leitmotif, but it is also a normative pattern. It can be an effective theme for our lives only if it permeates and elucidates all our norms, ideals, and goals.”<sup>29</sup> That is to say, responsibility in Christ must be the driving force underlying all moral-religious principles for the Christian person.

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<sup>27</sup> LC 1: 61.

<sup>28</sup> FFC 1: 6.

<sup>29</sup> FFC 1: 82.

The moral-religious response of the person to God's invitation must transcend the law, must not be based solely on duty or obligation, and must focus on God's relationship with the world rather than the goal of self-perfection. The moral-religious response of the person in Häring's Christocentric ethic is the response of the whole person seeking fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.

The divine-human relationship is understood most clearly in the light of the word-response dialogue between the persons of the Trinity. The dialogue within the Trinity extends to humanity through God's invitation to the human person to participate in this divine dialogue, particularly as this divine invitation manifests itself in the person of Jesus Christ. Rather than a morality based on laws and norms, Häring insists that a properly Christocentric ethic must have God's invitation and humanity's response as the foundation, with this dialogue most fully embodied in the person of Jesus Christ.

Although Häring admits that an adequate or complete moral theology cannot be based solely on one theme or idea, he suggests that responsibility is a particularly relevant leitmotif in understanding Christian morality. The concept of responsibility sets Häring's Christocentric moral theology apart from more philosophically oriented approaches to Christian ethics, precisely because Häring consistently ties the idea of "response-ability" to the figure of Jesus Christ: Jesus Christ is the Word of God that both invites and enables human response to the divine initiative. Through Christ, the person is given the freedom and the ability to respond to God's invitation. The freedom Häring discusses is both gift and responsibility for the Christian who seeks to live in the imitation of Jesus Christ.

The ideas of freedom and responsibility abound throughout Häring's work, and these concepts are consistently and directly tied to his understanding of the importance of Jesus Christ for Catholic moral theology. For Häring, the more philosophically oriented approaches to moral theology lack the proper understanding of the moral life of the Christian as a distinctively moral-religious life. Therefore, Häring insists that Jesus Christ is the perfect Model for the Christian seeking to live faithfully in response to God's invitation and summons in the world. Jesus Christ is the perfect example of response to God in obedience, adoration, freedom, faithfulness, and love of neighbor. This is the basis of the religious-moral life: the imitation of Christ through inward conversion and transformation (assimilation to Christ) and outward action (faithful response to God through loving and faithful obedience, and faithful response to the neighbor through love and service).

Although Häring is influential for the renewal of moral theology, particularly in the period leading up to the Second Vatican Council, his work largely has been neglected in contemporary moral theology. Häring's moral theology has been set aside primarily because his general ideas remain fairly vague when applied to practical situations, even in his later works. As I shall indicate in the following pages, Häring's primary interest is moral formation, while specific moral action is of secondary concern. Despite the fact that Häring seems to spend a great deal of time addressing specific issues in moral theology, particularly in the second volume of his two major works, the way in which Häring deals with these issues seldom relates back to his original ideas developed in the first volumes of his works. That is to say, Häring does not integrate his overall position regarding the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ, or his value theory and personalism,

for that matter, into an overall system that addresses moral deliberation regarding specific moral-religious actions. This vagueness in the application of his theory (ethics) into the realm of morality is indicative of the larger problem of Häring's lack of social location for his moral theology<sup>30</sup>.

Nonetheless, I believe that contemporary Roman Catholic moral theology can benefit from a re-appropriation and reconstruction of Häring's Christocentric moral theology. With Jesus Christ as central to moral formation and development, a retrieval of Häring's Christocentric moral theology can provide an ethic in which all moral acts are evaluated in light of the Christian convictions that serve as their foundation. Christian action, thus considered, would be understood as an extension of the discipleship of the Christian who seeks perfection in her imitation of Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus Christ is the revelation of the life of the triune God, Christian actions are the revelation of the person continuously converted to and transformed by discipleship in the assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ.

Focused on the significance of the person of Jesus Christ in Christian morality, Häring contributes to contemporary Catholic moral theology through the development of a Christocentric moral theology that integrates the Scriptures, personalism and value theory, the virtues (particularly the virtue of religion), and the sacraments into the moral-religious formation and development of the Christian disciple in the imitation of Jesus Christ. I shall begin by examining how Häring views the Scriptures, personalism, and value theory in relation to Jesus Christ as God's invitation to grace. The next chapter will then evaluate how Christian discipleship requires response to God's offer of grace,

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<sup>30</sup> The lack of social context throughout Häring's work is a problem that we shall examine in more detail in the fourth chapter of this project.

evident in the moral-religious response in the life of the virtues, with particular emphasis on the virtue of religion, and the sacramental life as distinctive of the Christian moral-religious life.

## II. “Vision of Wholeness”: A Biblical Foundation for Catholic Moral Theology

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholic moral theology tended to neglect the use of the Scriptures as a significant source for discussions of the moral life. Häring changes this trend by using the Bible as a fundamental source for his moral theology. In fact, Häring begins *The Law of Christ* with the statement that his work “attempts to expound the most central truths in the light of the inspired word of the Bible.”<sup>31</sup> Throughout *The Law of Christ* and *Free and Faithful in Christ*, Häring looks to the Scriptures as the primary source for understanding the experiences of the Hebrew and Christian communities as they seek to live the moral life in response to God’s loving invitation to grace. For Häring, the Bible consistently shows God’s gracious offer of love and the human response to God’s invitation through worship and moral acts. Häring is concerned specifically with Christian existence, and he believes that the Scriptures provide a model for the life of the person living in the imitation of Christ.

While a contemporary appraisal of Häring’s use of the Scriptures would conclude that he cannot be considered a biblical exegete, Häring clearly sees a prominent role for the Scriptures in moral theology unlike that of any earlier modern moral theology prior to the renewal movement in Catholic moral theology. Häring does not provide a specific methodology for his use of Scriptures, but his two major works still provide a noteworthy

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<sup>31</sup> LC 1: viii.

advance over the manual tradition prior to his moral theology. For Häring, the biblical perspective demonstrates the value and meaning of Christian life, so the authority of the Scriptures lies in the fact that they provide guidelines and norms for living the authentic Christian life in response to God's invitation. Given Häring's focus specifically on Christian existence as a central concern for moral theology, one would be remiss to neglect at least a brief discussion of the function of the Scriptures in Häring's two primary works, *The Law of Christ* and *Free and Faithful in Christ*. Our first concern in this discussion is to examine Häring's innovative vision and use of the Scriptures, because the Scriptures serve as the primary source for the recurring themes, ideas, and motifs employed throughout his moral theology. Our second concern is to highlight some of the problems one inevitably encounters in Häring's understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament as he seeks to develop an integrated view of the meaning and value of the Christian moral life in a distinctively Christocentric ethic.

In Häring's view, traditional moral theology, prior to the renewal in Catholic moral theology, tended to use the Bible primarily as a source to provide a catalogue of norms taught in the Old and New Testaments that had already been established. That is to say, the Bible is seen as authoritative but, practically speaking, it functions as a support that fits into the moral-framework already presented. Häring calls it "an unfortunate custom to refer to Scripture only after having presented one's own system, and to do so particularly in order to present proof-texts for the norms already established once and forever."<sup>32</sup> Häring advances the role of Scripture for moral theology from one of solely

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<sup>32</sup> FFC 1: 7.

seeking normative value in the written word of God to seeking a “vision of wholeness” from the biblical perspective. This is not to say, however, that Häring does not find normative value in the Scriptures. Although Häring does not use the Scriptures to find a static code morality, as was often the case prior to his moral theology, Häring does see normative value in the Scriptures. Häring insists,

The Bible offers much more than a moral code, something quite different from a list of ready-made norms, but, nevertheless, does offer binding norms. However, the more concrete some biblical norms are the more carefully must the question of concrete historical circumstances be raised; and the universality of norms binding for all time is not to be asserted on the basis of one or two texts. We need to pay attention always to the whole Bible and to Tradition.<sup>33</sup>

Rather than presenting his own ethical system and then returning to particular passages from Scripture as proof-texts, Häring’s approach looks “first and mainly to the biblical perspective to find, in a vision of wholeness, the value and meaning of Christian life.”<sup>34</sup>

Häring wants to present a Christocentric moral theology that draws from the Bible as a whole to find the values that are absolute for all times, but that also respond to the changing historical circumstances in the world. The biblical authors wrote in various historical contexts in order to address specific local problems, but they intended their general norms to be abiding and binding teaching for all times. The normative value of

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<sup>33</sup> FFC 1: 337-338. Although the role of the Scriptures in Häring’s moral theology is of great importance, one must not neglect his use of tradition in conjunction with the Scriptures. Häring says that the Holy Spirit leads the Church and humanity to a deeper understanding of Christ’s doctrine not only through the Scriptures, but also through tradition: “For, besides Scripture, but never opposed to it, there is the living tradition. This is not only a tradition from mouth to mouth throughout the centuries; it is a torrent of life in which God remains always the source and power, the One who was, who is and who will be. Historical events and especially the life of the Church are, therefore, to be understood as the ongoing active presence of God. And wherever there is an active presence, a work of God, there is also a message, an ongoing revelation” (LC 1: 331). Furthermore, in LC 3: 159, Häring contends that when we consult Tradition we do not reject Scriptures, preferring the Church to the Scriptures, but rather we prefer “the explanation of the Scriptures given by the whole Church to our own explanation.” For Häring, the Scriptures are to be read always within the faith community.

<sup>34</sup> FFC 1: 7.

Scripture, then, is to be found by looking at various passages in their relation to the Scriptures as a whole, such that they provide “very helpful . . . ‘models’ of how to deal with particular traditions and how to incarnate the Gospel morality in other cultural contexts.”<sup>35</sup> Häring is careful, however, to clarify that “Christian moral theology is more than normative ethics; it is the theology of life in Christ Jesus, an effort to come to a full understanding of what discipleship means for Christians and for the world. Normative ethics, however, is an indispensable part of Christian ethics.”<sup>36</sup> Häring contends that the Scriptures offer distinctive themes, images, and paradigms that can be used in the Christian community to help guide the moral life.

Häring’s use and understanding of the Scriptures is important for contemporary approaches to moral theology precisely because he sees the Bible as a dynamic source for moral theology, rather than merely a static presentation of norms that are absolute and unchanging for all persons of all times. Häring insists that the main themes and ideas found in the Scriptures are true for all persons and all times; but more importantly, the Scriptures address the “signs of the times” throughout all times, places, and cultures precisely because the Scriptures offer new value insights and present responsibility, liberty, liberation, and fidelity that are “at the very heart of the ‘signs of the times.’”<sup>37</sup>

In keeping with his particular focus on response and responsibility as an appropriate leitmotif for an authentically religious approach to moral theology, Häring identifies the key scriptural message as follows: they show God’s free and gracious

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<sup>35</sup> FFC 1: 336.

<sup>36</sup> FFC 1: 338.

<sup>37</sup> FFC 1: 2.

condescension in the offer to human beings, at God's own initiative (not ours), and the human response to this invitation by individuals and communities in the cult and moral relations that follow. Although the idea of invitation and response is most perfectly embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, particularly as found in the New Testament, the Old Testament also identifies the dialogical and dynamic relationship between God and humanity as a central theme for the moral laws of the Hebrew people. For Häring, the Old Testament emphasizes this relationship between God and human beings in the ideal of the covenant relationship. According to Häring, the divine-human relationship is especially evident in the stories from Genesis and Exodus.<sup>38</sup> The central theme of the New Testament, in Häring's theology, is discipleship as the true response of the Christian individual and community. While the Bible provides norms and principles for individuals and the community in their response to the divine summons, the Scriptures' most important role is to present the dynamic relationship between God and human beings as a dialogic encounter in which responsibility and freedom are the central paradigms for moral theology.

In his quest to find the value and meaning of Christian life through "a vision of wholeness" derived from the biblical perspective, Häring draws from a variety of texts throughout the Bible. The primary biblical sources for the images that Häring uses throughout his work are, from the Old Testament, the creation story in Genesis and the theophany and legal material in Exodus, the prophetic tradition (although this is given surprisingly minor attention as compared with other texts from the Hebrew Scriptures),

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<sup>38</sup> One must make special note of the fact that Häring relatively neglects the Old Testament in favor of the New Testament, which is an issue that we shall further address in this section, as well as in Chapter Four.

and Proverbs; and from the New Testament, the Gospel of John, the epistles of Paul, and the Sermon on the Mount.

I believe that Häring's decision to give greatest weight to these particular texts stems from his fundamental understanding of the divine-human relationship. Häring wants to emphasize that God initiates the relationship with humanity. The human being does nothing to merit God's love and invitation to grace, yet God freely chooses to invite humanity into a fellowship within the divine life. Thus, the creation story in Genesis aptly shows the relationship of the Word and the Father as they bring forth new life in creation, while the theophany highlights God's revelation of God's self to humanity without persons seeking such a revelation on their own. The legal texts of the Old Testament demonstrate the normative value of God's positive or "goal" commandments for those who seek to respond to God's self-offer, and thus they suggest that those who respond to God must do so in a way that exceeds minimal standards of the cultural laws of the time. Likewise, the various passages Häring uses from Proverbs demonstrate the religious nature of the moral response to God by the community invited to the life of the covenant.

Häring's choice of primary texts from the New Testament also suggests a particular understanding of the divine-human relationship, with a specific focus on who the person of Jesus Christ is as depicted in the Christian Scriptures. Häring selects biblical texts that view Jesus Christ primarily from the standpoint of a "high Christology" that evaluates the person of Jesus Christ primarily in terms of his divine relationship in the life of the Trinity.<sup>39</sup> For Häring, "It is always Christ who was, who comes and will

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<sup>39</sup> I shall discuss Häring's Christological approach to moral theology as a "high Christology" in further detail, but one must make special note of the fact that a "high Christology" underlies most of Häring's

come to manifest the Father to us and to draw us together in his liberating love.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, the Gospel of John is of utmost significance for Häring’s examination of the role of the New Testament in Christian moral formation, for John depicts Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh, sent by the Father, and the invitation to holiness. Likewise, Paul’s epistles, particularly those which emphasize Christ’s invitation to participation in the divine life, are central to Häring’s overall project. The Sermon on the Mount explains what the Christian disciple is called to imitate in her assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ, which is a life founded on the call to holiness and perfection in participation in the triune life of God. While the narrative aspects of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection are important for Häring’s moral theology, he focuses on the texts from the Scriptures that point to the divinity of Jesus Christ as the invitation to and response of humanity to God’s invitation to participation in the life of God.

Given Häring’s clearly Christocentric focus throughout his moral theology, and despite his best efforts to carefully view the Scriptures as a whole throughout both of his major works, Häring tends to draw from the Old Testament less frequently than from the New Testament. The Old Testament is relegated to a particularly minor role in shaping morality in *The Law of Christ*, although Häring does employ the Hebrew Scriptures a bit more frequently in his later work, *Free and Faithful in Christ*. Häring’s understanding of the role of the Old Testament in shaping the moral life of the Christian is much too narrow, and is therefore one of the weakest aspects of his Christocentric moral theology.

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approach to moral theology, not only in his selection of New Testament texts, but also in the language he uses to depict the meaning of the person of Jesus Christ for moral theology. Thus, Häring consistently refers to Jesus Christ as “the Word” throughout his Christological anthropology. I shall discuss Häring’s Christology at length throughout this project.

<sup>40</sup> FFC 1: 1.

Admittedly, this neglect of the Hebrew Scriptures is one of the limitations of Häring's thought, but this is an issue that contemporary interlocutors can help to correct, as we shall see in Chapter Four of this project. Nonetheless, Häring views the usefulness and authority of the Old Testament in two general ways: first and foremost, the Old Testament points to the revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament; secondarily, the Hebrew Scriptures present a moral law, but this moral law is practically equivalent to what can be known through natural reason, and thus the Old Testament contains no authentic revelation in and of itself. In both of Häring's major works, however, the Hebrew Scriptures serve the important (though limited) role of foreshadowing the fulfillment of God's invitation to grace in the person of Christ.

The two primary concepts from the Old Testament that Häring uses most frequently in the development of his moral theology are the law, established in the theophany and legal texts throughout Exodus, and the covenant. The Old Testament shows the divine plan of salvation for the people, in the context of the covenant. The secondary role of the Old Testament is to show the revelation of the mystery of the divine life. In particular, however, the *covenant* serves as the fundamental theme for much of Häring's use of both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. The idea of the covenant relationship is important for the Christian community because it focuses on the dialogical relationship between God and human beings. Indeed, Christ fulfills the old covenant in the new covenant of his love, and therefore he fulfills the old law. Häring is concerned with the human relationship with God as a dynamic relationship in which humans are given creative freedom. God writes the covenant on human hearts, not in order to tell people what to do, but so that human beings know how to live in response to this

covenant. God promises to send a Messiah who is fully and faithfully the Servant of God and humanity; how the Israelites respond to this election and promise from God determines their fulfillment of the covenant in acceptance and in faithful response.

For Häring, then, the Old Testament's primary purpose is to point to Christ. In general, however, Häring does not attend to the Old Testament as revelatory throughout *The Law of Christ*. Instead, the Old Testament functions primarily as establishing only minimum requirements for living the moral life for the Israelite community. The role of the law established in the Old Testament provides prohibitions more often than freedom and responsibility, according to Häring. *Free and Faithful in Christ* provides a more positive view of the role of the Old Testament for moral theology. Häring places a (slightly) greater emphasis on the prophetic tradition particularly in this latter work. Here the covenant is seen as the gift of the law and the heart of messianic hope: "The prophets proclaim and foster the hope that God will fulfill his covenant and his law, and will find a people responsive and faithful in the covenant."<sup>41</sup> Häring views the ideas of responsibility and fidelity as prominent features of the biblical tradition, consistently understood alongside the freedom of being the children of God. Even in Häring's latter work, however, the value of the Old Testament for moral theology is limited primarily to negative prohibitions that prevent the irresponsible use of freedom given to humanity in the covenant. Altogether, the Old Testament lays the groundwork for the significance of the person of Jesus Christ, found in the New Testament, rather than having any prominent role in moral theology itself.

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<sup>41</sup> FFC 1: 14.

Although Häring gives only a very limited role to the Old Testament as an authoritative source for moral theology, the biblical exegete, Jeffrey Siker, suggests, “Häring’s overall neglect of most of the Old Testament may in part be due to his reaction against the older manual tradition of centering on the Decalogue as a point of departure for moral reflection.”<sup>42</sup> In fact, from the outset of *The Law of Christ* Häring insists that “the point of departure in our study is not the decalog [sic], but the life of Christ.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Häring’s understanding of the relationship between the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount is a good representation of his understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament as authoritative sources in shaping the Christian moral life. While Häring suggests that the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount provide norms and principles for persons who seek to respond to the divine initiative as individuals and as a community, he further contends that the convert to the life of Christ experiences these passages from the Old Testament and the New Testament, respectively, in very different ways. Häring states,

The negative precepts of the decalog, the two tables of the law, are not a perfect and adequate expression of the inner law written in the heart through our assimilation to Christ. This is manifested rather by the Sermon on the Mount, the new law of the kingdom of God promulgated by Christ, the law of disinterested and unbounded love, humility, and love of the cross. The prohibitive precepts (contained essentially in the decalog) lay down the minimum requirements. They fix the boundaries which all must respect (prescriptive precepts). The Sermon on the Mount determines the ideals and goals toward which we must strive (purposive precepts). Unlike the prescriptive precepts of the external law, these purposive precepts emerge and clearly reveal their obligatory boundaries only as one progresses interiorly in the new life. The movement toward the goal, toward the full realization of the law of Christ, is a strict duty arising from the new existence, the life in Christ. The approach, the progress toward fulfillment, must

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<sup>42</sup> Jeffrey S. Siker, *Scripture and Ethics: Twentieth-Century Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 61.

<sup>43</sup> LC 1: xi.

be an expression of the interior growth and the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>44</sup>

According to Häring, then, the Old Testament (and the Decalogue in particular) sets the minimum standards for living in the covenant of love, while the New Testament develops the loftiest ideals and goals toward which the Christian must strive in order to live in assimilation to the life of Christ. Throughout Häring's work, the Old Testament essentially is equivalent to a presentation of a static code of morality based primarily on laws and norms.

While the Sermon on the Mount retains the minimal standards of the Decalogue, the Sermon also insists that the goal commandments direct the Christian toward the goal of perfection. Häring expressly explains his understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament when he states that the "main guidance given by the Sermon on the Mount and the whole gospel is not so much an 'ought' as a gracious invitation to live on the level of the spirit, to live the new life. . . . [T]he law of Christ guides us more by the indicative of the new life than by the imperative."<sup>45</sup> Häring suggests that the old moral law is still necessary, because we are limited beings who cannot always draw the proper conclusions from what is merely indicative; and what is more, "since we are all still sinners, we need also the explicit guidance of the imperative."<sup>46</sup> Häring contends that the laws of the Old Testament merely direct the external life of the person through static rules and prohibitions, whereas the New Testament basis for Christian moral theology concerns itself with the whole person, the

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<sup>44</sup> LC 1: 403-404.

<sup>45</sup> FFC 1: 352.

<sup>46</sup> FFC 1: 353.

interior and external life of the person as she progresses toward the new existence in the life in Christ.

*The Law of Christ* presents a particularly limited role for the Old Testament in Christian moral formation. While Häring describes the three kinds of law presented throughout the Old Testament, he insists that only the moral law remains relevant after the law of the New Testament, the law of Christ. The cultal (religious) law and the judiciary law are bound together with the moral law of the Old Testament; Häring insists, however,

Just as the entire cult of the Old Testament had value in God's sight only because of its reference to Christ from whom it derived its force, so too the noblest function of the many meaningful liturgical prescriptions was to keep awake the yearning for Christ and excite a sense of sin and of need for redemption in relation to Christ. With the coming of Christ and His perfect cult, the Old Testament ceremonial law was abolished.<sup>47</sup>

Likewise, according to Häring, the judicial (civil) law of the Old Testament was intended to unify the Chosen People, who were the bearers of the covenant, such that transgressions against the covenant were a frustration of the divine will in the covenant. When the universal Church was established, "the spiritual norms of her law replaced the juridical norms, temporal and spiritual, of the Israelite theocracy."<sup>48</sup> All that remains of the authority of the Old Testament, then, is the moral law. With the covenant as the heart of the Old Testament, according to Häring, he insists that the moral law is not added to the covenant, but flows from it. Although the law flows from the covenant, however,

The moral law of the Old Testament as the clear revelation of the natural law is without doubt more specific and precise in its determination and enjoys a loftier sanction because of the loving alliance between God and His people. The moral

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<sup>47</sup> LC 1: 251.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

norms of the Old Testament are summed up in the decalog and in the great commandment. Their binding force as natural law rested on the rational nature of man, who can grasp them by use of his natural endowment of reason.<sup>49</sup>

All that remains of revelation from the Old Testament, then, is the revelation of the natural law. While the moral law of the Old Testament remains authoritative, according to Häring, the “laws of nature evident to all men include at least the general precept to honor God and the essentials of the second table of the decalog.”<sup>50</sup> That is say, according to Häring, the moral law of the Old Testament is available to all persons, not just the Israelites, through natural reason. The Old Testament moral law is not, therefore, a unique revelation.

Furthermore, although the moral law of the Old Testament has binding force as natural law because of the rational nature of the human person and the positive declaration of the divine will that is revealed in the message of the covenant, “its binding force, interpretation, and sanction no longer derives from the Old Testament, but from the New.”<sup>51</sup> Häring contends that the Old Testament law must be viewed entirely in relation to Christ, and therefore Häring gives no authoritative force even to the moral law of the Old Testament apart from the natural law that can already be made known through human reason.

Häring’s *Free and Faithful in Christ* provides a more generous assessment of the role of the Old Testament in the moral formation of the disciple of Christ. Rather than relegating the laws of the Old Testament to the role of presenting what is already known

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> LC 1: 245.

<sup>51</sup> LC 1: 252.

through the natural law, Häring insists that certain themes which emerge from the Hebrew Scriptures have relevance for Christian moral formation derived from the vision of wholeness inherent in the Bible. According to his later work, Häring insists, “Moral theology has much to learn from the great and all-pervading perspectives of the Old Testament. There, the great themes that are particularly fruitful for ethics overlap and integrate each other,” most notably God’s “creative word and call to fellowship.”<sup>52</sup> God calls us to be images of the Creator, but also to be with God in freedom. To this end, Häring points to the prophets who present the messianic hope and spark yearnings for a new covenant of salvation. Siker identifies the more prominent role of the Old Testament in *Free and Faithful in Christ* as a significant progression in Häring’s thought regarding the vision of wholeness derived from the biblical sources. Siker concludes, “although ultimately the Old Testament remains for Häring primarily a precursor and pointer to Christ, he moves significantly away from the overall negative characterization of the Old Testament found in the *Law of Christ* to a more positive appreciation for the Old Testament, and the unity and authority of the biblical witness as a whole, in *Free and Faithful in Christ*.”<sup>53</sup>

While Häring gives the Old Testament a slightly more important role in moral discussions in his *Free and Faithful in Christ* than it was given in *The Law of Christ*, he never fully engages the Old Testament in his analysis of the significance of the Scriptures for the Christian moral life. Häring’s approach to Christian ethics is so thoroughly Christological that his “vision of wholeness” ultimately does not include a thorough

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<sup>52</sup> FFC 1: 8.

<sup>53</sup> Siker: 70.

representation of the whole Bible. Rather, the Old Testament has a relatively minor role in shaping Christian ethics, while the New Testament is the heart of the Scriptures for Häring's moral theology. Despite his attempts to view the Scriptures as a whole, Häring fails to adequately address the true relevance of the Old Testament for Christian morality. By envisioning the relevance of the Old Testament only in light of its relationship to the New Testament, Häring effectively limits the role that non-Christian sources will have throughout his moral theology; Häring subsequently views all non-theological sources only in light of the role that they have in developing a specifically Christian morality, such that all morality is authentic morality only to the extent that it centers on and is lived according to the life of Jesus Christ. As such, Häring's understanding of the significance of the figure of Jesus Christ for non-Christian morality is never fully developed in any of his works. This is a problem that Häring seems unable to adequately address throughout his Christocentric ethic, as I shall address further in subsequent sections of this project.

Although Häring's Christological ethic lacks a true integration of the Old and New Testaments into a comprehensive "vision of wholeness" for Christian ethics, Häring's focus on particular themes from the Old Testament does have merit for his overall approach in his ethics of response. In my view, the most positive role of the Old Testament in Häring's moral theology is to present the covenant of love, and in return the Hebrew Scriptures engender our loving adoration of the Lord of the covenant. Although Häring considers the commandments of the second table of the Decalogue as merely minimum requirements and demands that give structure only to the external life of the human person, Häring insists that these commandments also orient the person toward love. "Since the Lord Himself sharply underlined these commandments for us, they give

us the assurance that we can fulfill our earthly obligations, our observance of the commandments, in the service of love of neighbor, only through responsibility before God.”<sup>54</sup> The Old Testament presents the moral demands of the covenant, the alliance between God and the people of Israel, requiring an active return of love for God’s love.

As Häring’s own moral theology develops in his later work, his more positive assessment of the importance of the Hebrew Scriptures for moral theology is that the Old Testament shows that religion is not equivalent to a philosophy about ideas, “but a history of the living God with his people,” such that “everything depends on how the people listen to God, receive his message and his messengers, and respond to him.”<sup>55</sup> The Old Testament points to the need for responsibility before God. Furthermore, while I believe that Häring’s assessment of the ability of the Old Testament (and the Decalogue, in particular) to direct the interior life of the person is inadequate (too negative, limited, and even inaccurate), his focus on the inner life of the person is an important first step for a moral theology that emphasizes the significance of the moral person, not merely his acts, in examining the meaning and value of the moral life. Häring insists that the Christian must strive beyond the laws of the Scriptures toward the loftiest ideals and goals of the life lived in the assimilation to Christ.

The attention that Häring gives to the New Testament is understandable, particularly given his focus on the imitation of Christ as central for moral theology. The Christian Scriptures reveal the love of Christ, and they give the Christian community goal-directed norms, “as expressed, for instance, in the beatitudes and in the solemn

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<sup>54</sup> LC 3: 78.

<sup>55</sup> FFC 1: 15.

words of Jesus, ‘but-I-tell-you’ (Mt 5:17-48).”<sup>56</sup> The prohibitive rules show the attitudes that absolutely contradict the gift and norm of love, while the goal-directed norms “are truly to be considered as norms for Christian attitudes and actions, in that Christians ought always to be guided and dynamized by them. In the illuminative view of principles, the center of gravity is on the newness of the life in Christ Jesus, the openness for ongoing conversion and growth, the absolute readiness to go far beyond the realm of prescriptive rules.”<sup>57</sup> While the Old Testament provides a covenant morality in which lives are lived freely and responsibly in faithfulness to the covenant, the New Testament establishes discipleship as the fundamental concept for Christian morality. Häring insists that Christian morality must not be faithful merely to commandments, but to “the life-giving law of the Spirit of Christ Jesus (Rom 8:2).”<sup>58</sup> Christian discipleship means that if

we are ready to accept Christ’s sacrifice as the pattern of our life, and if we test all that we do by whether we can offer it, with him, to the Father in thanksgiving for all he has given us, then we will be guided by the Spirit and able to discern the will of God. The real Christian does not just stand before rules and criteria: he has his center of life in the Eucharist and makes his decisions on whether his response can be brought home into the celebration of God’s goodness and mercy as revealed in the Paschal Mystery.<sup>59</sup>

The New Testament reveals the life of Christ as the pattern for the life of the Christian disciple. The Christian Scriptures show the normative ideal to respond to God’s offer of love and grace through our love of God, with our whole hearts and with all our energy in our assimilation to the life of Christ.

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<sup>56</sup> FFC 1: 342.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> FFC 1: 344. Häring proceeds to cite Josef Fuchs’ helpful insight that Christian morality “does not deal so much with the ‘Thou shalt of the commandments but under the impulse of the ‘Thou mayest’ of love.” From Josef Fuchs, *Human Values and Christian Morality* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970): 63.

<sup>59</sup> FFC 1: 345.

In keeping with his Christocentric focus throughout his moral theology, Häring draws from a wide range of texts from the New Testament that show the divine-human relationship as a dialogue of call and response. Of particular significance for Häring are the Gospel of John and the Epistles of Paul, most notably Paul's letter to the Romans. Häring emphasizes the positive aspects of the moral life as evidenced in the Christian Scriptures, because in particular, according to Häring, the New Testament shows the freedom of life in Christ. Häring states, "At the very heart of the New Testament is Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Man, the Son of the living God. This is the newness of Christian ethics: that the Father has given us everything and, indeed, has given us himself by sending us his beloved Son, his Word incarnate."<sup>60</sup> Because the Father shares his life with the Son through the Spirit, the Trinitarian relationship is one of infinite freedom, and because God chooses to share the divine life with us, we, too, experience true freedom in the creative liberty of the children of God.

The life of Jesus Christ is the heart of the Christian life, and in order to imitate Christ, Christians must respond to his life as presented in the New Testament, and as anticipated in the Old Testament, through a life in perfect imitation of Jesus Christ. Häring frequently refers to Christ's call to "Abide in me" and "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." Likewise, Häring's first major work receives its title from Paul's Letter to the Galatians imploring the community to "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Just as Häring understands the normative value of the Scriptures for Christian ethics primarily in terms of their overall "vision of wholeness," as opposed to merely citing one or two texts to support a

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<sup>60</sup> FFC 1: 15.

normative system already in place, he looks to the New Testament to find not just Christ's words, but his total message. Assimilation to the life of Christ is life in the Spirit of Christ; for all "who truly believe in him, trust in him, and adore the Father with him, will have a share in his prophetic role. They will not endlessly repeat Christ' words to long-dead generations but will proclaim his word, his total message, in creative faithfulness to the living God in their own times."<sup>61</sup> The message of the New Testament is creative freedom for renewal and sanctification for the disciple of Christ.

An interesting inconsistency in Håring's work is his heavy reliance on particular sayings of Jesus in dealing with specific moral issues, while he rarely refers to the general story of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection as they relate to Christian moral reflection and action. The use of specific texts relating to Jesus' teachings seems to be at odds with Håring's insistence that Christ's total message is what is most important for the Christian moral life. Håring's overall focus is on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as embodying the creative freedom and obedient response to the invitation of the Father for the moral life of the Christian; at the same time, however, he does not mention the historical life of Jesus in relation to actual situational ethics. In fact, Jeffrey Siker notes this anomaly, saying it is "noteworthy that Håring refers primarily to isolated sayings of Jesus and Paul and relatively rarely to narratives about Jesus, although clearly for Håring the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus are crucial. Although he is aware of larger narrative contexts, he rarely pays much attention to them."<sup>62</sup> Despite

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<sup>61</sup> FFC 1: 18.

<sup>62</sup> Siker: 63.

seeing the overall narrative of the Scriptures, Häring does not seem to actually engage in the narrative context of the Bible for his own moral theology.

Nonetheless, Häring explains that moral theology must be “neither biblicistic nor a mere philosophical endeavour. It is either under the authority of the word of God or it is not theology at all.”<sup>63</sup> The Scriptures have normative value for Christian ethics because of their overall vision of what God has done and who God calls us to be as Christians and as the community of the disciples of Christ. The Bible transforms the life of the believer, as the Scriptures look to the past and point to the future. Häring insists:

The motivations and, to some extent, the very content of the lofty biblical orientations, requiring corresponding dispositions and offering criteria for discernment, are based more on what God has already done in creation and redemption (*anamnese*) than on our expectations and hopes, although we do not wish to minimize the eschatological horizon insofar as it describes God’s promises for the things to come and the road we have to walk. The uniqueness of God’s marvelous deeds climaxing in the incarnation of the Word of God, the Paschal Mystery, the effusion of the Holy Spirit, is more than an additional motivation for keeping norms which are naturally known; it opens up new dimensions and orientations that also lead to more concrete norms, setting us on the road and obliging us to a clear direction that has always to be kept in mind.<sup>64</sup>

Moral theology based on the Bible cannot seek to prove the abiding and universal value of norms based solely on one or two texts without being aware of the complementarity of the others, nor must moral theology be completely based on philosophical ideas without adhering to the word of God as the source of the invitation to grace and salvation. An adequate moral theology, according to Häring, must have a biblical foundation that looks at the dynamic divine-human relationship as presented throughout the Scriptures as a whole in order to maintain an appropriately eschatological view of creation and

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<sup>63</sup> FFC 1: 337.

<sup>64</sup> FFC 1: 335.

redemption. In fact, Häring contends that the emphasis of the Bible is not on the four cardinal virtues, but on the eschatological virtues (faith, hope, and love) that have normative value for Christian moral reflection for all times and places. Häring insists that such “a return to the biblical vision can generate and release energies of creative liberty and fidelity in today’s world.”<sup>65</sup>

Häring’s eschatological orientation helps to explain, or at least contextualize, his relative lack of interest in the narratives of Jesus’ life, ministry, and death. Despite Häring’s consistent emphasis on the importance of the imitation of Christ as a primary motif for Christian moral formation, from the New Testament passages that Häring uses for his theology, one can see that Häring’s is primarily a “high Christology” or a “Christology from above.” Such a Christology is particularly evident in Häring’s heavy reliance on the Gospel of John and Paul’s letters. Throughout his theology, Häring refers to the descent from the inner life of the Trinity to the earthly encounter in which God speaks to creation and invites human response in grace. Most significantly for Häring’s Christocentric moral theology is his insistence that God’s invitation and the human person’s (and the Christian community’s) response leads directly to the moral life expressed in the life of worship. The moral life expressed in worship is not limited to the cultic life of the liturgy, however, but in service of the love of God and the love of neighbor. Although Häring understands the importance of the historical Jesus and sees his ministry, death, and resurrection as the seeds of faith, he does not begin his Christocentric ethic with this as his starting point. Rather, Häring makes the central focus

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<sup>65</sup> FFC 1: 202.

of his moral theology God's initiative in sending the Word Incarnate among us for our salvation.<sup>66</sup>

While the Christian disciple is called to the imitation of Jesus Christ, such an invitation seems in tension with the primary texts that Häring chooses to describe Jesus Christ as portrayed in the New Testament. Yet I would suggest that this is not really an inconsistency on Häring's part. Although the choice of texts pointing to a high Christology seems to be in tension with a moral theology of imitation of Christ, Häring's selection of New Testament texts points to the *kind* of imitation that the disciple of Christ is invited to live. For Häring, the imitation of Jesus Christ is not meant to be a point-by-point imitation of the sayings and actions of Jesus Christ; rather, assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ invites the Christian disciple to be *like* Christ, not to be Jesus Christ. That is to say, Christian discipleship requires an adoption of fundamental attitudes and dispositions that lead to a particular kind of life, or a particular way of living, that embodies the love of Christ for others. The Christian life in the imitation of Christ is the life of responsibility before Jesus Christ marked by the creative freedom unique to the individual and the fidelity to God distinctive of the Christian life in communion with each other and with the triune God. I shall further explicate Häring's understanding of the meaning of the imitation of Christ in the following sections, but one must note that his high Christology, particularly as presented in his choice of New Testament texts, may point to a specific type of imitation of Jesus Christ unique to Häring's moral theology.

The heart of the New Testament is Christ, and Häring insists that God's call and the human response is the pattern exemplified throughout the Scriptures. Christ is the

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<sup>66</sup> Häring repeatedly refers to Christ as the "Word of God," "the Logos," and "the High Priest."

fulfillment of the old covenant and is the new covenant. Relying heavily on the Gospel of John, Häring establishes that, while the law is given through Moses, grace and truth come through Jesus Christ. The dialogue-response relationship is the basis for Christian existence. Responsibility before God is the expression of creative freedom and fidelity. Likewise, Häring draws from Paul's epistles, particularly Romans and Galatians, to identify the "law of Christ" as "solidarity in liberating love" that fulfills the law. From the New Testament we can see the synthesis of the love of God and love of neighbor. By his death on the cross, Christ entrusts himself to God the Father, and at the same time "gives himself to his brothers and sisters, so that they, too, may have life in the Spirit."<sup>67</sup> The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are essential for Häring's moral theology, because they embody God's relationship with human beings as one of freedom to respond to God's initiative, which is accomplished most perfectly and obediently in the life of Jesus Christ. God condescends in divine freedom to become one of us and, thanks to this movement from within the inner life of the Trinity, we are enabled to respond in the freedom of the love and grace in Christ.

Finally, of particular interest in Häring's portrayal of the relevance of the Scriptures for moral theology is his insistence that "theological hermeneutics, using all the resources of philosophy and of the anthropological sciences, should always take place within the faith-community."<sup>68</sup> Christian moral theology, precisely as the theology of life in Jesus Christ, seeks to understand what discipleship means for all Christians and for the whole world, according to Häring. Because we are in community with the Father in

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<sup>67</sup> FFC 1: 17.

<sup>68</sup> FFC 1: 338.

Christ the Incarnate Word, we are united with one another in the Body of Christ.

Therefore, the Scriptures are to be interpreted in the Church and with Tradition under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, not alone as individuals with our own individual interpretations. Because of our dialogical relationship with God and fellow persons, “[t]o be in Christ means necessarily to be bound up with all those who have fellowship in Christ, who are called by Christ. Hence it belongs to the essence of religious living that it place us in the community with our neighbor because it is a life in Christ, the Incarnate Word of God.”<sup>69</sup>

The role of the Scriptures for Häring’s Christocentric ethic is to develop an integral vision of the dialogical encounter with God by presenting models for how the Christian and the Christian community are to live in assimilation to the life of Christ throughout all times and all historical circumstances in our own “culturally conditioned way.”<sup>70</sup> The Scriptures point to the lofty ideals necessary for the development of the moral life of the Christian as a disciple of Christ. The Christian is given freedom in God’s love and grace made manifest in Christ, and the Christian who lives in authentic freedom responds to God and to other people in the life of worship and service. The role of the New Testament in shaping the moral life of the Christian, then, is not to give rules and limitations, but to give guidance and positive direction for the person who seeks to live as a disciple of Christ. Therefore, from the Scriptures we learn that the transformation and conversion of the inner person to the life of Christ (through attitudes, dispositions, and virtues) is essential for moral action.

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<sup>69</sup> LC 1: 38.

<sup>70</sup> FFC 1: 334.

### III. Christological Anthropology and Ultimate Value

Jesus Christ is a central concern not only in Häring's presentation of the Scriptures in his ethic, but throughout his moral theology in general. The word-response model is a fundamental motif in Häring's Christology and theological anthropology, particularly as the word-response model is used to exemplify the relationship between Jesus Christ and humanity. Jesus Christ is the Word through whom God speaks to humankind, and in the Word the person is made capable of responding to God's offer of grace. Häring draws from sources both within the Catholic theological tradition as well as sources outside of theology, in an "integration and synthesis of various systems"<sup>71</sup> that emphasize the life in grace as the human response to God's Word in freedom and gratitude. Häring insists that all Christian morality is religious in its roots, and indeed he insists that Christian morality "is essentially dialogue-response, which means that it springs from the response of man to the redemptive word of God committed to him."<sup>72</sup> Thus, although Häring extensively employs philosophical, psychological, and sociological theories sources throughout his work, he always intertwines specifically Christian ideas with these non-religious sources such that these sources are always viewed in light of the distinctively religious foundation of Christian moral theology.

While response and responsibility are general concepts within philosophical theories of ethics, Häring specifically identifies the Christian understanding of call-and-response in relation to the person of Jesus Christ, who is the center and source of

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<sup>71</sup> LC 1: vii.

<sup>72</sup> LC 2: xxi.

Christian morality. Therefore, although the basis for the primary model for Häring's moral theology is a general concept that can be universally understood and to which all persons are capable of adhering, what is distinctive to the Christian concept of response and responsibility is the understanding of Jesus Christ as the one who calls and, at the same time, the one who responds. The Christian uses such a model of response and responsibility to recognize herself as called to the imitation of Jesus Christ, the Call to the person and the personal Response to God's invitation to grace.

Häring's "Christological anthropology"<sup>73</sup> is one of the most compelling aspects of his moral theology. Because the Christian is a disciple of Christ, the figure of Jesus Christ must be the most prominent aspect of Christian morality. One of the most important ideas that Häring provides for contemporary Catholic moral theology is his understanding of the meaning of discipleship. More than merely a student of the Teacher, the follower of Christ is not just a disciple who is shaped by the *teaching* of the Master; indeed, the life of the disciple of Christ is utterly shaped and transformed by the *being* of Christ. The imitation of Christ is not merely external copying of Christ's actions, but complete conversion and assimilation to the very heart of the life of Jesus Christ. Häring's concern is not for Christian's to imitate externally the actions of Jesus Christ, because when we place Christ at the center of our moral life, "we do not ask first what his actions were, but, rather, who he was. We want to know his relationship to God and to people."<sup>74</sup> The Christian moral-religious life is formed not just according to what

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<sup>73</sup> Häring never identifies his anthropology as such; rather, "Christological anthropology" is the term I use to underscore the centrality of Christ for all aspects of Häring's moral theology.

<sup>74</sup> FFC 1: 86.

Jesus Christ says or does on Earth, but who Jesus Christ was, is, and shall be for all times and all people.

With Jesus Christ as the Model, Ideal, Norm, and Pattern whom the Christian follows, the imitation of Christ is the heart of Christian identity. For this reason, conversion is a significant element of the life of the Christian because the “very essence of imitation of Christ is to assume the inner spirit of Christ . . . [which is] made possible, not merely through conformity with the example of Christ, but also and much more through the indwelling of Christ in us (Rom 8:10; Eph 4:17-24). Christ dwelling in us is the actual source of power for this renewal within us.”<sup>75</sup> Assimilation to Christ in the life of the Christian disciple is essentially what defines the person as Christian. The imitation of Jesus Christ is being Christ for others, not only through external actions, but also through the inner spirit that exemplifies the kind of person that Christ calls the Christian to be as His disciple. Through the imitation of Christ, one’s personality is most fully developed and the person becomes more fully herself precisely as a disciple of Christ. For the purposes of this aspect of the project, then, we must focus on Häring’s understanding of how the Christian’s moral-religious response to God develops according to the person’s specific identity as a follower and imitator of Christ. The Christian lives in the grace of Christ and responds to this invitation to grace both in her personal and communal life in every moral-religious decision for participation in the life of God.

The interweaving of various theological, as well as non-theological, concepts is evident throughout Häring’s theological anthropology. Häring sees Christology as essential for an adequate anthropology. He states, “Not anthropology in itself alone, but

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<sup>75</sup> LC 1: 209.

Christology breathes the spirit of life into the theme of moral theology. The grace comes from Christ.”<sup>76</sup> Häring’s anthropology must be studied in light of his Christology. One of the most prominent features of Häring’s theological anthropology is his integration of personalism and value theory into his Christocentric approach to morality. Because he views Christian morality as constituted by the person’s specifically religious-moral response to God’s offer of salvation in the person of Jesus Christ, Häring insists that anthropology must study the whole person “from the standpoint of the call of Christ to man,” namely, the human person integrally viewed as “created in the Word of the Father, who is Christ, and in Christ wonderfully renewed.”<sup>77</sup> The dynamic dialogue between God and humanity as call and response is the heart of Häring’s Christocentric moral theology, and his Christological anthropology is developed always with a view to Christ as the center of all Christian religious-moral response to God’s invitation in grace.

Responsibility is the heart of Häring’s Christological anthropology and value theory because it explains both the religious and moral experience of the Christian person as response to God’s initiative in the gift of grace. In keeping with the scriptural foundation for his moral theology, Häring sees responsibility as a particularly helpful vehicle through which to approach moral theology, precisely because responsibility is a concept found throughout the Bible, and responsibility corresponds to the “signs of the times” in the modern world. Thus, the leitmotif of responsibility shows the discernment of the divine-human relationship for moral theology to be historically rooted in the past with relevance for the present and future. Because Häring understands responsibility to

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<sup>76</sup> LC 1: 61.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

have a scriptural foundation, he views Christian responsibility as a particularly important theological concept that is distinct from a more philosophical understanding of responsibility. Häring thus views responsibility as a key concept for understanding the Christian's relationship with God, and with the world, for all times.

What I find most significant in Häring's word-response model is that his understanding of responsibility is both accessible to non-Christians but also distinctive of the response of the Christian community. Although all persons are capable of responding to something that they perceive to exist outside of themselves through transcendental acts, the Christian response to that which he perceives calling to him from beyond his own inner self is a response directed specifically to God, Who is understood as the highest good outside of the self. The responsibility of the Christian is to respond to God's offer of grace, manifest most perfectly in the person of Jesus Christ. For Häring, then, the responsibility of the Christian is responsibility in the imitation of Jesus Christ, carried out for the sake of Jesus Christ whose life is lived for the sake of others. The response of the Christian is a unique response, both in terms of being unique according to the capacities of the individual person who responds throughout his life, as well as in the sense that the response of the Christian living in the Christian community is specific to the person who understands his life as one who lives according to the imitation of the response of Jesus Christ to God's will.

In the development of his theory of Christian personalism, Häring contends that responsibility demands faithfulness to the word of God, but responsibility also requires the creative freedom of the individual in order to respond to God's call in a way that fulfills the individual personality in distinct circumstances and situations. Häring states,

“Since our life can be understood only in view of God’s initiative, we exercise and develop our creative freedom and fidelity by listening and responding. It is therefore a distinctively Christian approach to emphasize responsibility as a leitmotif, but in a way that shows it as expression of creative freedom and fidelity.”<sup>78</sup> Häring identifies the Christian life as precisely the life of response. The response of the person is always to God’s invitation to grace directed specifically to the unique individual living in community. God initiates the dialogue with humanity, and we are given the ability to respond to this offer of love and grace in Jesus Christ. Häring develops a personalist ethic in which the person is called to participate, through each and every moral decision, in the very life of the Trinity through God’s self-revelation in the second person of the Trinity, the Word Incarnate; the person’s response to this offer of participation in the life of the Trinity is the development of the individual personality in relationship to God, the neighbor, the self, and all of creation. The person is most fully free and faithful to God’s will when she responds with her whole being to God’s offer of fellowship with God and with others, and in the response the person becomes most fully herself. The person’s response is not solely to God, however, but also to the neighbor, the community, and the world in which she lives. Häring asserts,

Those who want to live creative freedom and fidelity in Christ ought to understand themselves, above all, in relationship with God, with fellowmen, themselves and all of creation. It is not so much new ideas as new relationships that change people, communities and societies. Only one who understands his or her self in a relationship of response and dialogue with God and fellowmen can reach that selfhood that is truly free to love and to be faithful in a creative way. The highest ideal of the disciple of Christ is to be conformed with the loving will of God.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> FFC 1: 59.

<sup>79</sup> FFC 1: 85.

Thus, relationship is the heart of Häring's ethic of responsibility in the imitation of Christ, for Jesus Christ's life is the life of relationship to God and relationship to others in loving solidarity.

For this reason, the primary purpose of moral theology is to provide a deeper understanding of what it means to imitate the life of Christ as perfect response to God in the world. The goal of the Christian must be to aim for the summit of perfection, to live the glad tidings of salvation in the world here and now, in hopes of the future kingdom. Concern for right conduct alone cannot help the Christian to merit salvation, as Christ has already earned this salvation for us; nothing we do can ever "merit" what Christ has already accomplished for us in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Every Christian is called to holiness and perfection. The perfection that the Christian seeks can be attained only through continual conversion to the life of Christ, not through following the minimum requirements to attain salvation. Life in the imitation of Christ does not mean following rules and principles, but stretching beyond those norms and limits to the heights of participation in the divine life of the Trinity. Just as the triune life of God is inherently relational and dynamic, so must the life of the disciple of Christ be lived in constant renewal and transformation in light of God's invitation and our response in freedom and faithful obedience.

At the same time, love for God motivates and sustains the imitation of Christ. In the figure of Jesus Christ, the Christian experiences the perfect example of response to God in adoration, freedom, faithfulness, and love of neighbor. At the heart of Häring's explication of Christian personalism, he emphasizes the importance of the imitation of Jesus Christ particularly in terms of the imitation of Christ's adoration for God and

sacrificial love for humanity. Häring's focus on love is of great importance for contemporary moral theology because the love embraced throughout his Christocentric ethic is not a general concept of love, as in more philosophically oriented morality; rather the love of the Christian is the love of Jesus Christ Himself. Thus, Häring says that

the Great Commandment of love is the foundation for personalism and as well the deep source of the Christian spirit of fellowship and family. The divine summons to us, which is something utterly personal, and its acceptance on our part, which must likewise be altogether personal, is the foundation of fellowship with God and at the same time of brotherly community with men. All authentic responsibility of man for his fellows and all responsibility for the social order in the world flows from our response to the redemptive Word of God. From this response it draws its life and inspiration; to this response it constantly returns.<sup>80</sup>

For Häring, the Christian religious-moral life consists of imitating Christ through inner assimilation to the indwelling of the spirit of Jesus Christ, which then leads to expressing love of and responsibility for the neighbor. More importantly, however, I suggest that what Häring indicates through his depiction of the imitation of the love of Jesus Christ is more than a love universally understood or given in general philosophical concepts of love. I interpret Häring's explication of the love of the Christian as a responsible love through which the Christian is responsible for the imitation of Christ's love for all persons, not just the neighbor, but the enemy as well, in a genuine fellowship and community of all persons directed toward communion with the triune God. The love of Jesus Christ is not directed only toward his friends and his disciples. Rather, Christ's love is the love of God, directed toward and offered to all persons in the redemption wrought through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

One must fully understand Häring's development of his Christian personalism to clearly grasp the importance of the figure of Jesus Christ for moral theology. Rather than

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<sup>80</sup> LC 2: xviii-xix.

the general concept of the “I-Thou” relationship espoused by many of Häring’s contemporaries, Häring emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the heart of Christian personalism, for Jesus Christ most completely and visibly manifests the will of God and the human response to God’s will as the ultimate norm for Christians. Expanding on philosophical personalist theories, Häring insists that the dialogical understanding of the human relationship with God stresses the importance of the “I-Thou” relation of the person to the sacred. The central concern for Häring’s theological anthropology is the I-Thou encounter, the encounter of the whole person with the all-holy God, particularly in the Word, the Logos, Jesus Christ. In the fellowship between the human person and God, the person responds to God’s word through his whole being, through personal responsibility in the decision for action in the community with God and with neighbor. Häring’s Christian personalism clearly resembles that of Karl Rahner, particularly in his assertion that the person becomes his true self, most intimately himself, through giving of the self generously and selflessly to another, experiencing himself as “not-I” when confronted by a Thou. Rahner states,

Within and behind the situation of the individual, even as determined by the demands of the “thou,” a concrete call of God is legitimately presented to the individual concerned; and this call engages at once the agent in his moral behavior, whose self-realization this call demands and bends in a particular direction, and the general moral law reflecting God’s fundamental plan for human beings, society, and their environment, which is meant to be given effect through the activity of the individual and can only be given effect by that means.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, Häring presents the dialogical relationship of the person as the “I-Thou” of the self in relation to “the Other” that is God and “the other” that is the neighbor. Hence, genuine human encounter with that other than the self is also the “I-Thou-We” of the person in

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<sup>81</sup> Karl Rahner, “Existential Ethics” in *The Content of Faith* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994): 543.

fellowship with God in the community, in a fellowship of word and response in loving obedience expressing itself in action. The significance of the I-Thou relationship for Häring's Christocentric moral theology, however, is not just the encounter of the Thou of our fellow human beings, but the Thou of God and fellowship with God in Christ.

Because of his understanding of the I-Thou-We relationship of the person to God and neighbor, the traditional understanding of the *imago Dei* plays a significant role in the personalism and value theory Häring employs throughout his Christological anthropology. The I-Thou relation of humans to God is not based only the human person knowing and following universal, static laws imposed from outside of the person. Rather, the freedom and knowledge inherent in authentic Christian morality is the freedom and knowledge attained through the person's participation in divine freedom and knowledge. Although they maintain their full value in Häring's moral theology, commandment and law are not the proper focus for Christian morality. Rather, "the term *responsibility* understood in its religious sense is the more apt; even from the mere standpoint of etymology the word designates the personal-essential characteristic of religion. This is the relation of dialogue, word and response, in a community."<sup>82</sup> Responsibility expresses the personal relation between human beings and God, response and word. The term responsibility also implies humanity's likeness to God. God's word calls for and invites the whole human person, and the human person makes a decision for God in the response of acceptance (or rejection) of this summons in a life of imitation of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>82</sup> LC 1: 45.

Häring's theology is developed in light of much of Rahner's transcendental philosophy. Häring's allegiance to Rahner is evident especially in his explanation of the significance of the fundamental option in the moral-religious life of the Christian. For Rahner, and for Häring, theological anthropology is the necessary starting point for theology. Essential to Rahner's theological anthropology is his fundamental understanding of human freedom, particularly in terms of the person's freedom to actualize oneself. For Rahner, freedom is the ability to transcend categorical acts through the becoming of a self. Thus, Rahner states, "transcendence is not primarily the condition of possibility for knowing *things*, but is the condition of possibility for a subject being present to himself and just as basically and originally being present to another *subject*."<sup>83</sup> In this sense the person is both free and responsible before God as a person who recognizes himself as created and also as becoming a self. Häring embraces Rahner's theological anthropology when he states, "Karl Rahner describes the fundamental option as 'the total self-understanding and the radical self-expression', while, however, acknowledging that 'it remains first frequently empty and unfulfilled'."<sup>84</sup> The fundamental option in Rahner's theology is the basic decision that accepts or rejects God's offer of grace. Rahner describes the subject's freedom to accept or reject God in the following way:

Freedom is the freedom to say "yes" or "no" to God, and therein and thereby is it freedom in relation to oneself. If the subject is borne by his transcendental immediacy to God, the really subjective freedom which disposes of the subject as a whole and in a final and definitive way can occur as such and as a whole can be affected. Freedom is the freedom of the subject in relation to himself in his final

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<sup>83</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1993): 65 (emphasis Rahner's).

<sup>84</sup> FFC 1: 166.

and definitive validity, and in this way it is freedom for God, however little this ground of freedom might be thematic in an individual act of freedom, and however much, as it were, this God with whom we have to do in our freedom might be appealed to and sought after explicitly and thematically in human words and in human concepts.<sup>85</sup>

Häring qualifies Rahner's depiction of the fundamental option, however, when he describes the person's ultimate acceptance or rejection of God's summons as the "profound dynamics directed towards total self-understanding and self-expression"<sup>86</sup> rather than the actual fulfillment of one's self-expression or self-understanding.

Although Häring's description of the fundamental option seems to be only a slight departure from the fundamental option in Rahner's theology, the dynamic aspect of Häring's distinction is important because it underscores the significance of the life of the Christian as ongoing conversion rather than the attainment of fellowship with God in one mere moment or instance. At the same time, Häring consciously adopts Rahner's description of the fundamental option as requiring the dimension of totality, for totality distinguishes the fundamental option for the good and the profound experience of the conscience as more significant in the life of the Christian disciple than the role of the law and norms alone in the Christian life.

With the word-response relationship between God and humanity as his foundation, Häring further incorporates aspects of Rahner's theology into his own theory of Christian personalism when he elaborates that God manifests the divine will in universal law and universal human nature which can be recognized by all persons. Rahner's universalistic tendency is evident when he claims, "Without prejudice to the

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<sup>85</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*: 100.

<sup>86</sup> FFC 1: 166.

fact that it speaks of a free and unmerited grace, of a miracle of God's free love for spiritual creatures, the statement that man as subject is the event of God's self-communication is a statement which refers to absolutely all men, and which expresses an existential of every person."<sup>87</sup> For both Rahner and Häring, God offers love to all persons, but every person does not necessarily freely accept God's offer. God's will is made known uniquely through the individual function of the conscience, not universal norms and commands. With Rahner, Häring insists that what is singular and unique in each person does not diminish that which is common in humanity, but centers in the universal human. Rather than viewing the person as dependent on norms and laws alone, Häring's Christocentric moral theology views the person as an autonomous individual who can discern his Christian duties and tasks in the unique and concrete situation according to his spiritual maturity developed in light of universal norms and principles. With these norms and principles informing his discernment, the person is free to actualize himself as an individual in an acceptance or rejection of God's self-offer. Like Rahner, then, Häring insists that the common normative ethic is the cornerstone for the individual ethic.<sup>88</sup>

Häring does not negate the necessity of the law and norms for Christian morality, but he does envision the role of the law in a distinct way for the formation of Christian morality. Häring explains that the role of the law for the Christian is not the external coercion of the person; rather the "proper and primary role of law is to direct us to the

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<sup>87</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*: 127.

<sup>88</sup> See esp. LC 1: 296-297 for Häring's reliance on Rahner's theology in the rejection of situation ethics in favor of existential theology.

right understanding of the divine will in its loving summons to us.”<sup>89</sup> For Häring, morality is grounded in the divine-human relationship such that the “commandments of God are words of the divine Love addressed to us, expressed in the great command of love. And the true fulfillment of the command is the obedient response of love, obedient love.”<sup>90</sup> Thus, the disciple of Christ uses the law as “guidance to the right use of interior grace.”<sup>91</sup> Just as the Christian disciple becomes most truly himself when he allows the spirit of Christ to dwell within him, the role of the law for the disciple of Christ in Häring’s theology is primarily to invoke an inner change, or even an inner love, for the person rather than an external force to which he submits out of fear. The word-response relationship is fulfilled in fellowship only when the divine word that summons the person to grace is accepted lovingly by the person, and is answered with the response of loving gratitude.

The law of the Christian is the law of Christ, which is the law of grace in the Holy Spirit that animates the inner life of the disciple of Christ. Christian morality, therefore, is responsibility in the grace-endowed fellowship of humanity and God, centered in the following of Christ. “Only if it is centered in Christ does our moral life possess the worth of response made to God, for Christ is the Word in whom the Father seeks and calls us. Our loving obedience in the imitation of Christ is the echo, the image, the participation in the triune, eternal life of God, in the Word and the response of love.”<sup>92</sup> This response in

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<sup>89</sup> LC 1: 264.

<sup>90</sup> LC 1: 42.

<sup>91</sup> LC 1: 265.

<sup>92</sup> LC 1:52.

fellowship of word and love is not accomplished merely through the external coercion of law, but through the right disposition and inner spirit of the person who is summoned.

Union with Christ shows the Christian disciple the true meaning of the law. Thus a dialogical Christian morality in the word-response relationship views the law as the objective aspect of true and genuine dialogue with God, while the inner disposition and spirit of the person is the subjective aspect in conjunction with the circumstances of each individual situation in which the summons of God invites the person to respond. Law serves primarily as the first step to the right understanding of God's summons and invitation in each particular instance, and therefore the law is not impersonal and merely rational. Genuine morality demands knowledge of the law, but also the use of conscience in the response to the will of God made known in each situation. Authentic Christian morality necessitates dialogue with God for true personalism and genuine moral understanding of the law in order to attain fellowship with and participation in the life of God.

According to Häring, the goal of all Christian ethics is to attain fellowship with God in the moral life of responsibility before God. As a response to the more legalistic ethics that dominated Catholic moral theology prior to the Second Vatican Council, Häring's Christocentric moral theology leaves room for the importance of laws and norms and duties, but he views the laws, norms, and duties of the Christian as freeing rather than limiting moral formation in Christian discipleship. Häring's emphasis on the importance of the law focuses on the positive goal commandments that free the person from the limitations of minimalism that follows the letter of the law rather than laws that prohibit certain actions. The new law for the Christian is the law of Christ, the law of

love offered in Jesus Christ. Häring describes the law of Christ as “essentially a law of perfect liberty. To be free through that freedom by which God manifests his infinite love is to be totally free for genuine love. Surely, God does not need us; but in his infinite freedom he created us to be co-creators throughout history. In Christ he has chosen us to be partners in the ongoing work of redemption.”<sup>93</sup> The new law sets the Christian free in the person’s faithful response to the divine Word spoken in the individual person’s and community’s life. The human person’s response to this invitation to grace is made possible and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

In Häring’s Christocentric moral theology, therefore, Christian personalism is not primarily concerned with one’s own personality, but is concerned with “the word-and-response relation between God all-holy and the soul called to salvation,” a relationship that brings about perfection as the image and likeness of God “who imparts in word and in love the glory of the intimate life of the Trinity.”<sup>94</sup> Indeed, the individual personality is the expression of the image of God in the person. Häring summarizes his own approach to theological anthropology when he states, “In the Word, the Logos, through the Word, and in the image of the Word, we are created. In Christ, the Word-made-man, God comes to us and we to Him. (Man’s likeness to God is the significant key word of moral theology!)”<sup>95</sup> The moral life of the Christian must be the life of response, “both to the self-revelation of the all-holy God and to the revelation of the mystery of man redeemed.”<sup>96</sup> Jesus Christ, the God-made-man, is the perfect revelation of both the

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<sup>93</sup> FFC 1: 68.

<sup>94</sup> LC 1: 37.

<sup>95</sup> LC 1: 36.

<sup>96</sup> LC 2: xxxviii.

divine nature and the human nature, and thus our likeness to God. In Jesus Christ, the supernatural realm and the natural realm come together in the full revelation of the very life of God in the created order.

What is most important in Häring's Christocentric ethic for contemporary moral theology is his emphasis on the Christian person's responsibility before Jesus Christ in the authentic imitation of Christ. Of particular relevance for his moral theology, and for our own understanding of the meaning of the imitation of Christ, is Häring's insistence that what is essential for the imitation of Christ is freedom and fidelity. The Christian life is the life of the responsible, creative person who lives all aspects of her life in conformity with the gracious will of God inviting her to participation in divine-human fellowship. Through the assimilation to the life of Christ, the person fully integrates her likeness to God into the totality of her life. Häring considers the mystery of the divine-human relationship to be most fully revealed in the person's perfect imitation of Christ's freedom and fidelity to the gracious will of God. In his discussion of the importance of prayer in the life of the Christian, Häring states:

That a man can speak with God is the noblest evidence of his resemblance to God and, in the order of grace, a most adorable mystery. The prayer of the Christian is not merely an external imitation of the prayer of the Savior. It is inner attachment to Christ, constantly enkindling itself anew, constantly penetrating more deeply into the soul. It is in truth a participation in the eternal dialogue between the Word of God with God the Father in the Holy Spirit.<sup>97</sup>

Therefore, in order to participate in the very life of the Trinity, the disciple of Christ must assimilate her life to the life of Christ, such that the moral life of the Christian is the life of perfect imitation of Christ, the Word Incarnate. The Christian faithfully, and freely, submits her will to the will of God made known in Jesus Christ. Häring insists that

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<sup>97</sup> LC 2: 246.

Christian morality demands perfection, but not the perfection of the individual self.

Rather, Christian morality requires the perfect imitation of Christ whose response to the Father is the perfectly faithful and perfectly free response of loving and sacrificial obedience to the loving will of God.

Häring considers the focus on self-perfection as the fundamental error of most philosophical approaches to morality. Rather than a merely philosophical understanding of personalism in which the self-perfection of the individual is the fundamental goal of morality, the goal of Christian morality is the perfect imitation of Christ. Häring places Jesus Christ as the center of all Christian morality, for “Christ is revealed as the Word Incarnate through whom the Father speaks out all his love and wisdom. In him God gives to humankind, in infinite freedom, his greatest and undeserved gift. Jesus is his final Word, in whom he gives himself.”<sup>98</sup> With Jesus Christ as the center of Christian personalism, morality is no longer concerned with self-perfection; rather, morality is concerned with responding to God’s grace in such a way as to fulfill the individual’s personality in creative freedom and fidelity to God’s word. Häring states, “Since we receive our freedom from Christ and in Christ, we can rejoice in it only insofar as we are committed to him and have discovered our true selves in that commitment.”<sup>99</sup> Häring contends that morality in a non-religious ethic is merely monologue between man and himself, not free and creative dialogue between God and man; such a “monological” morality creates the impression that the human person in his perfection is the center and meaning of the moral life. Contrary to this view, Häring insists that a Christian ethic

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<sup>98</sup> FFC 1: 60-61.

<sup>99</sup> FFC 1: 74.

must be a specifically religious ethic, concerned with the glorification and adoration of God in human fellowship with the triune God and with our neighbors in the order of creation. This relationship with God and neighbor is the heart of the imitation of Christ.

In light of his understanding of the essentially religious nature of Christian morality, then, Häring insists that all moral theology necessarily must recognize the distinctiveness of the religious convictions that lie at the heart of Christian moral formation and development. Herein lies one of the most important, and at the same time one of the most problematic, aspects of Häring's moral theology seen from our own perspective. Because the imitation of Jesus Christ is the foundation of his work, Häring cannot but ultimately argue for a distinctively religious ethic. Although Häring wants to emphasize that God's offer to humanity is universal, with the imitation of Christ as his fundamental concern he finally cannot concede that Christian ethics is just primarily, or even, a universal ethics; for Christian ethics is concerned with the dialogue of the divine-human relationship, not the monologue of self-perfection as the foundation for morality. While personalism is important for his moral theology, Häring insists that personal perfection is not an adequate motivation or source of authentic morality.

The danger in thinking of Häring's theology as a "personalist" ethic is that the idea of "personalism" seems to focus on the individual while neglecting the all-important role of the community in the full development of the human individual and the individual's relation to God. Although the concept of "personalism" may seem to suggest that self-perfection and development of the individual personality are the goals of an ethic developed in light of the philosophical theory of personalism, Häring is careful to point out that Christian personalism is inherently focused on the person's relationship

with God, self, neighbor, and creation precisely as the person's response to God's invitation in Jesus Christ. Only through imitation of and assimilation to the life of Christ in service to the life of the neighbor and the life of the world can the individual person respond to God's invitation.

Indeed, Häring emphasizes that his understanding of Christian personalism does not equate with individualistic narrowness. Rather, his is a "personalism that confronts each of us with God, with our fellowmen, and with all of creation."<sup>100</sup> The Christian personalism developed by Häring has both an inward and an outward movement, in that the person becomes more fully herself in her response to God's invitation, and at the same time she inherently moves beyond her own self-perfection in seeking to fulfill her response to God through her relations to God, herself, and others. Although God calls the individual personally, the encounter with the divine always takes place within community. The free, faithful, and creative love of Jesus Christ leads the person to solidarity with others.

Integral to Häring's personalistic theological anthropology is his belief that the complete "dedication to the good and the sound development of the whole man which follows from it is assured through the following of Christ. Christ stands before us as perfect man, fully spiritual and devoted to the Father, entirely humane and open to his brethren, to all the joys and sorrows of the world."<sup>101</sup> Indeed, Häring specifically warns of the danger of forgetting that solidarity is a key concept for any Christocentric moral theology. The law of Christ is the law of love, but it is also the law of unity in love, for

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<sup>100</sup> FFC 1: 3.

<sup>101</sup> LC 1: 72.

through freedom in Jesus Christ the person gains the love of saving solidarity and is made capable of bearing one another's burdens. Christ is the law of our life, for Christ is our Way and our Life. Häring says that "saving solidarity is the heart of the law of Christ as he reveals it in his own person, in his life and in his death."<sup>102</sup> The Christian personalism in Häring's Christocentric ethic demands that the person must be viewed "in the entire context of being and life, in the texture of relations which enrich his life and which offer him the opportunity to develop his inner capacities fully."<sup>103</sup> The individual encounter with God always takes place in the community of disciples. God's invitation to the person comes to the individual living in the community, and the person's response to God is lived out in loving service to the neighbor.

While persons are unique, they are also inherently social. The full development of the person in her very essence takes place only in the communities in which she lives. We become our true selves as the image and likeness of God in the encounter with the holy, but at the same time we encounter our neighbor because, "in accepting the word of God directed to us we find the way opened to the word-love relation with our neighbor."<sup>104</sup> Thus, the true self, or the fullness of self, is realized only in communion with God and with other persons, the neighbor. The person has freedom, yet this freedom is perfect freedom only in view of the communities in which the person lives, the communities that shape and condition the individual in history. Häring states, "We enjoy community with the Father in Christ the Incarnate Word. To be in Christ means

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<sup>102</sup> FFC 1: 5.

<sup>103</sup> LC 1: 73.

<sup>104</sup> LC 1: 38.

necessarily to be bound up with all those who have fellowship in Christ, who are called by Christ. Hence it belongs to the essence of religious living that it place us in the community with our neighbor because it is a life in Christ, the Incarnate Word of God.”<sup>105</sup> The religious-moral life of the Christian necessarily places her in the human community in a word-love fellowship with fellow human beings.

Personalism, then, emphasizes the unique individuality of the person who is called by name, personally. At the same time, however, personalism emphasizes the person as social and religious, in a relationship of dialogue with both the neighbor and the sacred, the human and the divine. Responsibility is the personal response to the God who invites and who offers salvation, and this dialogue is always a dynamic movement of God to person and person to God and community (the neighbor) in loving response and in authentic imitation of Jesus Christ. For Häring, the proper perspective for Christian morality is to view the moral-religious decision in light of the religious response to God, such that the person seeks first and foremost “loving communion with God and seeking this in fellowship.”<sup>106</sup> The goal of Christian ethics, then, is not the salvation of the soul or the perfection of the person on Earth, but personal fellowship with God and the holiness of God.

Therefore, according to Häring’s Christocentric ethic, the person is called not merely to perfection and salvation, but to holiness, and indeed the holiness of the triune God. We are called to be holy, to be perfect. “Our whole life is directed to this end as its goal (*télos*), to the praise and infinite holiness of God. An end rich in grace directing our

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> LC 1: 40.

lives and demanding the earnestness of our decision!”<sup>107</sup> Fellowship with Christ through the perfect imitation of Christ is the center of Christian morality. The person’s total conversion to God is the goal of Häring’s Christocentric ethic. With the imitation of Christ as the foundation for moral theology, “the essential characteristics of religion as fellowship with God and morality as responsibility before God . . . are entirely in the foreground.”<sup>108</sup> Therefore, holiness can be attained only when fellowship with God is achieved, and this is achieved only when the person responds to God’s grace in creative and responsible freedom and fidelity to God’s will. Our decision for God must be the free decision of obedient love in imitation of Christ’s sacrificial love for God and for humanity.

Häring’s emphasis on the ongoing process of conversion is of particular relevance for Catholic moral theology today. Rather than conversion being understood as a “once in a lifetime” event, or as an utter transformation of the person in one single moment of grace, Häring reminds us that conversion takes place throughout the entirety of one’s life. Such an understanding of the meaning of conversion is a significant advance beyond the presentation of conversion in previous moral theology. Häring’s explication of conversion in light of his development of a moral theology of imitation of Jesus Christ suggests that conversion, like the fundamental option, is not an utter acceptance of God’s offer of grace once and for all. Rather, the basic orientation of the person toward God is renewed throughout the entirety of one’s life in an ongoing process, a process in which the person continuously develops a self that is made more and more capable of accepting

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<sup>107</sup> LC 2: 152.

<sup>108</sup> LC 1: 51.

God's offer throughout one's lifetime. Such an understanding of conversion, and likewise the fundamental option, offers (at least) a significant shift of focus, in comparison with Rahner's explication of the fundamental option (as I indicated in the previous discussion of Rahner's influence on Häring's moral theology).

Häring believes that, in general, the person does not immediately attain holiness through one moment of conversion, but through a gradual development of the person through assimilation to the life of Christ, in response to God's invitation in grace. Häring states, "Since in this world God does not reveal Himself to us through vision, face to face, but 'only' in His Word, so it is that only progressively do we develop in our response to His Word, through growth in Christ, the Word, and thereby in fellowship with God."<sup>109</sup> The holiness of God is not something altogether unintelligible to the person on Earth, for we experience this holiness in our encounter with the living Christ in God's personal invitation to the individual as well as the communal experience of Christ's presence in the Body of Christ, the Church. We attain a level of holiness to the degree that we are assimilated to the life of Christ in our ongoing conversion and in our imitation of Christ in our moral decisions within the created order. The imitation of Christ "means attachment to Christ through grace, love, and obedience. But it also means attachment to Him in the practice of His virtues and in the imitation of His holiness."<sup>110</sup> Every moral act is an act that aims for holiness and perfection when the person seeks to fully imitate Jesus Christ. The moral act of the Christian disciple is the act of love for God and for fellow human beings in the imitation of Christ's love for all. Häring

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<sup>109</sup> LC 1: 46.

<sup>110</sup> LC 2: 246.

explains that the “moral act is always in greater or less measure weighted with responsibility toward our neighbor and toward the natural and supernatural community in which we live and upon which our individual moral decisions and our whole religious-moral life react.”<sup>111</sup> Far from an individual-centered ethic, Häring develops an ethic in which fellowship with God, self, neighbor, and the world is the goal for the disciple of Christ. Indeed, I would suggest that Häring’s Christocentric moral theology is important for contemporary moral theology in this respect, precisely because it calls attention to the importance of ongoing conversion and perfect imitation of Christ.

Jesus Christ is the model, the center, the goal for the Christian. The Christian disciple is made capable of the imitation of Christ, of following Christ, precisely because Christ is the Word of God who reveals our likeness to God and who restores the image of God within us by the Redemption. The mystery of God and the mystery of humankind are one in the person of Jesus Christ. Häring states, the “mystery of man’s salvation and the mystery of God’s self-revelation has been unveiled for us in the mystery of Jesus Christ. In and through Jesus, the Father turns his countenance toward us with all His glory and love. In Him and through Him mankind can in turn honor and please God in a manner worthy of His supreme dignity.”<sup>112</sup> Jesus Christ is God’s word and humanity’s response. Our likeness to God becomes manifest in the fulfillment of the imitation of Christ, and therefore the Christian life must be directed at all times to “the Word or Logos, the divine pattern in whom and through whom man made to the divine image

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<sup>111</sup> LC 1: 48.

<sup>112</sup> LC 2: xxix-xxx.

lives and to whom he can respond.”<sup>113</sup> The religious-moral life of the Christian is the life lived in the imitation of and assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ, the life of love, obedience, and sacrifice. The love of the Christian person must be the response of the whole person to the divine offer of salvation in Jesus Christ, and the true response is “a love which penetrates and animates the whole religious and moral life of man. Only such love can respond to God’s self-revealing offer of grace and mercy”<sup>114</sup> in adoration and obedience in the creative freedom of the children of God.

The supreme mystery of love is that God loves us first, and invites us to respond in love, as God is Infinite Love in the Holy Trinity. Our response of love is both for God and for our neighbor. The law of Christ is the law of love.

In imitation of Him through our obedience to His law, to the law of love written in the very core of our being by the Spirit, we attain to the freedom of the children of God, awaiting in joyful confidence the consummation of revelation: the full possession of the glory of God and the freedom of His children. But this freedom and this hope – coming to us through the power and instrumentality of Christ in glory – is ours only at the price of love. We must be ready to pay this price day by day in self-oblation and mystico-real death with Christ; we must accept all the sacrifices required by the solidarity of interest in the salvation of our neighbor.<sup>115</sup>

Love of God and love of neighbor go hand-in-hand throughout Häring’s moral theology, for the “[l]ove of the neighbor and its realization in the various realms of life finds its highest motive in the love and worship of God, in the virtues of charity and religion. Charity and religion furnish far more than motive, however. They are the very foundation, the fount and source of the love of brotherhood.”<sup>116</sup> Love in the Christian

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<sup>113</sup> LC 1: 52.

<sup>114</sup> LC 2: xxviii.

<sup>115</sup> LC 2: xxxviii.

<sup>116</sup> LC 2: xxxiv-xxxv.

moral life is more than following the command to “do unto others as you would have done unto you.” The sacrificial love of the Christian is the love that requires the Christian to love as Christ loves. The love of the Christian is a love of a higher order, such that the Christian loves with the “price” that he must love his enemies as well as his neighbors. The love of the Christian is the sacrificial love that is given for the sake of others in the imitation of Jesus Christ. To love as Christ loves is to love as the Father loves the Son and as the Son loves the Father. The Father allows the Son to sacrifice Himself for the sake of others in loving submission to the will of the Father. Therefore, Häring insists that the life of human fellowship cannot be severed from the life of fellowship with God in the reflection of the life of the Trinity. The love of the Christian thus understood, Häring concludes that “the *moral* life of the Christian in its strict and proper sense forms a peerless unity with the *religious*.”<sup>117</sup>

For Häring, the moral-religious life of the Christian is dialogue-response, with God (inexplicably!) initiating the dialogue and the human person responding to the word of God with her whole being. Häring’s theological anthropology presents the person as one who is called by God and who responds to God in an ongoing, dynamic relationship that reflects the relationship of the divine persons of the Trinity. Häring’s Christological anthropology draws from the more philosophically oriented approaches to ethics, but develops them in light of a specifically Christian religious-morality based on the manifestation of God in the person of Jesus Christ and the human person’s response in the divine-human dialogue.

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<sup>117</sup> LC 2: xxxv.

In his Christological anthropology, Häring views the moral life as the life of worship and the life of worship as the moral life. Häring strongly emphasizes the priestly vocation of the Christian as inherent to the Christian's identity as a disciple of Christ, the High Priest. In Häring's moral theology, the "first meaning and purpose of creation is the glory of God," and by his very creation the human person has a natural "priestly task and vocation to worship God."<sup>118</sup> The Word of God speaks all creation into existence, and as such, the human person understands himself as embodied word spoken by God. Häring elaborates on John 1:1-2 when he explains, "*Man is a word* and he can find the Word who calls him, and thus understand himself as an embodied word spoken by God and as a calling to respond in freedom and gratitude."<sup>119</sup> Häring frequently refers to the human person as the word spoken by God. For Häring, then, the moral response of the Christian is always the religious-moral response to God's offer of God's-self specifically in the Word Incarnate, Christ Jesus. Häring places particular emphasis on the importance of the Word and consistently refers to Christ as the Logos – the Word of God – who creates and invites, who breathes forth love and responds in love, in the community of fellowship of God and neighbor. The Word, the Logos, is both the invitation to and the response of obedient love. Through the Incarnate word, Christ, we enter into the community with God. The Word breathes forth the Spirit of love to elevate the human person to the divine likeness. Only when the person is animated and inspired by the spirit of love can the person respond in freedom to the divine summons. The decision for God is free, in

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<sup>118</sup> LC 1: 92.

<sup>119</sup> FFC 1: 106.

acts of moral obedience and love, only because its source is knowledge in proportion to the knowledge of our likeness to God.

As the Word and the High Priest, Jesus Christ is the Model for the Christian moral life. Through his human-divine nature, Christ is both the one who calls and the one who responds. Humanity's communion with Christ is the center of Häring's morality of responsibility, and this unity with Christ is achieved only through imitation of Christ. "In a moral teaching based on the imitation of Christ, the essential characteristics of religion as fellowship with God and morality as responsibility before God, are entirely in the foreground."<sup>120</sup> For Häring, religion and morality have the common center of dialogue and responsibility through word and response. Jesus Christ is both our invitation and our response, the one who invites and the one who makes possible our response, and the one who makes our response acceptable to God. To be an imitator of Christ means to be incorporated into his kingdom through being a member of the Mystical Body of Christ. This membership requires the responsibility of active participation in our actions for the Kingdom of Christ, responsibility for loving service for our neighbor. The person fulfills the "great commandment" of love only according to the measure and the standard of the grace with which she has been endowed by Christ.

The entire goal of Häring's Christocentric moral theology is the human person's total conversion to God precisely through assimilation into the life of Christ (through the interior transformation in the life of worship and cult) and perfect imitation of Christ (through loving obedience to God and loving service to neighbor). Religion is fellowship with God and morality is responsibility before God, and ideally the moral-religious life is

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<sup>120</sup> LC 1: 51.

one in which the moral act is at the same time a religious act. God's offer of grace is made to all persons. The Christian response to God's offer is distinctively religious, however, because God's offer and the human response to that offer is perfected in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, Häring claims,

Our religious life, our response to this revelation in the divine virtues, in the divine worship, and in the practice of religion is henceforth manifested as fellowship with the Triune God in and through Jesus. In Him, with Him, and through Him, we profess our faith, our hope, our love. And faith, hope, and love become a worthy prayer of praise of the name, the holiness, and the glory of God.<sup>121</sup>

Authentic Christian moral action is the religious-moral act of loving obedience to God in service of the neighbor in perfect imitation of the life of Christ, for the imitation of Jesus Christ is the central religious and moral response of the person to God.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God who bestows on humanity a participation in the divine life and the High Priest who calls on humanity to follow him. Christ is the source of the dialogue between God and humankind. This dialogue is possible only because God first speaks to us most personally through Christ the Word, and the person of Christ is the central focus of the life of the disciple who follows Christ's word, example, and grace.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> LC 2: xxx-xxxi. I shall address further Häring's explication of the Christian life of virtue in relation to the religious-moral response of the person in the next chapter.

<sup>122</sup> Häring sees James Gustafson's moral theology, particularly his *Christ and the Moral Life*, as helpful in the development of his theology of imitation of Christ. Gustafson's theology provides for Häring a general concept of "the dispositions that are basic for becoming a sign of freedom in Christ and of fidelity to him." (Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968]: 249.) For both Häring and Gustafson, the pattern of Christ's relationship with God and with others becomes the pattern of the life of the Christian disciple. Häring contends that only by developing one's attitude for Christ and entering into authentic relationship with Christ can the Christian disciple attain to the creative freedom and fidelity to Christ characteristic of one who has submitted to the loving will of God in responsibility and love. Häring also finds Gustafson's theology particularly helpful in his insistence that imitation of Christ means that the Christian conforms himself with the action of Christ by doing for others and being for others what Christ has done and has been to us and for us.

Häring insists that authentic religious-moral response to God is the perfection of the human person's bond with God because the response manifests the divine likeness within the person. He explains,

The Christian is aware that he is, from the beginning, called from God and for God, and that he finds his truthful existence in a total answer to God's grace. In the light of the Word Incarnate who calls us all together, we see our whole existence as a word spoken and confirmed by God, and realize that we gain our own identity by making our whole life a response to Jesus Christ.<sup>123</sup>

The Christian is called to participation in the life of the Trinity through the second person of the triune God who is God-made-human. The Christian response to God's invitation is the response of the person seeking fellowship with God, in the perfection of the image and likeness of God who gives us the Word and the love of God's intimate inner-life of the Trinity, through Jesus Christ. The fellowship with God develops and fulfills the individual personality as the image of God in us.

In Häring's Christocentric moral theology, human freedom in the imitation of Christ's freedom "is both a gift from the divine bounty and the divinely imposed task."<sup>124</sup> The freedom of the child of God is both benefit and burden, for Christian freedom is the freedom of sacrificial and loving obedience to the will of God. In his first major work, *The Law of Christ*, Häring makes clear his view that the law of Christ is the new law that sets the person free to love and obey in the freedom of the child of God. The notion of human freedom becomes even more significant in Häring's later thought as he develops the concept of Christian freedom as the person's creative freedom in faithful response to the Word of God. While our lives are submission to the love and glory of God, they are

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<sup>123</sup> FFC 1: 62.

<sup>124</sup> LC 1: 103.

also lived in the freedom of the children of God. The freedom of which Häring speaks is not freedom from the law, but freedom *for* obedient and sacrificial love in the imitation of Jesus Christ. In keeping with the motif of his responsibility ethic, Häring underscores that the freedom of the Christian is understood as a gift, but also as a responsibility and a task. The responsibility, on the one hand, is for the self to remain open to acceptance of God's offer of grace, and on the other hand, to maintain responsibility in service to others in loving and sacrificial service in the imitation of Jesus Christ. Häring contends that there is no moral response for the Christian apart from the religious-moral response to God's grace revealed most fully in Jesus Christ. Thus responsibility and dialogue define the religious-moral aspect of the divine-human relationship in Häring's Christocentric moral theology. The Christian is given the ability to respond to God's invitation to grace in creative freedom and fidelity to the Word of God, through the Logos, the Word made flesh, God incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ.

Häring views the Christian's relationship with God as freedom for commitment and obedience. The influence of Rahner's thought is evident throughout Häring's discussion of human freedom as the person's radical self-expression and self-understanding coming to fulfillment. Häring likens this profound dynamics of self-expression to God's self-expression in divine freedom. Essential to Häring's Christian personalism is the understanding that "to be free for Christ and his kingdom, requires 'ultimately the freedom of the subject to commit himself'."<sup>125</sup> That is to say, the person becomes most fully himself only by the giving of himself, to God and to the other in the neighbor and in the world. Thus, Häring insists,

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<sup>125</sup> FFC 1: 74.

As followers of Christ, we can never limit our attention to how our response affects our own life. We must also, and most carefully, consider how it affects all our fellow travelers on this earthly journey. ‘Because of its objective embodiment, every free act produces a change in the sphere of freedom shared by all’ we will give particular attention to how our own desire, decisions and actions affect our relationships with others and, indeed, the very lives of others.<sup>126</sup>

The response of the person is always to God’s invitation to grace, but at the same time, the response is given in the created order in the community of fellowship with our neighbor.

Häring develops a Christian personalism in which human freedom and knowledge are patterned on the divine relationship and the human likeness to God. The human person is given the capacity to make the moral decision for God through the gift of the free will. The “direct and immediate source of responsibility is the free will of man which can be considered morally free and responsible only in the light of man’s knowledge of values, his own inner disposition and spirit, his own conscience.”<sup>127</sup> Freedom is the power to do the good and to overcome evil. The power of freedom is derived from our likeness to God and our participation in the divine freedom. The mystery of human freedom is that the human person is most free when acting under the influence of grace in the highest participation in divine freedom. We are free to reject God’s invitation precisely because we are given the freedom to say “no” to God’s offer and summons by our participation in the divine freedom.<sup>128</sup> According to Häring, “Human freedom is the capacity to take one’s stand in accepting or rejecting God’s call

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<sup>126</sup> FFC 1: 67, internal quote from Karl Rahner.

<sup>127</sup> LC 1: 99.

<sup>128</sup> Such an understanding of freedom is evident in Häring’s explication of the fundamental option, which will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter.

to us, but only by virtue of a participation in the divine freedom.”<sup>129</sup> The summit of freedom, however, is the obedient service to God, because the person recognizes that freedom is both gift and task. The core of moral decision is the spirit of obedience to God, saying “yes” to God’s will. The person is responsible for his actions, yet becomes his true self through the inner love of the good and the disposition to obey in a spirit of obedience even when there is no external obligation to act through command or law.

The human likeness to God is evident not only in our participation in the divine freedom, but also through our participation in the divine knowledge. This brings us to Häring’s version of value theory, which is most evident in his examination of the way in which the person participates in the life of the triune God particularly through the attainment of the divine knowledge. One of the primary sources for Häring’s value theory is clearly the personalist value ethics of his teacher, Max Scheler. Häring develops his own Christological anthropology in light of Scheler’s value theory in order to emphasize the values underlying the norms and laws of Christian morality. Häring relies particularly on Scheler in his own understanding of the importance of normative theology for Christocentric moral theology. From the outset, Häring explains Scheler’s influence on his own work when he states, “Max Scheler offers a ground-breaking vision of an ethics of values with criteria for determining the scale of values and the urgencies of value responses. Norms concerning lesser values can be absolutely binding regarding the relationship they cover, *as long as* that relationship does not overlap with another more binding relationship.”<sup>130</sup> Scheler’s relevance to Häring’s moral theology is evident

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<sup>129</sup> LC 1: 101.

<sup>130</sup> FFC 1: 365.

in Häring's contention that such an ethic of value is essential for a theology that takes account of the importance of progress and ongoing conversion in the moral-religious life of the individual. At the heart of Scheler's value ethics is the person's "leaning" toward values, or pre-rational preferring based on a hierarchy of values. The highest order of value is the order of love, the *ordo amoris*. Scheler describes the hierarchy of value as the person "encased as though in a shell, in the particular ranking of the simplest values and value-qualities which represent the objective side of his *ordo amoris*, values which have not yet been shaped into things and goods."<sup>131</sup> He goes on to explain that "attraction and repulsion are felt to come from things, not from the self, in contrast to the case of so-called active attention, and are themselves governed and circumscribed by potentially effective attitudes of interest and love, experienced as readiness for being affected."<sup>132</sup> The person is attracted to or repulsed by the innate value perceived within the object that lies outside of the self, and the moral act is one which seeks to attain or move toward the value perceived as the good in the object. The attraction to value is a kind of "second-nature" in Scheler's (and Häring's) work.

Before a person is able to act toward the good, in a moral act for the good, Scheler insists that the person must have an insight into the inchoate value of the object. Scheler explains the relationship between the recognition of value and morality:

Value-insight has an *objective* priority over good volition and conduct, for only what is unmistakably willed as good is, if it be also objectively good, *perfectly* good. But at the same time true value-insight is subjectively dependent on, hence posterior to, objectively good volition and conduct. Furthermore, true value-insight has a subjective priority over perception of entities, though value itself is

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<sup>131</sup> Max Scheler, "*Ordo Amoris*," *Selected Philosophical Essays*, trans. David R. Lachterman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973): 100.

<sup>132</sup> Scheler, "*Ordo Amoris*": 101.

no more than an attribute of the absolute entity. So we may go on to say that the specific “emotional” acts through which we come to apprehend values and which are consequently the source of all value-*judgments* as well as of all norms and decisions of obligation, constitute the unifying factor which is *common* to our practical conduct and all our theoretical knowing and thinking. But since, within the group of these emotional acts, *love and hate* are the most fundamental, embracing and underlying all other kinds (interest, “feeling of...,” preference, etc.), they also constitute the common *roots* of our practical and theoretical behaviour; they are the *basic acts* in which alone our theoretic and our practical life discovers and conserves its ultimate *unity*.<sup>133</sup>

Rather than an order based on reason, Scheler’s order of values is based on the order of love, such that sensible values are at the lowest rank and proceeding to the top of the order, which is the value of the holy. The person intuitively apprehends the inherent value of an object and thus wills to act toward the good through meritorious conduct. Essential to such action is the judgment that the object possesses a good worth acting toward and thus the person acts toward the good due to an inherent love for that value which is within the object. At the heart of Scheler’s value theory lies a fundamental drive for the good according to the rank of the value within the hierarchy of values. In light of his concern for the “*Ordo Amoris*,” Scheler states,

We can have just this knowledge of the ranking of everything which is possibly worthy of love in things, in accordance with their inner values. Such knowledge is the central problem of all ethics. However, the highest thing of which man is capable is to love things as much as possible as God loves them and in one’s own act of love to experience with insight the coincidence and intersection of the divine and the human act at one and the same point of the world of values. The objectively correct *ordo amoris* becomes a norm only when it is seen as related to the will of man and as commanded to him by a will.<sup>134</sup>

The will of the person is indeed commanded to him by a will outside of the self, according to Scheler’s presentation of the normative nature of the *ordo amoris*. The love

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<sup>133</sup> Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, trans. Bernard Noble (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1960): 88.

<sup>134</sup> Scheler, “*Ordo Amoris*”: 99.

of God is the highest possible love, and the highest possible value. The person who loves with the highest form of love, loves with the love of God. Häring develops Scheler's hierarchy of values into his own value theory with participation in the life of God through the imitation of the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ as the summit of perfection.

Häring finds Scheler's value theory helpful in developing his Christocentric moral theology primarily because he believes that an "ethics that wants to serve the formation of responsible and creative persons will give great attention to emotions, affectivity and the whole realm of sensitivity to values that lie deep in man's being and are particularly expressive of the human longing for inner wholeness, for integrity and integration."<sup>135</sup> The person is responsible for being open to the value that lies outside of the self in the objective value of the other. The value within the other demands response. Häring follows Rudolph Otto's theology in which "responsive sentiments precede and transcend particular actions" because they are beyond "mere conceptual understanding."<sup>136</sup> Häring sees such "responsive sentiment" as important for ethics precisely because it avoids the pitfalls of mere utilitarian ethics.

Häring sees sensibility and emotions as key components for an adequate Christian moral theology of relationality and response. In Häring's Christocentric moral theology, morality is response to value in the created order, and therefore value is the motive for human action. Because the person always is engaged in various relationships, Häring sees value theory as particularly helpful in describing the person's interaction in the I-Thou-We relationship as openness to the Other in order to experience value. Häring

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<sup>135</sup> FFC 1: 90.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

insists that emotions are as important for Christian morality as is reason because the core of Christian morality is relationship. To this end, Häring explains that authentic value ethics addresses “the emotional mindset of that affectivity that expresses the person’s basic relationship to the Other, the others, and to one’s self.”<sup>137</sup> Häring insists that the person must also be open to experience the other in order to experience value.

One of the key principles of Häring’s value theory is that the objective worth of value is intrinsic, and does not depend on its utility (that is, value must be recognized and appreciated without concern for it being a means to an end). The emotional “leaning” of a person who is drawn to the other is the person’s affirmation of the value embodied in the lovable other, or, as Häring clarifies, “a sort of confirmation of their worth, acknowledged simply as such, and not for any particular purpose.”<sup>138</sup> Openness to the other and openness to the experience of the other is central to Häring’s value theory. Thus, rather than taking reason to be the primary source for Christian morality, with experience, emotions, and sensitivity as merely peripheral aspects of moral theology, Häring draws from Scheler’s work to explain that the person becomes attached to value which is experienced primarily through love and the experience of value in the other.

A second key principle of Häring’s value theory is that the obligation to respond to value imposed on the person requires a response that corresponds to the nature of the value, such that the lower the value on the scale of the hierarchy of values, the less obligation one has to attend to that value. Häring explains, “All particular values and all types of value rest in basic value: in the ‘good’ (ultimately in God, the fullness of all

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<sup>137</sup> FFC 1: 92.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

good).”<sup>139</sup> The fullness of God’s goodness is revealed most perfectly in the person of Jesus Christ, and thus the basic dynamic movement of the Christian toward value is through intuition, knowledge, and acceptance of Christ. For Häring, human knowledge is participation in the life of God through Christ, and the human beings seek knowledge in order to attain truth, or the knowledge of the good. Häring states, “Man’s likeness to God manifests itself in every conception of truth and every act of knowing, for there can be no truth except for participation in the eternal truth.”<sup>140</sup> Although a person can know value through norms, love of value and attachment to the good comes through experience of value. A person cannot love what he does not know, and he cannot know what he does not already love. Therefore, “to know the good as it should be known implies that one is already good.”<sup>141</sup> At the highest level, the knowledge of value arises from a kind of intimate connaturality with the good. When one recognizes the good, he lives according to the good because the value of the good draws him into itself and appeals to him to choose for the good. At this level of the knowledge of value, the person sees and experiences value concretely in particular situations, but also possesses a bond and contact with it, an intimate affinity with it which transcends every particular instance and situation. The key aspect of value theory in Häring’s moral theology is that “the sense of value attains perfection only in the total response to its word of love, only when the attitude of the one who perceives it measures up to the essential attraction of the good, insofar as this is possible. For ultimately the essence of the good is its appeal to love.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> LC 1: 126.

<sup>140</sup> LC 1: 120.

<sup>141</sup> LC 1: 124.

<sup>142</sup> LC 1: 125.

Value has its appeal and summons in the intellect, while the response is in the will. The loving will must support the knowledge in the person who is entirely and utterly devoted to the good.

For Häring, knowledge of God is the basis of value. Participation in truth is participation in the eternal truth through participation in the very life of the triune God. Knowledge of value is, therefore, participation in ultimate value, namely, God. “The summit is knowledge penetrated with love, engendering love, made dynamic in love. Such in its innermost reality is God’s knowledge, for God is love!”<sup>143</sup> The person’s response to God’s word of love stems from the person’s apprehension of God as ultimate value, and thus every action – both religious (worship and cult) and moral (loving and obedient service) – is aimed toward God as supreme value.

The task of the disciple of Christ is to attain “that structure and perfection of moral value which responds to his own uniqueness and incommunicability before God. He must be truly his individual moral self.”<sup>144</sup> At the same time, however, in the fulfillment of this proper moral task, “each individual must be supported by the community, in which alone the universal laws and values of nature are made comprehensible to him.”<sup>145</sup> Only by giving of himself to another does the person attain moral maturity and become most fully himself. In the relationship of respect for the dialogical I-Thou encounter, “only in the submission to the Thou and in deference for the Thou does the individual attain to its full maturity of perfection.”<sup>146</sup> The ultimate source

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<sup>143</sup> LC 1: 120.

<sup>144</sup> LC 1: 74.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> LC 1: 75.

of the I-Thou fellowship is God who calls us by name and allows us to utter God's name in the dialogical word-response relationship. Our response to the summons of God is directed to the divine initiative in the religious realm of human life, and to value in the moral realm. In both realms, however, the response is assimilation to and imitation of Christ.

In the moral realm, good actions are ultimately sustained by Christ. Through Christ and in Christ, by the Mystical Body of Christ, moral actions "have their source of grace, their vital center, their power and merit."<sup>147</sup> All of the human person's life must bear the mark of response to God's Word through imitation of Christ. The human vocation, then, is to respond in freedom and gratitude through giving glory to God. The Christian disciple is called to participate in the life of the triune God through Christ's obedience, freedom, love, and sacrifice. Therefore, through the imitation of Christ, the Christian disciple fulfills his priestly vocation in the glorification of God and in service to God and neighbor in the order of creation.

The deeply penetrating understanding of God and the moral good is only possible for the person who encounters God as love, and only then does love grow within the person. Häring insists, "The more love grows in us, the more will God manifest Himself to us, the more shall we also understand the morally good. Knowledge of God and moral knowledge are intimately bound together."<sup>148</sup> The knowledge of value, therefore, comes from the knowledge of the good as having inherent value that appeals to love naturally,

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<sup>147</sup> LC 1: 81.

<sup>148</sup> LC 1: 123.

drawing the person into its goodness, appealing to the intellect and eliciting response in the will.

Häring further contends that we can only love what we know, and if we participate in the very life of God, then we know and love God, and therefore know and love our neighbor. That is, we know love, and therefore we act lovingly in service to God and neighbor. “There can be no knowledge of God and the good which is not in some degree dynamic, moving us to love in the divine image, since there can be no normal man who does not feel in his inmost likeness to God the dynamic force of the known good, impelling him to action.”<sup>149</sup> Persons bear value, and the person encounters value most directly through other persons (the “value-person”). On the other hand, the person realizes that no particular earthly value is ultimate. God is the God of love who “speaks to us, most of all, through loving people, since by the quality of their life they are truly an image and likeness of God who is love.”<sup>150</sup> We love the other because we encounter value in the other when we realize that she also embodies the image of God in herself. All value is sacred and is rooted in God, but since the other is an image of God that symbolizes or signifies the reality, we realize the value of the other primarily as a reflection of and participation in ultimate value. Our response to value in the other, however, is our participation in the freedom of God, “who has created us all, not for any utility but as a sacred image and special sign of his presence.”<sup>151</sup> The ultimate value in which all other values rest is the person of God who offers God’s self and summons us to

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<sup>149</sup> LC 1: 122.

<sup>150</sup> FFC 1: 64.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

participation in the life of the triune God. Jesus Christ most completely and visibly manifests the will of God, which is the ultimate norm for Christians. As such, “Jesus Christ is the ultimate and definitive Word of God’s love to us, and also the sole worthy response of man to God’s love. In Him alone have we a response of infinite and ultimate value to Infinite Love.”<sup>152</sup> Christ is the Ultimate Value Person.

In Häring’s theology, Christian knowledge of the good comes through Christ who is the revelation of true or authentic value. Through the word and example of Jesus Christ the person can know and experience the good, because as the Eternal Truth it is ultimately Jesus Christ “who makes it possible for us to have any knowledge of value at all.”<sup>153</sup> The context of the response to God’s invitation is through action, and in the moral realm this response is to value. The moral knowledge of the person comes through the knowledge that Christ is ultimate value. Häring states,

Only if we are united in the Person of Christ in love, through profound submission of heart, will we become docile disciples of Christ with true perception of values and right application of them to ourselves.

Not merely the historic Christ as He is depicted in the Gospels as our teacher, but the whole Christ, the historic and the mystical Christ, who lives on in His Church. Through the Church in every age He makes known to us our personal tasks and places before us concrete and varied illustrations of His own example in the lives of the great saints.<sup>154</sup>

Häring explains that the imitation of Christ, assimilation to the life of the person of Jesus Christ, is essential for the lofty spiritual knowledge of the good rather than the simple knowledge of the law. Häring is careful to point out that the lives of the saints clearly point the way to the good, precisely because all people are called to the perfection and the

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<sup>152</sup> LC 2: xxx.

<sup>153</sup> LC 1: 81.

<sup>154</sup> LC 1: 133.

holiness of the life of Jesus Christ in submission to God. In Häring's moral epistemology, the obedient suffering of Christ is our guide and our model, such that the "motivating power of our moral knowledge is the firm and inviolable resolution to submit to God in all matters, cost what it may."<sup>155</sup> Authentic value transcends every particular instance of the good because it has an overarching appeal that impels the person to action beyond certain situations and events. The person does the good because of an inner drive due to the appeal of the value inherent in the good, because she encounters the good in the I-Thou relationship of love of the good itself.

Every moral act places the person in dialogue with God, because each act "says yes or no to the call of the Eternal. God sends His invitation through history as an appeal to historic activity."<sup>156</sup> Although God transcends history, every action of the human person in history is in relation to the way of salvation that is in history. That is to say, every moral action throughout the ages places the person in relation to Christ, whether or not the person accepts Christ as God Incarnate who redeems humankind and calls human beings to follow him. Drawing from the Gospel of John, Häring declares,

The foundation of a Christian morality is life in Christ Jesus: 'to be in Christ'. In such a life there is no place for a naked ethics of do's and don'ts [sic], nor for an ethics of external imitation or of discrete purposes. Christ's farewell discourses give us the right and essential vision: 'Dwell in me as I in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself, but only if it remains united to the vine; no more can you bear fruit unless you remain united with me . . . This is my Father's glory, that you may bear fruit in plenty and so be my disciples . . . I appointed you to go on and bear fruit, fruit that shall last' (Jn 15:3-16).

The value-response in faith, hope, love, all that can be synthesized in praise, thanksgiving and adoration, and human relationships marked by the same direct value-response: all this is what makes the tree good, the roots without which we cannot bear fruit.

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<sup>155</sup> LC 1: 134.

<sup>156</sup> LC 1: 89.

While Häring is careful to point out that one must not neglect the importance of fully conscious intentions and purposefulness in moral decision in lieu of sensitivity, dispositions, and emotions, he does want to emphasize the significance of value-response that takes place through listening and responding in the order of creation to the needs of other persons. Therefore, the response to value in the moral realm is the religious-moral act of an affirmative response to the divine invitation through action in loving service of God and neighbor.

The moral knowledge of the Christian, then, is developed by an inner dynamism of love that transforms the person's obedience to the law into the loving obedience of the child of God who responds to God's invitation to the good that appeals to the person in each and every individual situation, even if it requires hardship and suffering. We thus "know" the good and grasp it with our whole beings by accomplishing the good. Therefore, to "come to Christ, the 'light' of eternal truth, also means to arrive at a profound understanding of the good."<sup>157</sup>

While norms and principles remain important for Häring, their significance is understood only in light of the implications of his Christological anthropology. All of our "knowledge of God and the good is an appeal to us to choose God and His law,"<sup>158</sup> but this knowledge comes precisely from the experience of value in "the other," not through norms, principles, and laws from without imposed upon the person. The role of norms, principles, and laws is to express the inherent values already present and experienced in the encounter with others and the Other. A person understands and

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<sup>157</sup> LC 1: 135.

<sup>158</sup> LC 1: 121.

experiences value through self-knowledge, through relationships, and through the encounter with “the other” in the I-Thou relationship with God all-holy. The experience of the other is the experience of participation in divine freedom. Because God calls out to the person in love, the person is made capable of interiorizing the command of God’s will and the value inherent in the will of God. Therefore, Häring contends,

Values that appeal to freedom are those embodied in persons or understood as relevant to the growth of persons in their own identity and in healthy relationships with God, with fellowmen and the created universe. They are values relevant for a fully personalized being-with and being-for each other, values expressive of creative freedom, fidelity and truthfulness. Always they are ‘we-values’, manifestations of solidarity in freedom and in the word.<sup>159</sup>

The law only tells the person what is to be done or avoided, but insight into the value of a norm or principle creates the sense of obligation for the individual to act in communion with the other. For a norm or principle to have legitimacy for an individual, the person must be drawn to the value and give a free and faithful response to that inherent value. The person is able to know and to choose the good because of value-experiences, through the I-Thou relationship in which the good is known and sought through the inherent value of that outside of the self. The person’s response to God’s summons of love is the decision for ultimate value in obedient love of God – in worship and cult – and also in loving service for the neighbor. This loving response is the heart of the religious-moral act.

#### IV. The Problem of Distinctively Christian Imitation of Christ and Non-Christian Ethics

Before moving forward, we need to take note of one aspect of Häring’s moral theology that inevitably raises questions for the contemporary reader. I have argued that

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<sup>159</sup> FFC 1: 111.

Häring's Christian personalism is significant for his Christocentric ethic precisely because the human person is not the focus of morality; rather, God is the center. Unfortunately, in many ways Häring's Christ-centered ethic leaves little room for morality outside of Christian religions. That is to say, Häring's Christian personalism does not leave much room for pluralism in the dialogue between God and humanity. Because Häring is concerned primarily with Christocentric moral theology, he never fully addresses the issue of non-Christian morality and how non-Christians are able to enter the dialogue between God and humanity, specifically because non-Christians do not view the person of Jesus Christ in the same light as Christians. Häring is not concerned with such a problem, but one must recognize that this lack of pluralism in Häring's moral theology is a significant issue in our world today. The rare instances in which Häring addresses non-Christian religions seem to suggest that he recognizes that non-Christian morality is an issue, but he is reluctant to develop any thoughtful solution as to how Christians who base their morality on the person of Jesus Christ are to enter and maintain dialogue with those outside of the Christian faith. I first addressed this problem in the context of Häring's relegation of the Old Testament to a minor role in his scriptural basis for his moral theology, and I return to this issue again now to highlight the difficulty for a distinctively Christian ethic to have relevance to non-Christian morality.

Häring's uneasy relationship with non-Christian religions is particularly evident in one passage from *The Law of Christ* in which Häring briefly discusses the importance of specifically religious morality. Häring says of the Hindu religion of self-perfection, "the Hindu and all kindred religious orientations are basically nothing more than a

projection of the anthropocentric ethic of self-perfection into the sphere of religion.”<sup>160</sup>

Häring proceeds to describe the fundamental concern of Hinduism as self-serving and self-centered, and therefore fundamentally limited as to its ability to attain to the authentic morality of Christianity. He states,

Whether the Indian seeks Nirvana as a positive beatitude of the soul which survives after death, or whether he seeks its extinction, the motivation and central meaning of all his asceticism and virtue is man, his own salvation.

Obviously, salvation of the soul in the Christian sense is something altogether different. It is not a blessed solitude of existence nor a blissful absorption into an impersonal essence, but loving community with the living God.<sup>161</sup>

While Häring seeks to provide an increased emphasis on the importance of concern for universal salvation for all persons in moral theology, he dismisses aspects of other religions that may contribute to a greater sense of inter-religious dialogue between Christians and non-Christians. Although such “insensitivity” may be attributed to the times in which Häring wrote his earlier works, a retrieval of Häring’s Christocentric moral theology for contemporary moral theology must address and overcome this aspect of his work. On the one hand, one must remember that Häring sought to be a missionary. Although he is educated in other religions, one must keep in mind that the goal of his mission would be to convert non-Christians to Christianity. Häring’s pastoral approach to moral theology is evident in his concern to present a religious-moral theology in which the person is formed in the imitation of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, we must recognize that Häring has little regard for non-Christian religions that do not (in his view) place religion at the heart of morality, and prefer the self-perfection of the individual over

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<sup>160</sup> LC 1: 39.

<sup>161</sup> LC 1: 40.

the fellowship with God and the community of souls participating in the very life of a personal God who calls individuals as persons, individually.

For Häring's Christocentric moral theology, religion is not of secondary importance for Christian moral formation, but of primary significance. If religion is treated as secondary, "Instead of viewing religion and the proper perspective as first of all a loving communion with God and seeking this in fellowship, [the person] sees in it the furtherance and assurance of his own salvation, which flows from such fellowship."<sup>162</sup> The holiness of God is the keystone of religion, and thus the person must seek loving communion with God first and foremost, above all other things. The efforts for self-perfection are not worthless as long as religion is not dismissed as meaningless. Such "positive value can be coordinated with the religious orientation, but not without being reformed, Christianized."<sup>163</sup> In order to be a worthy response to God, all ethics must be placed in service of God's holiness. Fellowship with God, not self-perfection, must be the center of religious-morality.

Despite his somewhat dismissive attitude toward some non-Christian religions, I would suggest that Häring ultimately presents a Christocentric moral theology that has some universal appeal. Häring insists that God's invitation to grace is offered to all persons. Jesus Christ serves as the Call to all persons to respond to God's loving offer in a life assimilated to His life. Indeed, Häring says that Jesus Christ offers universal salvation. What is distinctive of Christian ethics, however, is the life of the person who responds to God's offer of grace, for the Christian life of discipleship places the divine-

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> LC 1: 41.

human relationship as central to all moral formation, particularly as this relationship is manifest in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Christian life is distinct because it is a life lived in the imitation of Jesus Christ, God's universal call to humanity, and at the same time humanity's specific response to God's call. We shall further examine the distinctive life of the Christian in the following chapter, in an examination of the fundamental option, virtues, and sacraments in Häring's Christocentric moral theology.

## CHAPTER THREE

### JESUS CHRIST: THE PERFECT HUMAN RESPONSE

Although the themes of responsibility, freedom, and fidelity appear consistently throughout all of his moral theology, one must never lose sight of the fact that, for Häring, the heart of Christian morality is the figure of Jesus Christ. Through assimilation to the life of Christ the Christian person attains the inner dwelling of the spirit of Christ that makes possible the external actions that embody the relationship of Jesus Christ with God and with the world. For Häring, Jesus Christ is the center of all Christian morality. The previous chapter examined Häring's relation to prior Roman Catholic moral theology particularly in his use of the Scriptures and his general use of the concepts of personalism and value theory throughout his Christocentric moral theology. With these general concepts as our foundation, now we shall proceed to analyze how Häring envisions the adult Christian's response to God as a moral-religious response in the development of the life of virtue and the life of worship.

Far from a minimalist approach to the Christian moral life, Häring contends that "the disciple of Christ is always and unconditionally obliged to strive for perfection."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LC 1: 174.

The Christian lives not according to laws and imperatives, but according to the divine bounty, God's gracious and loving offer of participation in the triune life in the world.

In Christ, the Father has given us everything. In Him and through Him the Father manifests the profoundest depths of His love. In the love of Christ and through the love of Christ for us He invites our love in return, which is a life truly formed in Christ. The Christian life is following Christ, but not through mere external copying, even though it be in love and obedience. Our life must above all be a life in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian moral life is lived in union with life in and through Christ, our ideal and our model. We are created in his image, and re-created through the redemption of Jesus Christ. Despite the fact that Häring's first major work is entitled *The Law of Christ*, Häring clearly views a Christian ethic based on the law alone as wholly insufficient. The disciple does not merely follow Christ in a narrow sense; Christ's disciple imitates and shares in the life of Christ in a wholehearted conversion to life in, with, and through Jesus Christ. The Scriptures are the light in which the central truths of Christian morality must be viewed, as the Bible shows us the perfect ideal of the life in Christ and with Christ. Therefore, Häring's moral theology shows that the limits and the bounds of the law must necessarily be discussed along with the ideal of fulfillment and perfection. Christians not only must live according to the law, with the understanding that they will not always achieve the fulfillment of the law; Christians also must realize that the perfect fulfillment of the law, perfect obedience to the Father, has already occurred in and through Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Häring emphasizes the Christian life as life in progress and on pilgrimage, and hence the Christian person's need for constant conversion. Christians are on pilgrimage, following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, but this journey necessarily

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<sup>2</sup> LC 1: vii.

includes growth, dynamism, and progress in the midst of our imperfection and incompleteness while on the way.

The previous chapter examined Häring's understanding of God's initiative in the invitation to grace for the person, particularly in his analysis of the divine-human relationship as presented in the Scriptures as well as in Häring's own development of the concept of Christian personalism and value theory. This chapter seeks to examine how the human most fully responds to this offer through the religious-moral response in the development of the life of virtue and through the life of worship in the imitation of Christ.

## I. The *Religious*-Moral Response

As discussed in the previous chapter, responsibility is the “normative pattern” of Häring's moral theology that replaces the traditional norms of Catholic moral theology. Response and dialogue in the context of responsibility determine the religious and moral experience of both the person and the community. As the dominant leitmotif for his Christocentric moral theology, responsibility serves to underscore the dynamic, social, and interpersonal relationship between humanity and God otherwise lacking in the traditional categories used for moral theology, most notably the emphasis on commandments, law, and self-perfection as the goal of the virtues in order to attain salvation of the soul.<sup>3</sup> The call-and-response model serves to maintain a balance between

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<sup>3</sup> Häring insists that concepts such as salvation of soul, commandment, and law do not lose meaning in a theology based on responsibility and the imitation of Christ; rather, these concepts retain their full value but cannot be the focal center of a Catholic moral teaching whose focal point emphasizes the personal-essential characteristic of religion (see esp. LC 1: 42-46).

the two poles of the divine-human relationship such that Häring develops a distinctly *religious*-moral theology for the Christian community.

In order to understand the significance of the religious-moral response, one first must understand the importance of religion in the life of the Christian for Häring's Christocentric moral theology. Religion, for Häring, is "the point of encounter between the word of God and the response of man,"<sup>4</sup> through public cult and through the moral life in general in Häring's work. On the one side of religion sits the human person, and on the other side sits God. Häring's theology attempts to bridge the gap between these two poles that remain so infinitely distant from one another by placing religion at the center, such that the human encounters the Holy when God speaks to humanity, thus making religion possible. Personal fellowship with God is the heart of religion, and religion is the heart of Häring's theme of invitation and response in his Christocentric ethic. Just as the moral act is the act of response to the divine initiative, Häring insists that the religious act also always implies an act of response. The religious act is a receiving act in which God initiates the dialogue and the person responds by fulfilling the will of God to the best of her ability. That is to say, in the religious act, the person is primarily a receiver and only secondarily an actor (or agent who acts). Because the human person is made in the image and likeness of God, however, in freedom she is given the capacity for dialogue and response in freedom to the divine offer made at God's own initiative.

Religion is central for Häring's moral theology because he views religion as the authentic bond between God and humanity. As such, Häring insists that religion is the

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<sup>4</sup> LC 1: 35.

“entire foundation of our life as manifested in the light of the divine self-revelation” and, he continues, “[i]n the light of God’s manifestation of Himself, religion is the *first pillar* of our life.”<sup>5</sup> The prominent place for religion in Häring’s Christocentric ethic is also evident in his further explanation that, “the *second foundation stone* of our life here on earth...is the moral life considered in the strict sense as assent to the creative designs of God. It is faith-full obedience to God who discloses His covenant-plan of salvation and His promises of eternal life.”<sup>6</sup> The human life is thus comprised of, first, the religious life as response to God’s self-revelation, and, second, the moral life as grateful obedience to God’s loving will for us. As such, Häring’s vision of religion is rather complex, and deserves further elaboration in subsequent discussions. For now, I shall merely emphasize that Häring’s understanding of religion is not the traditional concept of cultic worship or acts. Indeed, I understand Häring’s vision of religion in two ways: religion is the individual person’s fellowship with God through participation in the very life of the triune God; and, at the same time, religion is the bond of fellowship with the community in the communal response to God. More than just an assent to God’s will with concern for the divine-human relationship, the assent to God is given with concern for human community, in loving service to the neighbor. Thus, God’s transcendent holiness is always in view in authentic Christian morality, according to Häring; but at the same time, he insists, too much emphasis on God’s transcendence can lead to a loss of religion in ethics because the human pole of the relationship (the response) is not taken seriously enough. Special attention must be given to the fact that this is an expansive account of

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<sup>5</sup> LC 2: xxiv.

<sup>6</sup> LC 2: xxvi.

what religion is, according to Häring's moral theology, which will be examined further in subsequent analysis of Häring's work.

Häring distinguishes himself from other moral theologians and moral philosophers of his time in his particular insistence that worship and the moral life are not utterly separate in Christian morality. Häring insists, "The greatest hazard to genuine religious life arises from making man its center, from viewing all divine worship and all communion with God primarily from the standpoint of the profit it brings to man" because this creates a "fatal dichotomy between worship and the moral life."<sup>7</sup> Häring suggests that, while religion and morality are two distinct aspects of the same reality (that need to be analyzed and examined as such), they are deeply and intimately connected. The essential characteristic of the authentic religious-moral life, according to Häring, is the element of response. Thus, Häring provides a very specific way of construing the term religion when he states, "Response, responsibility, dialogue belong to religion essentially. We have religion only if man conceives of the Holy as a Power which advances toward him and to whom he can turn in dialogue."<sup>8</sup> In Häring's moral theology, religious and moral acts are founded on the religious response to God, and therefore religious acts are not distinct completely from other kinds of acts. Although religion and morality both essentially imply the element of response, however, Häring insists that religion and morality are not merely synonymous.

Häring distinguishes between the purely religious and the religious-moral relation between the person and God. Throughout his moral theology, Häring consistently views

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<sup>7</sup> LC 1: 40-41.

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religion as immediately and directly looking to and responding to God, whereas morality is concerned with increasing value in the created order. Because morality is concerned with the created order, it is not fully religious in the sense of direct response to God. Although the moral act is not a direct response to God, but a mediated response to God through the created order, Häring insists that the moral act has a significant role in the person's life precisely as a religious-moral response to God. Häring explains,

The believer detects in the order of creation the message of the Lord and Creator; the child of God hears in all things the word of His Father. He is sustained by the inner vital bond of the three divine virtues with the inner word and response. In community and fellowship with God through this word and response of the divine virtues, his responsibility to God is expressed in religious response to God. From this it is evident that the term *responsibility* is best suited to express the interpenetration and formation of the moral through the religious, and also the distinction of the two.<sup>9</sup>

The increase of value in the created order is attained through acts in accordance with one's relationship with others and that which is outside of the self. The moral order, Häring continues, is still authentic response to God "precisely to the extent that man takes his terrestrial tasks seriously, and earnestly accepts created values" in the spirit of obedience to God.<sup>10</sup> Morality is responsibility because the response of the person who says "yes" to God's will is the moral decision of the person who attends to God's will and makes the affirmative choice in the midst of numerous other possibilities. The person makes the free decision for his response in the circumstances of his own situation, and thus the person's response is his responsibility before God. Therefore, the person is accountable before God in every moral act through the responsible cultivation of value.

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<sup>9</sup> LC 1: 47.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

As such, the moral life of the person is an integral part of the person's religious-moral response to God in the order of creation.

Just as the person is responsible to God in every moral decision, Häring points out that the person is also responsible to the community in moral decisions. Throughout his moral theology, Häring insists that both morality and religion affect the community as much as the individual person. Häring says, "The moral act is always in greater or less measure weighted with responsibility toward our neighbor and toward the natural and supernatural community in which we live and upon which our individual moral decisions and our whole religious-moral life react."<sup>11</sup> The response of the individual person bears responsibility for the society that exists within the same order of creation. Häring consistently highlights the importance of community for Christian morality, both in terms of the person's effect on the community as well as the community's influence on the individual person's moral decision-making. This is particularly evident in Häring's discussion of the relevance of the community that is the Body of Christ for Christian morality. Häring insists that in order for the person to be "in fellowship with God through the Word, to be in Christ the Incarnate Word, implies that we are immediately united with all the other members of the Body of Christ and act in immediate communion with them."<sup>12</sup> The communion with others takes place not only through specifically religious acts of cult or worship, but also through fellowship with others in the community in which the individual person reveals himself as himself, as a responsible being who lives in the constant presence of God. In the moral act, the person is

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<sup>11</sup> LC 1: 48.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

answerable to himself, but also to God and to the community. Fellowship with others includes everyone as at least potential members of the Body of Christ, but the communion is particularly significant in terms of solidarity with other members of the Christian community as such. For Häring, then, morality is concerned primarily with the created order, and only secondarily is the person aware through the moral act that his salvation depends on giving the right response to God. The Christian person, however, is more fully conscious of the truth of salvation precisely through his unity with other members of the Body of Christ.

Häring insists that, in the dynamic dialogue with God, the Christian's response is not merely through prayer, worship, and sacraments, but also through moral acts. Häring says that the person is responsible and answerable to himself in the moral act as well as in the religious act. He states, "In fact, in the religious act man is more immediately aware that his salvation depends on giving the right response to the Word of God all-holy. Both areas belong to moral theology. It has as object the religious life and activity as well as the whole sphere of religious moral responsibility."<sup>13</sup> For Häring, then, the religious and the moral are distinct realities, yet are closely related to one another. These distinct realities must be understood and examined separately, not as two mutually exclusive aspects of the Christian experience, but as two dimensions of human existence.

The distinction and unity of religion and morality are evident throughout Häring's moral theology. Indeed, the strained relationship between the specificity and universality of religion and morality is one of the most interesting aspects of Häring's work that surfaces and resurfaces incessantly throughout Häring's Christocentric moral theology.

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<sup>13</sup> LC 1: 48-49.

One cannot help but notice traces of Rahner's discussions of the "anonymous Christian" throughout this particular aspect of Häring's Christian ethic. Häring struggles with the inherent difficulty of presenting a distinctively Christian ethic with universal appeal throughout his work. He seeks to identify what is common or shared in all human experience, but at the same time he seeks to underscore what is unique to the Christian experience in the imitation or following of Jesus Christ. Bridging the gap between the two goals appears to be intractable in many ways throughout Häring's Christocentric moral theology. Häring is clearly influenced by many aspects of Rahner's thought regarding the "anonymous Christian," but I believe that Häring ultimately rejects a universal response to God's offer of grace in favor of his own understanding of the specificity of Christian ethics, namely, the importance of the imitation of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the most adequate approach for an initial evaluation of the specificity and universality of Häring's moral theology is to begin with an examination of his understanding of the meaning of religion and morality. The unifying link between religion and morality for Häring is that both are deeply personal and both demand a response. Häring reminds us that we must never overlook the fact that "the common center of all values is God, the love of communion with Him, responsibility before Him."<sup>14</sup> The true source of morality is God, and therefore all moral response is necessarily a response to God in the life of worship and in the moral acts of the human person.<sup>15</sup> Religion is distinct from morality primarily because Häring views religion as the capacity for direct and immediate response to God. Here we must emphasize that

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<sup>14</sup> LC 1: 49.

<sup>15</sup> The moral response, in Häring's moral theology, means the moral life comprehensively considered, not merely the moral response expressed on a particular occasion in certain circumstances.

Häring's specific understanding of religion closely resembles what the Christian tradition identifies as "grace." Indeed, Häring closely identifies religion with the theological virtues throughout his work. Although morality is concerned with the created order, underlying all moral action is the concern for relationship with God, even though the moral response is an indirect response to the summons of God. Throughout Häring's moral theology, religion is not reserved only for the explicitly religious or Christian person. Rather, religion can take an inchoate or implicit form in non-Christians; whereas for Christians religion is linked predominantly to public worship and prayer. Both Christians and non-Christians can engage in loving service for the neighbor as a response of unity, or community, with others.

For the Christian, religious-morality strives for fellowship with the living God. Therefore, Häring contends, "Religion must not be looked upon as a mere external aid and sanction to morality, but as its very spirit. Only if it is imbued with religion, centered in the religious, can morality be correctly judged."<sup>16</sup> The encounter between the word of God and the response of man is at the heart of religious experience. Häring's Christocentric moral theology aims to guide the Christian community that seeks faithful response in the world. Therefore, according to Häring, worship and prayer are the heart of the Christian life from which the moral response arises. As such, Häring departs from previous Roman Catholic moral theology which views the sacraments as moral obligations, and instead he insists that the sacraments are the response to God's summons, by the individual and the community.

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<sup>16</sup> LC 1: 38.

The invitation-response theme persists throughout Häring's moral theology, particularly in regard to his theory of religion. Religion is the heart of, not peripheral to, morality in Häring's Christocentric moral theology. For Häring's moral theology, religion is not merely worship in the traditional sense of cult. Rather, religion is the external communion with others in response to God's invitation, particularly in service of the neighbor. Häring contends,

Religion and morality are inseparable. Whoever refuses to love his neighbour and to work for God's kingdom of justice and peace on earth, refuses by this very fact to love God. Faced with the marvelous works of God's self-revelation, man can give a wholehearted and fitting response. This response includes, by necessity, involvement as partner in the ongoing creation and redemption and in the final battle between God and the inimical powers. Non-action, non-involvement is an injustice to the Creator and Redeemer as well as to God's people.<sup>17</sup>

The person gives glory and adoration to God through both worship in the traditional sense of cult as well as in the response to God in the participation in creation and redemption in the created order. For Häring, religion looks to the supernatural through the natural order, and the person responds to God in service to God's creation. Therefore, although they are distinct, religion and morality ultimately "must have the same center: community and fellowship with God."<sup>18</sup> Communion with God, participation in the life of the triune God, and glorification of the sovereignty of God – not the attainment of self-perfection – must be the goal of religious-morality. Likewise, moral theology is not concerned with the inner life of the person alone, but with how the person's inner life of grace produces outward actions for the world in an ethic of responsibility. The person is

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<sup>17</sup> FFC 1: 384.

<sup>18</sup> LC 1: 41.

enabled to attain the goal of participation in the very life of God because of God's invitation.

Häring's ethic of response and responsibility maintains a balance between the human and divine poles of the divine-human relationship, such that neither is emphasized at the expense of the other, precisely because Häring views Christ as the center of all Christian morality. Häring insists that Jesus Christ is the perfect point of encounter, for "Jesus is both the Word who calls and the One who is called and sent. In him who is the hypostatic covenant between the eternal Word of the Father and the word of humanity, God and humanity have found the perfect listener."<sup>19</sup> God calls the person as an individual living in community, and the person responds to God through fellowship with God and in service to others. God gives the person authentic freedom to respond to the invitation solely because of God's revelation of God's-self in the person of Jesus Christ who is both God's word and humanity's response in the world. The response is the internal conversion of the person to the life of Christ as well as the external actions of the person who responds to God's call through participation in the communal life of fellowship in the Body of Christ.

Häring's Christocentric moral theology emphasizes the importance of the divine-human relationship using the word-response model, with Jesus Christ as the center. Response to God's offer of grace in Jesus Christ, the Word, is the fundamental leitmotif for Christian morality, and therefore responsibility is a dominant theme of Häring's morality. According to Häring, the goal and purpose of moral theology is "to present the rich and vital content of the history of salvation and our loving fellowship with God in

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<sup>19</sup> FFC 1: 61.

Christ.”<sup>20</sup> In the moral act, the person is responsible and answerable to himself, but the responsibility belongs to the religious act in the same way. With responsibility before God, responsibility to self, others, and the world as a fundamental aspect of his moral theology, Häring insists that Christian responsibility is specifically responsibility for assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ. Fellowship with Christ, participation in the kingdom of God, and the imitation of Christ are the core concepts of Häring’s Christocentric ethic. Therefore, he asserts, “In a moral teaching based on the imitation of Christ, the essential characteristics of religion as fellowship with God, and morality as responsibility before God, are entirely in the foreground.”<sup>21</sup> The moral life, then, arises from religious response to God’s continuing initiative. Morality is not obedience to norms alone, but the life of grace in the natural state of Christian existence.

In Häring’s Christocentric moral theology, religion is the life of cult as well as the response and obedience of faith. Indeed, Häring insists that faith must direct the person’s whole life, both moral and religious. Therefore, the religious-moral life is more than just external worship in the community of believers; the moral life of the Christian person is lived faith, and more precisely the faith-response to God’s offer and initiative in God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. To this end, Häring insists that a “genuine faith-response is quite different from just following the pattern of an organized religion without personal choice and interiorization. In faith, we freely entrust ourselves to God in a joyous, grateful and humble response to his self-revelation.”<sup>22</sup> Religion is cult and faith-response

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<sup>20</sup> LC 1: 51.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> FFC 1: 63.

in the glorification of God. Häring is careful to emphasize that the Christian's moral life is intimately connected to the life of worship. Indeed, Häring sees Jesus Christ as the perfect example of the unity of religion and morality precisely because Christ is the Word of God who invites human response, and at the same time is the perfect human response of obedient, adoring love to God. Inherent in the person's life of faith, then, is the freedom of Christ.

Jesus Christ is the heart of Häring's moral theology, for Jesus Christ is the Word of God and the response of humanity. Häring states,

In the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word of the Father, religion has its source, and in the Word and our response it is exercised. The more deeply the religious man enters into the Word of God addressed to him and the more his life bears the stamp of response to God's Word, the more is his religion (*religio*), the bond with God, perfected and the divine likeness manifested within him.<sup>23</sup>

God's condescension to humanity is the *agápe* of the Trinity. Jesus Christ is the perfect embodiment of God's relationship with humanity and the human response to God through adoration and glorification of God's holiness. Religion is the driving force for Häring's moral theology, and particularly the religious response of the person to God's offer of grace in the person of Jesus Christ. Häring's Christocentric ethic sets him apart from more philosophically inclined approaches to morality precisely because of his concern for the place of religion in the moral life of the person, particularly as Häring views the moral life of the Christian as the specifically religious-moral response of the person to God's offer of grace. For Häring, moral theology is concerned with the response of the human person both in the moral act and in the life of worship, because the moral act is the act of worship and the act of worship is at the same time a moral act.

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<sup>23</sup> LC 1: 37.

Because Häring views the Christian life as the religious-moral life lived in response to God's invitation, we should examine Häring's vision of the faith-response at some length. Häring equates religion and the faith-response frequently throughout his moral theology. Häring's understanding of religion is not the traditional vision of a virtue directed toward the communal worship in cultic acts, but more closely likened to the traditional concept of grace and revelation. When Häring discusses the significance of the faith-response for the authentic moral-religious life of the person, he consistently refers to the Christian experience, with infrequent reference to the faith-experience of the human person more generally considered. A broader concern is that, as stated above, Häring insists that religion "must not be looked upon as a mere external aid and sanction to morality, but as its very spirit. Only if it is imbued with religion, centered in the religious, can morality be correctly judged."<sup>24</sup> That is to say, all "merely" philosophical ethics cannot be correctly judged, and thus have no standing for the discussion of morality more generally considered beyond the theological standpoint. This is troubling on several levels, and it points to the specific problem of the distinctiveness of Christian ethics in pluralistic dialogue. By directing his comments to the Christian person, Häring suggests that non-Christian, or at the very least non-religious, ethics cannot be considered authentic and thus cannot participate in the ongoing dialogue with a morality that has Christ as its center. Although I do not believe that it is Häring's intention, he seems to isolate the non-Christian from the Christian person. For this reason, I would like to highlight a few problematic elements of Häring's discussion of religion in order to

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<sup>24</sup> LC 1: 38.

accentuate the problems inherent in a distinctly Christian ethic that still seeks to maintain dialogue with those outside of Christianity.

As Häring assesses the importance of the life of faith for morality, he begins – not surprisingly – with the figure of Jesus Christ. From the outset, Häring insists that lived faith is not accomplished through concepts, norms, and teachings alone. He states,

For a Christian, it should be easy to understand that believers are not faced just with a system of teachings, but, above all, with Jesus Christ, the living and most real symbol of God's love for humankind. This central and most real symbol, and the symbols used in Christ's teaching, touch our intellect, our intuition, imagination, our affectivity, and thus also, more deeply, our will.<sup>25</sup>

This passage from Häring is significant for two reasons. First, according to Häring, faith-experience transcends all other human experiences precisely because it is the response of the person's whole being, not merely the movement of the intellect or the will alone. The faith experience directs the moral life of the person precisely because the goal of the moral life of the Christian person is the imitation of and assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ. Second, and in conjunction with the first point, in this passage Häring only hints at the enormity of what it means to live one's life in assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ.

Häring's emphasis on the imitation of Christ is important for contemporary moral theology. The imitation of Christ is more than merely copying the life of the historical Jesus and it is more than merely adhering to the teachings of Jesus Christ. That is to say, one does not become a pacifist because Jesus was a pacifist. More than that, the person adopts the very Spirit of Christ, and therefore her whole being is transformed such that she submits her will to the will of God through the indwelling of Christ within her.

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<sup>25</sup> FFC 1: 63-64.

Häring does not espouse a concept of the imitation of Christ that relies on imitation of Jesus Christ's actions. Rather, Häring insists that the Christian life lived in assimilation to the life of Christ is the life of discipleship in which the person receives and gratefully accepts the indwelling of Christ into one's very being in the moral-religious response to God. As such, the life of the authentic Christian disciple is the life of imitation, not merely of the words and actions of Jesus Christ, but a fundamental conversion to the very life of Christ in one's words, actions, attitudes, and overall bearing in the world. Just as Christ humbled himself, renounced his throne as the Son of God to become the Servant to humanity, the Christian disciple must humble herself and renounce her pride and the things of this world that encumber her. For humility is

the virtue not only of the creature-and-sinner status; it also belongs to the status of the Son who is the Man for all people and of those who share in the mission of the Master. It is, as it were, the fundamental option of Christ, Servant of God and of men, to free humankind from pride and arrogance by being the Servant of all; and this becomes grace and norm for our fundamental option.<sup>26</sup>

The life lived in imitation of Jesus Christ, then, produces and develops one's bearing as a Christian disciple. Jesus Christ was fully free and fully faithful to the Father, and the Christian life must therefore be the life of creative freedom and fidelity that sees all things as gift from God, and all life is lived as response to God in humble gratitude for all the gifts of God's love for us.

The Christian person sees in all reality and in all events the gift and task of God's call. As such, the "response in faith is to the reality that is at its heart, the Word Incarnate, in whom all things are made. Since God speaks in all his words and works, the

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<sup>26</sup> FFC 1: 202.

truly religious person gives a trusting response to him in all events.”<sup>27</sup> The significance of conversion for the life of the Christian disciple, then, is that the person continuously transforms her life such that her life embodies the sacrificial and obedient love of Jesus Christ, the Word of God Incarnate. The sacrificial and obedient love of the Christian disciple is made explicit in public worship and liturgical rites, but also in loving actions that seek communion with others in the world through being an example of Jesus Christ’s sacrificial love for the sake of others. The imitation of Jesus Christ means, therefore, not only loving communion with our neighbor, but also love for our “enemies,” as a response to God’s loving sacrifice in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With Jesus Christ as the center of all faith-response, Häring seems to indicate that the only moral response to God’s offer of grace is the faith-response in which Jesus Christ is the source, center, and summit of the Christian life.

On the one hand, Häring insists that the faith-experience transcends all other human experiences. Does this mean that the non-religious person cannot attain to the same level of experience, beyond common human experiences, that the religious person enjoys? If faith-response is essential for morality, then one has to wonder to whom the non-religious person responds in the moral act, and indeed one must question whether or not the non-religious person truly is capable of moral acts at all. What is the purpose of moral action if it is not a response to the loving will of God, particularly as made known in God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ? If Jesus Christ is the heart of reality, then it would appear that Häring does not leave room for faith-response apart from the response of the Christian disciple. All morality apart from Christian morality would be insufficient

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<sup>27</sup> FFC 1: 64.

because it would not be the authentic faith-response of the person who accepts Jesus Christ as the self-revelation of God and thus God's self-offering. Can there be a faith-response apart from the faith-response of the Christian who views reality as life in the state of graced-nature? At first glance, Häring appears to say, No. If religion is fellowship with God, as Häring indicates initially, can there be a religious life apart from the Christian religious life in which Jesus Christ is the source, center, and summit of perfection? Again, Häring seems to suggest that this is not possible because the Word Incarnate is the heart of reality to which faith responds.

As a first step toward addressing these problematic aspects of Häring's emphasis on religious-morality, I would like to point out how aptly Häring's Christocentric moral theology highlights the problems encountered in the attempt to balance a distinctly Christian moral theology with non-Christian ethics in a meaningful and fruitful dialogue for all persons, Christian and non-Christian alike. Like Karl Rahner, Häring is faced with the burden of attempting to struggle with the important question of the specificity of Christian ethics in the midst of pluralism. One cannot help but see the common ground shared by Häring and Rahner in their respective work on the relationship between the Christian and non-Christian experience.

Häring clearly is aware that a tension is inevitable when trying to maintain dialogue concerning Christian and non-Christian experience. From the outset, Häring insists that all persons are capable of experiencing value in the encounter with "the others." In this sense, the faith-experience of the non-religious person can transcend other human experiences because the person encounters the other person as value-bearing being that draws him into the love of the other. Häring describes the encounter with the

other in an experience of profound love as an “analogy of faith.”<sup>28</sup> The very language of “analogy of faith” hearkens to Rahner’s language of the “anonymous Christian”! Rahner maintains that a person may not refer to his motivations for moral actions explicitly in terms of faith, but the profound experience of that which lies outside of the self is a transcendent experience that so compels the person to act in a way that moves beyond oneself. Even for a non-Christian, this transcendental experience may lead to a moral action that closely resembles the same action of a Christian who acts explicitly according to the motivation of her faith, who chooses the transcendental movement in an affirmative response to the divine offer of grace and participation in the life of the triune God. This is the basic premise of Rahner’s thesis regarding the “anonymous Christian.”

Like Rahner, Häring suggests that even the ordinary human experience of relationship or encounter with the other can at the same time be a profound encounter with the other that can, in a manner of speaking, be considered analogous to the faith experience of the Christian encounter with the Other. For as long as the person experiences the other as one who loves and who is in need of love, he is all always on the way of faith, even if this experience is not immediately identified as a faith experience. The experience of profound love for a Christian may be the same experience for a non-Christian. Häring suggests that, while the experience may be the same encounter of love, however, the Christian and the non-Christian each experience the encounter in a different form. In this sense, Häring appears to adopt many of Rahner’s ideas particularly regarding the importance of the anonymous Christian who is capable of experiencing

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<sup>28</sup> FFC 1: 64.

grace in an analogous sense even if the person does not explicitly identify the experience as a moment of grace or encounter with God.

Here, one must emphasize that Häring's understanding of the faith-experience is not the traditional view of faith in terms of organized religion or even mere conceptualization of that which transcends the self. Häring identifies religion in much the way he identifies the faith-experience. Just as religion is not virtue that leads to cultic acts, genuine faith is not mere conceptualization of that which transcends the person. Genuine faith is lived faith, a faith that is lived in free submission of oneself to God as a "joyous, grateful and humble response to [God's] self-revelation" that gives the person "a sense of completion, of wholeness and salvation."<sup>29</sup> Religion, in the sense that Häring presents it, is not unlike grace and revelation in the Christian tradition. Faith is the experience of God's self-revelation in the Word, the Risen Lord. As such, Häring attempts to rectify the strained relationship between Christian and non-Christian experience by emphasizing that the non-Christian can experience God's self-revelation and, therefore, salvation, in a real sense, albeit only in the analogous sense of the "analogy of faith." Häring, however, is careful not to dismiss the worth of the analogy of faith. Rather, Häring reiterates the importance of God's love for *all* persons, and the importance of the journey of faith for all persons.

As a second step for confronting some of the most problematic aspects of Häring's understanding of the relationship between religion and morality, I call to mind that Häring consistently discusses reality in terms of creation and redemption. The person's role in the moral order is to increase the value of the order of creation that has

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<sup>29</sup> FFC 1: 63.

already been redeemed by Jesus Christ. All persons, created in the image and likeness of God, are called to participate in co-creation. Although God calls us to share in the divine creativity and freedom, we have also been endowed with freedom to accept or reject God's offer. Again, Häring's description of the person's freedom for acceptance or rejection of grace closely resembles that of Rahner's theology of freedom and grace. The person is capable of ultimately rejecting God's offer in a profound rejection of grace. Häring particularly emphasizes that the negative response to God's offer to act with the freedom that is a gift from God as a co-creator is a "No" that echoes through all of creation and makes visible the existence of sin in the world.

Häring insists, however, "Only through that creative faith that helps us to discover our own and our fellowman's God-given inner resources can we give a creative and redeeming response. We can throw a helpful, saving light on the twilight of the world around us only if we allow God to take hold of us and free all our energies for the great task to which he has called us."<sup>30</sup> As such, Jesus Christ is the central symbol of renewed, creative, and faithful freedom on Earth, for Jesus fulfilled his mission with the power of the Spirit, and those who are likewise guided by the Spirit are enabled to follow Christ. The person who chooses not to give himself to God in the "Yes" response has failed to recognize his own humanity. That person who chooses to respond to God's offer of grace with a resounding "No" has yet to discover his own mutuality with other persons in the world. Häring explains, "The Eternal Word assumed the humanity of Jesus Christ for all of us: so Jesus is the embodiment of co-humanity."<sup>31</sup> A rejection of Christ is a

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<sup>30</sup> FFC 1: 73.

<sup>31</sup> FFC 1: 77.

rejection of fellow persons because the person who refuses God also refuses to recognize the humanity, dignity, and freedom of other persons as images of God in the world. One becomes fully human only through fellowship with others in a relationship of love, response, and sacrifice. Häring contends, “People who, by the grace of the Spirit, know themselves as reconciled, know that God accepts them and their fellowmen, seeking them where they are. These people are free in self-acceptance which, before God, can never be separated from freedom for others.”<sup>32</sup> Mutuality, or co-humanity, is the free sharing of faith experiences and saving solidarity. The liberating love of Jesus Christ sets all of us free for relationship with God, self, world, and others. With this aspect of Häring’s moral theology as a foundation, I suggest that Häring’s response to our concern could be that a non-Christian faith-response is the response of fallen humanity that does not recognize itself as already reconciled with God in a relationship of forgiveness in God’s reconciling action through the person of Jesus Christ.

My interpretation of Häring’s emphasis on Jesus Christ as the embodiment of co-humanity and the Liberator for humankind is that the person who refuses to accept Christ is the person who refuses to accept reconciliation and forgiveness, which Häring views as essential for human relationships. Therefore, even if the non-religious person experiences himself as a co-creator in the world, as a person of good will who gives love and likewise seeks the love of others in mutually creative relationships, still he may refuse the grace of the Spirit that makes possible his understanding of himself as already redeemed by Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of co-humanity. The non-Christian does not discover the fullest meaning of his humanity, and therefore co-humanity, when

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<sup>32</sup> FFC 1: 78.

he does not know the world as already redeemed in the person of Jesus Christ. The non-Christian sees only partial reality, the reality of sinful humanity, without laying claim to the good news of Redemption through Jesus Christ. The morality that flows from such a partial view of reality lacks the essential elements of reconciliation and forgiveness inherent in an authentic and distinctive Christian morality. Although this is imperfect morality that lacks the fullness of salvation as its center, I believe Häring would still view such morality as pointing toward authentic morality.

Häring specifically identifies the distinctiveness of Christian morality when he insists that, ultimately, the imitation of Christ is the heart of the Christian religious-moral response. Häring's distinction of the motive of the Christian as the following of Christ is a clear departure from Rahner's work regarding the "anonymous Christian." In many ways, Rahner seems satisfied with the idea of an anonymous Christian whose actions conform to the ideals of Christian morality without having any specific reference to the person of Jesus Christ. In this sense, Häring's moral theology is more realistic than Rahner's rather abstract presentation of the practical sameness of Christian and non-Christian ideals of morality and how the life of grace ideally should be lived. Häring is aware of the problem inherent in a moral theology that holds grace as the central reality of Christian life while at the same time trying to maintain dialogue with universal humankind, non-Christian and non-religious alike. Häring clearly leans toward upholding the thesis that all persons are capable of responding to God's offer of grace with the "Yes" of the authentic, whole person in the fundamental option for the good. In the end, however, Häring cannot fully resolve the problem of the specificity and universality of a Christocentric moral theology because he views the Christian disciple's

motivation and goal as the assimilation to the way, the very life, of Jesus Christ.

Nonetheless, Häring should be commended for addressing the issue of the specificity and universality of Christian ethics for all persons, even if he is unable to arrive at a similarly optimistic position that tends toward universality as that presented by Rahner. Häring ultimately argues that Jesus Christ is the center of the authentic moral life, and therefore he favors the distinctiveness of the Christian moral life over the universality of human morality.

Häring directly addresses the concerns of the specifically theological approach to morality in relation to pluralism particularly in his emphasis on the specifically social aspects of religion. More than merely the individual person's fellowship with God, Häring insists that religion is also the bond of fellowship with the community in the communal response to God. Religion thus viewed is the internal movement of God to person, as the person receives as an individual person the personal offer of fellowship with God; religion is also the external movement of the person to God and to community through the responsible act, the faith-response, in dialogue with God and the community. Häring's emphasis on the social nature of religion is apparent when he explains that God's invitation takes place within the created order through the encounter with others. Far from a private religious experience or revelation of God in an individual encounter with the Holy, Häring views religion as a communal experience in which relationships are the heart of the religious encounter.

Although Häring presents a very complex view of religion, beyond the traditional concept of the virtue directed toward cultic acts, he does insist that the Church plays an essential role in the development of the moral perfection of the individual person. The

Church community is the key communal experience that aids in the development of the integral person. While the following of Christ assures complete dedication to the good and the development of the integral human person, Häring identifies the Christ who lives in history with the mystical Christ of the Church. Like Jesus Christ, the Church “is visible and at the same time invisible, supra-terrestrial and fixed in space and time. To this corresponds the ecclesial piety in sacraments and sacramentals and in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. There the whole man and the whole of creation are invited to the chorus of divine praise.”<sup>33</sup> As such, the life of communal worship, the cultic acts of praise for the glory of God, is necessary for the perfection of the moral life if it is to be authentic morality. Communal worship is, therefore, essential for the moral perfection of the individual in Häring’s moral theology. Thus, Häring contends, “There is no surer way to the full perfection of the whole man than the perfect following of Christ in the communal life of the Church. In the light of all this, the conscious care and deliberate discipline in the cultivation of our entire moral effort and all its spiritual forces must play a secondary role.”<sup>34</sup> The cultivation of the purely moral (as opposed to religious-moral) life, then, appears to be only an accessory to the religious life of worship in the community of the Church for the Christian seeking perfect assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ. For Häring, the authentic response to God’s invitation to grace must be the specifically religious-moral response rather than the moral response alone, for the moral response is response only in the created order without regard for the direct and immediate response to God through the religious response in communal worship.

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<sup>33</sup> LC 1: 72.

<sup>34</sup> LC 1: 72-73.

Through his emphasis on the communal nature of religious-morality, Häring gives a glimpse as to how he would respond to concerns over the non-religious person's faith-experience. In order to illustrate Häring's vision of the communal aspect of the faith-response, it is best to read Häring (at length) in his own words:

The God of love speaks to us, most of all, through loving people, since by the quality of their life they are truly an image and likeness of God who is love. If we open ourselves to all that is genuine love, and readily respond to others as persons who love or who need love, we are always on the way of faith, even if only in the form of "analogy of faith." The God of love calls us also through all that he creates, and through his personal love for all people. He, the living and loving God, calls us especially through those who share his love, "and all human activity is essentially response to his call."

Our response is truly a part of the total faith-experience if, confronted with people, we know that they must never be disregarded and are to be honored and loved. Thus our response is integrated into the sovereign freedom of God who has created us all, not for any utility but as a sacred image and special sign of his presence.

God's word is almighty; but as a word that reaches us, it is spoken as if it were a finite word, a word of man. Yet this finite word turns us to the almighty Word of God if we have learned absolute reverence for every human person. "The original relation to God is the love of neighbor."<sup>35</sup>

This particular passage is significant for our overall project for several reasons. First of all, this passage touches on many of the motifs in Häring's work, namely, God as love, the person as image and likeness of God, the need to open the self to encounter with the other, the importance of freedom, the particular significance of faith, the relevance of experience over reason, and the necessity of response to God's initiative in the encounter with God and with the neighbor. Yet all of these motifs gradually return to the heart of Häring's moral theology, the Word of God that both invites and gives the human response. Second, the passage shows the perennial influence of Rahner's theory of religion on Häring's own moral theology and Häring's ultimate deviation from Rahner's

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<sup>35</sup> FFC 1: 64-65 (internal quotes from Karl Rahner, *Grace in Freedom* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1969]: 217 & 218).

own theory. Rahner's influence on Häring is particularly interesting, given Häring's constant concern to attempt to balance the distinctiveness and universality of his Christocentric moral theology, which is a tension that Rahner seems unable to resolve in his own theology, particularly in regard to his discussions concerning the "anonymous Christian." Third, and of particular relevance to my own interpretation of Häring's moral theology, this passage demonstrates the significance of religion for the moral life of the person while maintaining religion's identity with the communal experience of God. Finally, this particular text highlights Häring's own awareness of the problem of maintaining a specifically religious ethic that can still have relevance for the non-Christian and non-religious community, which is especially important in the pluralistic world in which we live today.

For Häring, faith-response is the heart of morality. The response to God's call is the response of the whole being, and Häring explains that the total response of the whole being is the free response of the person who views himself always in relation to God, self, others, and the world through the dialogue of response and responsibility. Häring emphasizes the importance of the faith-response particularly in relation to the encounter of the other, whom he frequently refers to as the "value person." Even the non-religious person can experience value in the encounter with value outside of the self, particularly in the experience of the value of the neighbor who is loved for the sake of being loved, not for the sake of any utility. Häring suggests that the experience of love in the encounter with loving people, both loving and being loved by the other, is the journey of faith, even if the person does not recognize or acknowledge the experience as a faith-experience. The importance of faith for the moral life is evident throughout Häring's work, but

particularly as he identifies the loving response to the other as “only in the form of ‘analogy of faith.’” Häring leaves room for the non-Christian, and even the non-religious person, to respond to God’s call precisely through the experience of the loving response to the other, even if the person does not explicitly recognize the Other (the ultimate value, God) in the other (neighbor).

While Häring allows that non-Christian and even non-religious persons can respond to God through the fully free faith-response of love through the encounter with loving persons in an analogous sense, I must admit that this is not altogether sufficient, or at the very least not consistent, if a distinctively Christian moral theology is to have relevance to non-Christian persons. Although Häring states numerous times throughout his work that religion and morality are inseparable, he also insists that these are two distinct aspects of the same reality. That is to say, religion and morality must be considered in their own terms and in their own goals, and should be studied and interpreted as such. At the same time, however, Häring wants his audience to understand the importance of religion for genuine moral response to God. Once again, one must understand that religion is akin to grace and revelation, in Häring’s view, more than it is an organized religion or cultic acts. My interpretation of Häring’s work would suggest that religion is necessary for the person who seeks direct participation in the divine life; and in the sense that cultic acts are distinct forms of worship that are separate from specifically moral acts, religion is distinct from morality. Häring is careful not to diminish the role of religion to merely an accessory aspect of morality precisely because he insists that one must never lose sight of the importance of salvation for all the world. Häring, again, contends that what most fully distinguishes religious and moral acts is

their response to God, which in the religious act is direct and immediate, while for the moral act is indirect and mediated through response in the world through an increase in created value in relationship with self, world, and others.

As he grapples with the relationship between religion and morality, Häring likewise struggles throughout his moral theology to resolve the tension between the significance of the imitation of Jesus Christ as the center of a distinctively Christian moral theology and yet the desire for a specifically Christocentric moral theology to have relevance for all persons, who are the image and likeness of God and who are all loved by God and called by God. This problem is evident throughout Häring's work. First, Häring remains insistent that authentic morality must be related to the faith-response to Jesus Christ. This necessarily implies that all non-Christian ethics is, at worst, not authentic, and, at best, incapable of being judged correctly. If response to the call of God is most perfectly embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, and if Christians are called to the imitation of Christ, then non-Christians are not capable of authentic response to God's call due to lack of recognition that authentic response is always to the ultimate value person, Jesus Christ. The life of the non-Christian, therefore, is not the life of response to God in and through the life lived in imitation of Jesus Christ, even though Häring does admit that the non-Christian life can respond to value in the experience of loving and being loved by another person. The non-Christian response to value, therefore, does not attain to the moral perfection that Häring insists is necessary in the authentic Christian moral-religious life of the faith-response precisely to God in and through assimilation to Jesus Christ.

My second concern with Häring's insistence that the non-religious person can attain to an "analogy of faith" in human experiences is this: Häring insists that all persons are given the freedom to accept or reject God's offer of grace, and he appears at times to identify the person who rejects God's offer particularly with the person who rejects the communal life of the Church and the grace of the sacraments. At times, Häring identifies the communal life of the Church and the life of sacramental worship as his primary concept of religion, which is the general way that contemporary thinkers envision the meaning of religion. This is the life of "cult," to which Häring refers frequently in his discussions of religion. Yet at other times, particularly in his later work, Häring is careful to emphasize that religion is not merely the cultic acts of worship, but the very fellowship with God both for the individual person as well as for the community.

In Häring's moral theology, the goal of religious-morality is not merely to attain salvation. Personal gain, happiness, or salvation is not the goal, but the glory of God and the loving adoration of God. Religion is concerned with the grateful response of the person, not the perfection of the self. If this is indeed the case, then it seems that Häring's moral theology leaves room for a non-Christian ethic in which God, the Other, is kept in view even without reference to Jesus Christ. At the same time, however, Häring wants to emphasize that we must live in the reality of creation and redemption. Although many people recognize themselves as created, the true reality is that we are also redeemed, and thus the place for Jesus Christ must be the source, center, and summit of morality if one is to accurately portray the religious-moral life of the person who lives in the state of graced nature.

On the one hand, Häring wants to emphasize that religion is both individual and communal experience of participation in the life of God. On the other hand, Häring appears to reject the notion that non-Christians can come to the same participation in the life of or fellowship with the triune God. Häring contends, “Whenever we synthesize our moral value system in categories unrelated to faith-response, we cause a split between religion and our everyday life. Responsibility, seen in a distinctively Christian way, is our God-given capacity to make all of our moral aspirations and decisions, indeed, all of our conscious life, a response to God, and thus to integrate it within the obedience of faith.”<sup>36</sup> If Häring wants to claim that the person can attain to the faith-response through the analogy of faith in the encounter with loving persons, then he needs to define more clearly of what this faith-response consists. In some ways, Häring’s view of religion is so complex that his understanding of religion needs to more fully explain how the non-religious and non-Christian person experiences the religious encounter in the faith-response. If the “moral life must be nourished entirely and utterly on the religious relation to God,”<sup>37</sup> as Häring suggests, then his understanding of the “analogy of faith” seems to be merely an initial step in a more comprehensive discussion.

That being said, Häring does give some indications as to how to respond to concerns for the non-religious and non-Christian person’s faith-experience even if the person does not view her own experience as precisely a “faith” experience at all. Häring contends, “The final issue is whether we respond in our whole life in all our attitudes, decisions and actions, in a way that makes us witness to God’s grace. When we do so,

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<sup>36</sup> FFC 1: 65.

<sup>37</sup> LC 1: 38.

we already experience, to some degree, the final saving judgment. We come to know our true self to whatever extent we respond with all our being.”<sup>38</sup> In my interpretation, this indicates that even the non-religious person, or the non-Christian at least, can attain to salvation as long as the person’s fundamental being is a response to the experience of authentic value in that which is outside of the self. The response to this value is the faith-response of the person who perceives value outside of the self, regardless of the name given to that value (e.g., God, Jesus Christ, love).

The person is created in the image and likeness of God, even if he does not recognize this. As such, the person is open to the divine initiative as well as to the encounter with other persons in the social community of other persons. In this regard, the social aspect of Häring’s theory of religion is invaluable. The person is created as an inherently social being. The interpersonal life of the Trinity is reflected in the life of the human community when there is genuine fellowship among persons. Häring says,

True community of men rests on word and love, and perfects itself in the dialogue of love. The capacity for word and love, which centers in the very heart of the Thou, is fulfilled in us, however, only in so far as we are caught up by the word and love of God and give to God our response and love in turn. Fellowship with God in word and love develops and fulfills our individual personality (the image of God in us) and at the same time reveals our essentially social nature.<sup>39</sup>

God’s offer comes to the individual person through the community in which he lives, and the faith-response of the person is likewise given in his life in the community, through loving service to the neighbor. Häring is careful to point out that the community in which God’s invitation is made is not solely the Church community (although he notes that the Church community is the most perfect place for the response in the life of

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<sup>38</sup> FFC 1: 65.

<sup>39</sup> LC 1: 38.

worship in the sacraments), but in the human community in which there is genuine fellowship of human persons in the word-love relationship.

Häring does not intend to fully develop his own theory of religion, but he does intend to present significant concepts that emphasize the divine-human relationship in terms of God's invitation to fellowship with God and with other persons. The word-love fellowship is the heart of all human life, all religious acts, and all morality. Although Häring views Jesus Christ as the central figure in this fellowship, Häring emphasizes that the primary relationship to consider is the one in which God initiates the dialogue and the person responds with her whole being to this offer of fellowship.

Despite our concerns regarding the relevance that a specifically theological ethic can have for non-Christian or non-religious morality, Häring does attempt to address these concerns to some degree. From the outset, Häring suggests that his target audience is not necessarily the world at large, but primarily the mature adult Christian seeking authentic relationship with God and with the community. At the same time, however, Häring clearly does intend for this moral theology to have relevance for all people, as is evident in his emphasis on the social aspects of religion as well as his insistence that all people can attain to fellowship with God and with others if only by analogy of faith, in an authentic, yet limited way. Häring suggests that all people are capable of authentic morality by loving other people, without necessarily relating this loving behavior specifically to faith, religion, God, or Jesus Christ. The key is responsible and responsive relationships.

For Häring, the religious life and the moral life are intimately and deeply related. The loving fellowship between God and humanity is a continuing dialogue of call and

response. God continues to invite the person through the Word, and the human person responds in the “spoken” word of religion and morality. This is the essence of religious-morality, the encounter of the I with the Thou that initiates the relationship by summoning the person to respond. Through the encounter with the Holy, the person experiences God as ultimate value in a continuing relationship of word-response dialogue. For the Christian person the experience of God is wholly personal and dynamic, for it is a relationship of dialogue in, with, and through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the foundation and essence of all aspects of the moral life. The authentic response of the Christian disciple is life lived in the imitation of Christ. The imitation of Christ necessarily involves the response of the person in her whole being, particularly as this relates to the life of virtue.

## II. The Fundamental Option for the Religious-Moral Life: Virtues as Response

For Häring, responsibility means intimate unity with God. Personal fellowship with, and participation in the life of, the holy Trinity demands greater fellowship with the Christian community and the world at large. The dialogical encounter calls for fellowship beyond mere knowledge and understanding of one another. Responsibility requires intimate union with one another in mutual dialogue and love. Häring’s Christocentric ethic, therefore, also emphasizes the importance of the virtues, because the Christian life is lived in response to the divine initiative in the person of Jesus Christ, God’s self-manifestation in the Word-become-man, the Second Person of the Trinity who is God’s self-communication to humanity. The Christian must affirmatively respond to God’s offer of grace not just in a single act, but in a whole life of virtue.

Häring largely develops his virtue theory in light of Christian personalism, value theory, and his understanding of the fundamental option. Having already discussed Häring's value theory at length in the previous chapter, we now turn to Häring's discussion of the fundamental option that underlies the development of his particular virtue theory.

Häring initially describes the virtues in light of his understanding of the fundamental option in connection with the figure of Jesus Christ. Häring states,

To be free and faithful in Jesus Christ – that is, to be a believer who is responsible and creative – entails, above all, having the character of wholeness. We can be responsible and creative only to the extent of our wholeness, our inner integrity, the integration of all our energies. This means that our leitmotif and our fundamental option take flesh and blood in our life and so transform our desires, our intentions, our imagination, that fundamental intentions become also fundamental attitudes. This is what the traditional expression “virtue” means.<sup>40</sup>

At the center of the Christian life always remains the person of Jesus Christ and the Christian person's invitation to discipleship. In his initial introduction to the concept of the virtues, then, Häring explains that the virtues are the basic attitudes of the person that have been transformed by the fundamental option in the person's response to God's invitation to grace. The fundamental option for all human persons is the basic intention or basic decision for or self-commitment to value, to the summit of the good. The basic intention so permeates the being of the person that it leads to a gradual increase in the basic attitudes of the person, such that all the person's attitudes and his very character are transformed. Rather than a concern merely for certain acts, the basic intention of the person is a fundamental orientation that affects the bearing and quality of all the person's free decisions and actions.

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<sup>40</sup> FFC 1: 87.

What I find most compelling in Häring's discussion of the fundamental option, as with most of his Christocentric moral theology, is his attempt to maintain a distinctively Christian ethic while at the same time balancing religious specificity with the universal appeal of Catholic moral theology. Just as Häring contends that all persons are always on the way of faith, even if only in terms of the "analogy of faith,"<sup>41</sup> Häring further insists that all persons are capable of developing a basic intention that seeks the good always and at all times no matter what the circumstances. Just as the language of the "analogy of faith" poses problems for a theology that seeks to understand the relationship between Christian and non-Christian or non-religious morality, however, Häring encounters similar problems in his discussion of the Christian fundamental option. Häring repeatedly insinuates that Christians have a decidedly specific fundamental option unlike that of the non-Christian or, perhaps more broadly construed, the non-religious person. Although Häring seldom directly addresses the difference between Christian and non-Christian morality, and despite the appearance that this topic seems to be of little concern for him explicitly, one can clearly see the tension caused by the relationship throughout Häring's moral theology. Yet the precise language that Häring employs throughout various aspects of his moral theology suggests that Häring does envision a distinction between religious and non-religious morality.

The difference between Christian and non-Christian experience is not Häring's primary concern, but he clearly is aware that the differences and problems exist, even in the issue of the fundamental option. While Häring never directly addresses the difference between Christian and non-Christian fundamental options at any length, he pointedly

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<sup>41</sup> FFC 1: 64, as discussed in the previous section.

asserts that there does exist a specifically *Christian* fundamental option. Beginning with a general discussion of the role of faith in the life of the Christian, Häring insists that Christians have a distinct response to God's created order from that of non-Christians. This distinction is evident in the Christian fundamental option.

With his love, God gives us everything as a sign of the very freedom of his love and as a gracious and simultaneous appeal to join with him in his love for all creatures. Therefore we can describe the shape of the Christian fundamental option as love of God above all things and love of our fellowmen according to the measure and mode in which God has shown his love for us in Jesus Christ.<sup>42</sup>

In his discussion of the fundamental option, as with all of his moral theology, Häring emphasizes the importance of experience over reason alone.

On the one hand, Häring consistently allows that all persons experience (or at least have the capacity to experience) value in those outside of the self, what Häring refers to as "the others" or our neighbors. As discussed in the previous section, the non-Christian person is able to attain to an "analogy of faith" in the profound experience of love in the encounter with the other. The depth of the experience is likened to the faith experience because the person experiences value in a way that transcends the ordinary interaction with that which is outside of the self. Therefore, the motivation for non-Christian morality, according to Häring's moral theology, is the experience of the good outside of the self, or the person who is a value-bearer, the value person. The motivation for the non-religious person is not one's own perfection or happiness or salvation, but the good of the other. As such, the fundamental option of the non-Christian is the basic decision for the other who is a bearer of the good in the hierarchy of values, not as a means to the good, but as the good in and of itself.

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<sup>42</sup> FFC 1: 197-198.

On the other hand, Häring asserts that the fundamental option of the Christian is distinct from the fundamental option of the non-Christian, precisely because of the motivation of the experience of relationship with God in the created order that leads to a life lived in the imitation of Jesus Christ for the Christian disciple. More than mere analogy, the Christian moral life is the life of religious-moral response to value that is directly attributed to the lived faith of the person who follows Jesus Christ. While the non-Christian may have a fundamental option for the good in a general sense, Häring insists that the fundamental option of the Christian is distinct specifically because of his commitment to Jesus Christ. Häring insists that the person experiences God as ultimate value. Commitment to the good, then, means commitment to the ultimate value person, Jesus Christ, God incarnate. Therefore, the Christian fundamental option is for the obedient and sacrificial love of the disciple of Christ for God.

According to Häring's theology, all people are free through God's love, and as God's creatures we are called to be co-creators with God in the work of creation and redemption in the world. This work can be accomplished only through the fundamental option, the basic commitment of the person to God and the good. Therefore, Häring contends,

Where God's wonderful work and design are accepted with the profound freedom which we mean by 'fundamental option and intention', there is a dynamic of growth, integrity and maturity which cannot be easily overthrown. All free acts, but particularly decisions marked by creative freedom and fidelity, inscribe themselves into the person's psychodynamics and thus further strengthen the spirit. It is not just a matter of embodiment of the fundamental option in the whole person but also a task of reaching greater depths of firmness and clarity in the fundamental option itself.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> FFC 1: 195.

Because all persons experience the freedom of God in the created order, the Christian and the non-Christian alike are capable of attaining the capacity for a profound commitment to God and the good. In Häring's moral theology, however, what distinguishes the Christian fundamental option from the non-religious fundamental option is that the Christian views himself primarily from the standpoint of his experience of God's offer of grace and his participation in the life of the triune God. The person who understands the moral life as the life of worship, and the life of worship as the moral life, understands God's good creation and the order of redemption to be present everywhere. The fundamental option for that person is the basic intention for response to God who is ultimate value.

The basic intention or orientation of the person includes the monumental decisions for the good as well as the everyday decisions for response to value. Thus, Häring insists, "One must never try to dissociate the great decisions from one's total moral life, and especially from every day's decisions to be faithful to God's grace and open to the needs of fellowmen."<sup>44</sup> The religious-moral response of the person is the integral response of the whole person to God, through loving acts in service of others in the world as well as in the life of worship in the communal life of the Church. What is most important to note, however, is that Häring reiterates that the basic orientation of the person does not take place at merely one moment in the person's life, nor is it made explicit through one's response in "this or that" particular situation. Rather, the basic intention of the person is developed throughout the course of one's moral formation in a person's life as a whole. The religious-moral response is directed toward fellowship with

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<sup>44</sup> FFC 1: 191.

God and with others. Häring consistently refers to the importance of fellowship throughout his moral theology, so it is not surprising that fellowship is essential even in relation to his discussions of the fundamental option. Indeed, Häring insists,

The validity of the fundamental option is never affirmed, weakened or changed without relation to the basic decisions about our covenant with fellowmen, our commitment to professional integrity or to responsibility to the world around us. If the great decisions are made soundly, and not precipitously or defiantly, they can change the direction in which unconscious forces push. They can reorganize our psychic energies in the proper direction.<sup>45</sup>

This “proper direction” is the fellowship with God and others in a relationship founded in the person’s loving response to value. Therefore, the person’s fundamental option is a basic intention or basic decision for sacrificial, obedient, and loving response to God’s invitation through a life lived in the imitation of Christ. I believe that Häring’s construal of the fundamental option is a more adequate presentation than the way that the fundamental option is considered in previous moral theologies. Rather than a momentary decision for the good, or a transcendence that takes place at a given moment in one’s life, such as generally depicted in the work of Rahner and Fuchs, Häring’s explication of the fundamental option provides greater content to the idea of a basic decision or orientation of the person’s life integrally considered as constantly developing and continually forming. What is also unique about Häring’s presentation of the fundamental option is his insistence that in the response of imitation, the person experiences himself not only as a creature of God, but also, in his universal priestly vocation, as a co-creator with God who helps to increase the value of the created order in a profound way through his assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ, the High Priest.

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<sup>45</sup> FFC 1: 190.

Jesus Christ as the High Priest is the central metaphor for Häring's Christology. Indeed, the metaphor of the High Priest is significant for all aspects of Häring's moral theology, for Häring's Christology informs all of his moral theology. The particular designation for Christ as the High Priest shows that all of Jesus' responses to God's invitation are acts of worship, within the realm of religion. Likewise, the metaphor of the High Priest aptly identifies the role of the Christian person who participates in the reality of creation and redemption. Häring insists that in Jesus' Incarnation "the whole of creation was crowned with the most sublime dignity of priesthood."<sup>46</sup> As such, the religious activity and the moral activity of the human person are integrated.<sup>47</sup> All moral acts, then, are acts of worship, for "all the activity of sacramental man . . . bears the seal of the divine cult in the most exalted sense of the word. It partakes of his worship of God. For to be anointed by the Holy Spirit ultimately means nothing less than to be made to share the inner divine jubilation with which the Father and the Son eternally rejoice in the Holy Spirit (the jubilee of divine love)."<sup>48</sup> Thus, the imitation of Christ essentially includes the imitation of Christ's priestly consecration, in moral-religious acts that give glory to God, and in basic orientation in all aspects of one's life that seeks the good and gives honor to God.

As is generally held to be the case, Häring insists that the fundamental option for the good and for God must be nurtured and strengthened throughout the course of one's whole life, rather than each and every free decision of the person being considered a full

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<sup>46</sup> LC 1: 93.

<sup>47</sup> We shall return to the significance of the High Priest metaphor in the next section, as this designation for Jesus Christ has important implications for Häring's examination of the virtue of religion.

<sup>48</sup> LC 1: 93.

enactment of human freedom. Häring is careful to point out that not every free act of the person is necessarily an act flowing from the fundamental option of the person. Even free acts that are basic decisions for self-expression and self-commitment are not necessarily the full expression of the person. Many decisions in the person's life do not enact one's full freedom, and are instead peripheral decisions that do not ultimately affect the person's integral life plan. Furthermore, some aspects of the person's life may not be fully transformed by the fundamental option, even after an authentic fundamental intention is enacted. Häring explains, the "possibility exists that on a peripheral level the person is inconsistent with the fundamental intention. It needs a lifetime to come to full identity, integrity and integration. And this process of integration and complete consistency is frequently impeded by the contradictions encountered in the world around us."<sup>49</sup> In Häring's view, the person has an inborn goodness and the conscientious person is drawn to value in the experience of and encounter with the other, that which is outside of the self. In the historical, concrete circumstances of most human beings, however, the fundamental option does not fully operate in each and every human act. Rather, it "needs long and patient striving, attention and continuing conversion until that fundamental option is so embodied in fundamental attitudes, in virtues, that the whole life-style is a coherent and true expression of the unique self as God created it to be."<sup>50</sup> The individual acts of the person must be evaluated within the whole realm of the person's life.

Häring does, in part, maintain a balance between the specificity and universality of the fundamental option of the Christian through his insistence that what is common to

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<sup>49</sup> FFC 1: 193.

<sup>50</sup> FFC 1: 195.

both the Christian and non-Christian in the fundamental option is the commitment of the self to value outside of the self alone, to the other. Häring states,

The least we can say here is that a fundamental option is the activation of a deep knowledge of self and of basic freedom by which a person commits himself. It is not thinkable that the fundamental option is fully activated by committing oneself to a mere idea, for a person is more than an idea. Fundamental option is confirmed in its essence only when the person, as a person, commits himself to the Other, to the value person. In the fundamental option, human freedom manifests itself as ‘the capacity for the eternal’. This does not exclude, however, that a profound commitment to fellowmen in self-transcendent love can implicitly be commitment to the Eternal, to a personal God.<sup>51</sup>

All persons have the capacity for a basic decision, deeply ingrained in the being of the person, for the ultimate good, or the ultimate value, the Other. Häring suggests that all persons of goodwill, both Christian and non-Christian alike, have the ability to enact their freedom such that they can strive for the eternal through their love that stretches beyond the self and into love for the other, even if the other is understood only as the person “as person” rather than as the person “created by and loved by God.” Thus, Häring paves the way for a universal and at the same time distinctly Christian ethic in which profound love for the Other can be an implicit, yet deep, love for God, the ultimate value made known in the figure of Jesus Christ.

As with his presentation of the fundamental option’s role in moral theology, Häring asserts that an authentically Christian understanding of morality views the virtues as specifically religious-moral responses to God’s initiative. From the outset, Häring insists that the “Christian ideal of virtue is not man himself and human prudence or the mere balance and harmony of human life.”<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Häring suggests that the Hellenistic

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<sup>51</sup> FFC 1: 168.

<sup>52</sup> LC 1: 487.

concept of virtue is fatally flawed from the outset precisely because it “centered in man. For the ancients, virtue did not consist in worshiping God.”<sup>53</sup> In keeping with his view of the religious-moral life of the Christian person, Häring insists that the divine-human relationship is the center of the life of virtue. Neither the anthropocentric concern for the human person in his or her perfection, nor the theocentric vision of God utterly separated from humanity, provides an adequate vision of the purpose of the life of virtue for the Christian person. The role of the virtues in the moral life is not “just a matter of embodiment of the whole person but also a task of reaching greater depths of firmness and clarity in the fundamental option itself.”<sup>54</sup> Because the fundamental option for God and good is a response to God’s creation and to the order of redemption through which the person becomes a co-creator with God, Häring asserts that the virtues are important for the Christian precisely because they help the Christian as an individual and as a community in the quest for perfect response to God through the imitation of Jesus Christ throughout the span of one’s whole life.

The starting point for Häring’s virtue theory, as for all of his moral theology, is assimilation to the life of Christ. One can see clearly throughout Häring’s moral theology that morality for the Christian is distinct from more philosophically oriented morality, and this distinction is evident particularly in Häring’s development of his virtue theory. Häring states:

For the Christian, virtue is unique and inimitable; and yet it imposes on us the obligation to imitate the ‘goodness and loving-kindness’ toward men, the humility and sublimity, the selfless love of Christ. Christ taught us what virtue is, above all in His own all-embracing love. What virtue is appears in the very excess of

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<sup>53</sup> LC 1: 485.

<sup>54</sup> FFC 1: 195.

His loving sacrifice by which He offers Himself for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind. In Christ there is the most tremendous unity of opposites without force or constraint. In Him is the most perfect and harmonious balance of virtue with all the haunting beauty of consummate goodness.<sup>55</sup>

Häring insists that the love of the good, not merely seeking the heights of moral excellence for the perfection of the self, is the very heart of virtue. The love of the good is developed through the life lived in the imitation of Jesus Christ's self-sacrificing love for others and for the Father. In Häring's virtue theory, however, Christ is more than just the exemplar of virtue, as Jesus Christ is perfectly human and perfectly divine. Jesus Christ is the model of the life of virtue, but also the source of virtue; Jesus Christ is the call to virtue and the response of virtue. The imitation of Jesus Christ requires that the person be like Christ, not merely through an external copying of the actions of Jesus, but through a life that fundamentally adopts Christ's adoring and obedient love for the Father. The life of virtue is an internal disposition toward God as well as external actions that instantiate the love of God and neighbors. The imitation of Christ, according to Häring, makes the person capable of attaining to fellowship with the ultimate good that is God through the constant assimilation to the way of Jesus Christ for the sake of others, not for one's own sake. The person seeks the life of virtue not for self-perfection, but out of authentic love of the good experienced in the encounter with God and with others. Häring distinguishes his Christocentric view of the virtues from that of prior moral theories up to his time when he identifies the life of virtue as the fundamental right attitude specifically in assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ. Although his examination of the virtues leaves room for the universal nature of morality, ultimately Häring's virtue theory provides his clearest development of a distinctly Christian moral theology

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<sup>55</sup> LC 1: 485.

centered on the figure of Jesus Christ. Rather than viewing virtue as choosing the good in a general way, a habitual way, or even in a deeply profound way, Häring insists that virtue is being attuned to the good to the deepest depths of the person's entire being precisely as a Christian, as a disciple of Christ.

The most basic meaning of virtue is an inner quality of goodness that the person develops in order to live well. Häring defines virtue, in part, as “a permanent capacity (*habitus, héxis*) of the soul's powers assuring that constancy in good action which makes a man true to himself in the multiple hazards of decision and in the most diverse situations in life.”<sup>56</sup> When the good is the heart and center of all virtue, the person remains true to oneself in the response to God no matter what the circumstances throughout one's life. The driving force for Häring's understanding of virtue, then, is that the love of God is the source, center, measure, and goal of virtue for the Christian. Häring emphasizes that for a Christian to be virtuous “means to abandon oneself to the love of God which gives itself to us. It is the imitation of the love of Christ, the heroic renouncement of self, the outburst of love for God and neighbor.”<sup>57</sup> The love that is the heart of the Christian virtues, according to Häring, is specifically the sacrificial and obedient love of Jesus Christ for the Father and for the neighbor. Christ's love is the love that the Christian disciple seeks to imitate and assimilate into one's own life to the profoundest depths of one's being.

In keeping with his concern for response and responsibility, Häring's abiding interest in relationships continues even in his examination of the virtues in the Christian

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> LC 1: 487.

life, for he views the virtues as the unification of a multiplicity of relationships. God summons the person, and the person responds to God with her whole being, as a disciple of Christ, with all the human faculties: reason and emotions; the intellect and the will; the body, the spirit, the soul. According to Häring, the virtues must be viewed not only in relation to one's own inner faculties, but equally to "the spheres of values with which one enters into an ever-growing relationship as if into a covenant. The creation of the inner person brings with it openness to God's creation and participation in it through creative relationships."<sup>58</sup> Creative freedom and fidelity are basic to Christian virtue in Häring's moral theology. Häring insists that virtue is not attained merely through repetition or habitual acts; rather, virtue always enacts the creativity of the individual in her response to value. Indeed, Häring insists, "What counts is not the number of repetitions of the good intention but the depth and intensity with which we bring our daily life into the sphere of the fundamental option."<sup>59</sup> Virtues have the characteristic of response because the person employs the freedom of choice that builds up the capacity within the person to respond to whole spheres of values, but particularly the values of persons and their needs.

For Häring, the virtues animate the soul of the person such that it can perceive the true hierarchy of the values of love and respond to them. Augustine's influence, along with the influence of Thomas Aquinas, is evident throughout Häring's virtue theory.<sup>60</sup> In

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<sup>58</sup> FFC 1: 196.

<sup>59</sup> FFC 1: 199.

<sup>60</sup> Häring's virtue theory seeks, in some ways, to be a retrieval of earlier traditions in moral theology. Of particular relevance to the development of his theory are the Augustinian and Thomistic traditions. At times, however, Häring's attempt to appropriate these traditions for his own work demonstrates that Augustine's and Aquinas' approaches to the virtues are often incompatible. Nonetheless, Häring seeks to bring diverse traditions within moral theology into the contemporary conversation regarding the significance of the virtues for Christian moral formation, which is commendable if not entirely persuasive or consistent in the final analysis.

particular, Häring agrees with Augustine's assessment that the Greek cardinal virtues are not the summit of, but the way to, divine love. Häring explains that every "order of love, that is, every virtue centers in the free orientation of man to God, the supreme and most lovable good. Therefore it can have no other source than God bestowing Himself upon us with His love: from Him comes all its force and power."<sup>61</sup> The virtuous person, therefore, does not view the virtues as being attained through one's own efforts; rather, he is aware that the source of his virtue is the love of God bestowing virtue on the person. The person receives the virtues as both gift and task, as a responsibility to give glory to God for the invitation to grace in the response of love to God and to neighbor. According to Häring, then, the fundamental or basic virtue for the Christian is the "abandonment to God's loving self-giving which demands the free response of our gratitude in return."<sup>62</sup>

Because he argues that worship and the moral life are not completely separate, Häring asserts that the integration of the Christian person's faith and life is essential for the response of gratitude to God in an authentic relationship between the person and God, as well as the person and the neighbor. Häring claims,

We are on the road to this integration when the basic decision of faith (fundamental option) permeates and unifies all of one's energies and faculties in an ongoing effort to gain more light and to give an ever more embodied response to God's gifts and people's needs. This brings with it a constant readiness to share in God's creative and redemptive action in our own innermost being and in the world.<sup>63</sup>

Faith is the grateful acceptance of God's truth and love, and in turn, faith demands the response of the person's whole being in the grateful response of self-commitment to God,

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<sup>61</sup> LC 1: 487.

<sup>62</sup> LC 1: 488.

<sup>63</sup> FFC 1: 197.

to the neighbor, and to all of God's creation. In Häring's estimation, virtue activates the inborn longing of the will and the enlightenment of the intellect in an "inner creation of unity and strength [with which] comes unification with the world of values, openness to the Other and co-humanity with the others."<sup>64</sup> An act attains moral value precisely because the person activates her basic freedom and knowledge through her response to the value of the Other (God) and the others, a value which gives profound meaning to the person's fundamental option. The unification of all the person's powers and faculties is strengthened through each value response throughout one's life everyday, but this unity occurs not merely through repetition. Rather, each decision for the good contributes to a permanent disposition toward the good, and thus each decision for the good is a profound decision for value embodied in the Other, the others, and the world.

In addition to the influence of the Augustinian tradition in the presentation of his virtue theory, Häring also closely adheres to the Thomistic tradition in his presentation of the virtues. In his discussion of the fundamental attitudes necessary for the Christian person who lives in the imitation of Christ, Häring draws on the traditional categories of the Christian virtues as general attitudes or dispositions in the following of Christ. Häring presents each of the particular virtues according to the corresponding powers of the soul as the soul gives to each of them the good it demands, as specified by their object. Like Aquinas, who views the virtues as distinct, Häring insists, "Ultimately and in the final analysis the particular virtue is perfect only if it takes its place in the integral hierarchy of all the virtues and is rooted in the primary and basic virtue in which all are

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<sup>64</sup> FFC 1: 196.

centered.”<sup>65</sup> The totality of the good is the goal toward which the person strives as she seeks her own integral perfection, particularly in the integration of her faith and her life.

The virtues act in harmony with one another in the integral life of the human being.

Häring explains,

Faith means wholeness and salvation to the extent that it is filled with hope and trust and bears fruit in love for the life of the world. If it is active in love, faith is truly a fundamental option. Hope and love do not belong only to the later unfolding of faith; they are an essential part of faith as a fundamental option. The unfolding of these virtues – faith, hope and love – understood as integration of faith and life, occurs in the choir of virtues.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, if the person possesses one virtue, the implication is that she possesses all the rest, for the particular virtue can exist authentically only when placed in harmony or unity within the whole order of all the virtues.

For the Christian, “all the virtues are an unfolding of the total beautiful picture of life in Christ, with Christ in our midst, and with his love as the basic and unifying force.”<sup>67</sup> The love that Häring speaks of is not merely sentimental love, but specifically the love that Christ writes on the heart of the human person. The Christian virtue of love is the love that is fundamental for the transformation of our whole lives such that Christ’s love is the pure motive and source of our basic intention for our grateful response to God and to our fellow human beings. In his description of the authentic integration of the Christian moral life, Häring insists that “the moral and religious value of our acts can reach the highest level only when the fundamental option so pervades our vision and our energies that the pure motives and important decisions arise spontaneously from the

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<sup>65</sup> LC 1: 489.

<sup>66</sup> FFC 1: 197.

<sup>67</sup> FFC 1: 198.

depth in which the Spirit molds and guides us.”<sup>68</sup> The gracious love of God, the self-giving love of the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit, is the heart of the Christian life of virtue.

Christ is the center of the Christian life of virtue, but Häring primarily emphasizes only two aspects of the figure of Jesus Christ for his general virtue theory. I find the language that Häring uses to describe Christ’s influence for the moral life of virtue for the Christian disciple very interesting, particularly in relation to his reliance on the call-response model. Although Häring never explicitly separates the work of Jesus Christ into distinct categories, I would delineate the “work” of Jesus Christ in the following way: the Incarnation is God’s invitation to humanity, the call to participation in the divine life; the death on the cross, the Redemption, is the ultimate response of humankind to God’s offer of grace, the final assent to the assimilation to the life of Christ in the disciple’s life of virtue that espouses the virtue of love, in a sacrificial and obedient love in the full freedom of the disciple. A helpful way to understand the importance of the call-response model in Häring’s Christocentric moral theology is to view the idea of God’s call or invitation in the Incarnation, and the human response to the call in the Redemption from Christ’s sacrificial death on the Cross. Jesus Christ is central, for Christ is the invitation and the response.

Although I distinguish the Incarnation as God’s invitation and the Redemption as humanity’s response, however, I want to clarify that Häring never identifies the Incarnation as God’s only, or even first, invitation to the human community, nor the Redemption as humanity’s only response. Quite the contrary, Häring emphasizes that

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<sup>68</sup> FFC 1: 199.

God speaks to humanity in revelation throughout all of history, particularly as revealed in Scriptures and Tradition, but also clearly in the experience of value in the “the other” and “the Other.” Likewise, the person can respond to God’s offer in many ways, most particularly in the development of the life of virtue, in the response to value experienced in the encounter with others, and most particularly in sacraments. What I seek to point out by identifying this distinction, however, is that the Incarnation and Redemption are the perfection of God’s call and humanity’s response, respectively. Christ is perfectly divine and perfectly human, and in Christ God’s perfect self is revealed and humanity’s perfect response is given to God. The perfect imitation of Christ is, therefore, the goal of the Christian moral life in the cultivation of the virtues.

Despite the fact that Häring clearly understands the relevance of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the fact that the biblical witness to the life of Christ is evidently important for other aspects of his moral theology, however, Häring consistently refers to the Incarnation and the Redemption largely at the expense of the rest of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Indeed, Häring never actually addresses this aspect of the life of Jesus Christ in his discussions of the virtues. As I mentioned in the previous examination of Häring’s use of the Scriptures for his moral theology, Häring wants to maintain a “vision of wholeness” with the Scriptures throughout his moral theology. The problem is that, by focusing primarily on two aspects of the biblical witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Häring neglects the extremely important aspects of Christ’s interpersonal relationships demonstrated throughout the New Testament, despite the fact that relationship is the heart of Häring’s understanding of the triune God who seeks relationship with human persons. I think that this neglect of the life of Jesus

of Nazareth may be construed as a weak aspect of Häring's otherwise strong work on the importance of the virtues for the Christian moral life, for Häring does not provide a analysis of what the life of the assimilation to Christ specifically entails in terms of imitating Jesus Christ's actions that are religious-moral responses to the Father.<sup>69</sup> If the imitation of Jesus Christ is to be central to moral theology, one would expect that Häring would provide a more detailed account of what external imitation of Christ looks like.

In my opinion, the life and ministry of Jesus Christ are, in many ways, fundamentally important for the Christian life of virtue who seeks to attain the perfect imitation of Christ. Jesus' life and ministry provide a model or example of what imitation of the life of Christ entails, for the life of virtue cannot be relegated merely to the life of sacrificial or obedient love alone. While Häring clearly argues that the imitation of Christ cannot be relegated to mere copying in a point-by-point comparison the life of Jesus Christ (the Christian disciple does not actually have to be crucified to be a perfect imitator of Christ), the development of his virtue theory may have benefited from a more expansive accounting of the whole biblical witness to the life and ministry of Jesus, not just his Incarnation, crucifixion, and ultimately his Resurrection. Häring contends that the love of Christ is the form of all the other virtues, with which one can readily agree. The problem, however, is that the life and ministry of Jesus Christ seems to have little relevance for Christian moral discernment, at least as presented by Häring's virtue theory. If Jesus Christ is the perfect response of humanity, then why does Häring not give greater emphasis to Jesus' life and ministry?

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<sup>69</sup> The Christian ethic of Stanley Hauerwas will serve as an illuminating contrast to this particular aspect of Häring's moral theology, which will be examined in Chapter Four.

I believe that Häring's lack of emphasis on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ says a great deal about the kind of Christology Häring envisions as important for Christian morality. As I mentioned in the previous chapter of this project, Häring clearly invokes a "high Christology" in which the divinity of Christ plays a more prominent role than Christ's humanity. Nowhere is this more evident than in Häring's discussions of the Christian life of virtue, particularly with the virtue of love being the form of all the other virtues. Indeed, Häring constantly cites the writings of John as important for Christian morality, both in terms of viewing Jesus Christ as revealing the love of God for humanity as well as Christ's death on the cross as the glorification of God through the work the Father has sent Christ to do on Earth.<sup>70</sup> The difficulty with such a Christological foundation is that the focus on Jesus' birth and death puts too little emphasis on his everyday experiences and encounters with others, which is a key concept throughout the rest of Häring's moral theology. The neglect of the importance of the life and ministry of Jesus appears to indicate that the focus on Christ's divinity leaves little room for focusing on his humanity.

Does Häring ultimately neglect the reality of the historical Jesus, the humanity of Jesus, in favor of Christ's divinity? What implications does this neglect have for a moral theology based on the imitation of Jesus Christ? I think Häring's response would be that the emphasis on Christ's divinity points to another key concept in Häring's moral theology, namely, the capacity for the human person to attain participation in the life of the triune God. The attention given to Jesus Christ's divinity leads one to embrace the

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<sup>70</sup> See esp. LC 2: 114, in which Häring highlights John 17: 5 as the most exemplary expression of Christ's presence with God before the earthly manifestation of God's glory, and also the best representation of the relationship of love within the Trinity.

importance of participation in the divine life of the triune God, such that all of the Christian moral life is a response that makes possible authentic fellowship with God through imitation of the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, the Word made flesh. Ultimately, Häring embraces the importance of the life of the historical Jesus, for much of his moral theology draws from the narratives of Jesus' life and teachings and Häring describes the entirety of the life of Jesus Christ as the life of adoration and worship for the Father. Häring's description of the development of the Christian life of virtue in the imitation of Christ, however, never includes explicit reference to the historical life of Jesus.

Ultimately, Häring views the Christian moral life in terms of imitation of Christ's invitation to participation in the divine life and His redemptive love in his sacrificial death on the Cross that gives glory to God and redemption for others. In my opinion, Häring's discussion of the virtues should have included a much more expansive view of the relevance of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in addition to the Incarnation and Resurrection in order to provide a more thorough accounting of the relevance of the entire life of Jesus Christ for Christian morality and discipleship, for Christ's journey must have relevance for our own journey of discipleship. Such an inclusion would not diminish the importance of the adoring and sacrificial love of Christ for the Christian disciple, but would also emphasize the importance of adopting the basic attitude exemplified throughout the life of Jesus Christ. Häring does address the significance of adopting Christ's basic attitude of adoring and sacrificial love in his virtue theory when he discusses the importance of the virtue of religion as the basic virtue through which the

Christian disciple is offered divine cult as well as sacrificing herself in acts of cult for the other.<sup>71</sup>

Nonetheless, Häring's primary emphasis throughout his examination of the virtues is that the God who is revealed to humanity is the God of love, in a triune relationship of love and dynamic dialogue. Häring states, "God reveals Himself to us in Christ as love. Christ made manifest to us, in the Incarnation and through His life on earth, the love of the Father and His love for the Father. And He infused into us through the Holy Spirit the power of love. Therefore it is possible that love be prescribed in the imitation of Christ."<sup>72</sup> Because God reveals the divine self to be the fellowship of love, Häring emphasizes that the Christian life of virtue must have at its core the virtue of the love of Jesus Christ.

As stated previously, much of Häring's virtue theory relies on prior Thomistic virtue theory. In Häring's general overview of the virtues, he describes the moral virtues as directed toward the order of creation, while the theological virtues are direct and immediate responses to God. The moral virtues prepare the person for her vocation in this world through the person's striving to better herself and increase value in the order of creation. The theological virtues place the person in dialogue with God as the person strives for salvation. The moral virtues are concerned primarily with the realm of the external manifestation of the person's orientation toward the good and toward God, while the theological virtues are more concerned with "the inner spirit and the Word because they are directly and totally turned to God. More specifically, they reflect the loving

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<sup>71</sup> We shall examine the importance of the virtue of religion for Häring's Christocentric moral theology in the following section.

<sup>72</sup> LC 2: 98.

glance of God immediately directed to man and man's response to it, the movement of life and love between God and man."<sup>73</sup> What is most original in Häring's discussion of the virtues, however, is how he consistently insists that the virtues must always be viewed in relation to the figure of Jesus Christ as the call and the response in the divine-human dialogue.

Although Häring provides a lengthy discussion of each of the individual virtues, his work regarding the virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance clearly demonstrates that the cardinal virtues are not Häring's primary concern. Rather than examine Häring's assessment of each of these virtues, what stands out as most significant in his discussion of the moral virtues is the underlying emphasis that moral virtue "thrives whether nourished by profound consciousness of value or animated by enthusiastic love for the good."<sup>74</sup> The human person's natural likeness to God makes it possible, and gives the inclination, to do the good. The person's love for the good is authentic virtue only if the tendency of the virtue is an orientation toward God.

Häring acknowledges the importance of the moral virtues, but due to his prior commitments to a scriptural basis for moral theology, he maintains that the theological virtues are of primary importance for the presentation of a distinctly Christian virtue theory. He insists that "the emphasis of the Bible is on the eschatological virtues," while the four cardinal virtues "are taken from the Greek culture in a creative effort by the evangelizing Church to be faithful to the promptings of the Lord of history in that culture.

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<sup>73</sup> LC 2: 7.

<sup>74</sup> LC 1: 493.

The purpose was to bring home the valuable ethos of those who turned to Christ.”<sup>75</sup> As such, the theological virtues are direct and immediate responses to God by the person who acts as a partner of God in ongoing creation and redemption throughout history, while the moral virtues are directed toward the order of creation.

The primary concern for Häring’s virtue theory is to emphasize that humanity is placed in dialogue with God through the virtues, but particularly through the theological virtues. Häring argues that the most important aspect of the divine-human dialogue, in relation to the virtues, is the “mutual interrelation and interpenetration of the dialog proceeding from God and grasped by man in the first act (and in the virtue) of divine love in man’s conversion to God.”<sup>76</sup> Unlike the moral virtues, the theological virtues are not meant to prepare the person for his vocation in the world, although Häring admits that they do augment this mission significantly. Rather, Häring argues, the primary purpose of the theological virtues is “to open the sacred dialog between God and man, which is to be completed and perfected in eternal bliss.”<sup>77</sup> The theological virtues are not human achievements, but are the special endowment of the person that equips him “through divine grace for basic activities of Christian existence. These fundamental activities are not world betterment, not striving for self-perfection, but orientation to God, participation in the fullness of divine life.”<sup>78</sup> This is not to diminish the importance of the moral virtues or their role in increasing value in the created order. Häring clearly recognizes the importance of the cultivation of the moral virtues such that the person understands his

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<sup>75</sup> FFC 1: 201.

<sup>76</sup> LC 2: 6.

<sup>77</sup> LC 2: 5-6.

<sup>78</sup> LC 2: 6.

vocation in terms of the response to God's invitation to participate in the order of creation and redemption, not merely with an eschatological focus, but with a focus on the present increase of value in the created order.

What is most original in Häring's evaluation of the virtues, however, is how he consistently relates the virtues to the goal of the imitation of Christ, using the virtue of love as the primary vehicle for his discussion. For instance, Häring allows that the cardinal virtue of prudence could be considered the comprehensive virtue as the Greek philosophers contend, but he asserts that the Christian disciple knows that the wisdom of the Christian "can be only a grace from above (*agápe*) flowing from God's own loving revelation of Himself in Christ. Its grand ideal is the mission of fulfilling the great commandment of love in the following of Christ."<sup>79</sup> The goal of prudence for the Christian is, first and foremost, to point the way to love. Likewise, Häring points out the deficiencies of the ancient Western systems of virtues that elevate the virtue of justice to the loftiest position in the hierarchy of basic virtues while relegating love to mere passions of the human person. Häring counteracts this defect in the system when he insists that love first reveals "the actual I to the Thou and discovers the living fountain of value in the Thou" and justice only secondarily "establishes right order regarding the goods of the individual and the community."<sup>80</sup> Although Häring maintains that justice is the most elevated of the moral virtues, he insists that the force of justice "lies in the moral love of value and of the person,"<sup>81</sup> and therefore is enriched by love.

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<sup>79</sup> LC 1: 487.

<sup>80</sup> LC 1: 514.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

As with his evaluation of the importance of the moral virtues, Häring argues that the theological virtues are significant primarily in relation to the virtue of love, specifically the sacrificial and obedient love in the imitation of Christ. Häring's emphasis on love is not an indication that the virtues of faith and hope should be minimized, as he envisions all of the theological virtues working together as the foundation for the supernatural moral life. As such, all of the theological virtues are significant for the Christian moral life. Häring argues that the importance of the theological virtues lies in their relation to Christ in the divine-human dialogue. Thus, the virtue of faith recognizes Christ as the Truth; through the virtue of hope Christ is the Way to heavenly bliss; and through Christ's resurrection He manifests the power of His redemptive Love. The virtue of faith points the person to the divine goal; the virtue of hope releases the forces which strive for the goal; and the virtue of love unites the person with the goal. Faith and hope apart from love are imperfect virtues. Love is the form of all the virtues. Indeed, "love is the great commandment, the mother of all the virtues, their supernatural form and bond of unity."<sup>82</sup> Faith, hope, and love are theological virtues, distinct from the moral virtues, because they belong to the inner spirit and Word in that they are directed and totally turned toward God, not the created order, in and through Jesus Christ.

In conjunction with the obvious influence of Aquinas' virtue theory on Häring's own work concerning the virtues, Häring also maintains a place of great prominence for the Augustinian tradition throughout his virtue theory. The virtue of love that Häring emphasizes is the unifying virtue for the life of the Christian person. Häring explains that this love "has a countenance, and it is through the unified diversity of all the Christian

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<sup>82</sup> LC 2: 97.

virtues that love gives witness and integration to faith and life.”<sup>83</sup> This is the love that gives life to all the virtues, the love that is revealed in Jesus Christ. One cannot know the countenance of love revealed in Jesus Christ, Häring claims, “without knowing the virtues that respond to various spheres of values; and one cannot know the virtues and spheres of values without seeing them in the one great order of love, as St. Augustine emphasized so consistently.”<sup>84</sup> The love of God revealed in Jesus Christ confers on all the other virtues “a steadfast ordering toward the supernatural end, the eternal communion with God. Love is the inner dynamic principle which imparts to the whole life of virtue its firmness, inner warmth, and eternal value before God.”<sup>85</sup> That is to say, through the virtue of charity the other virtues are made capable of contributing to the perfection of the person who seeks participation in the life of God because love embraces and guides all the other virtues in the assimilation to the life of Christ.

One can see clearly that no particular aspect of Häring’s evaluation of the virtues is meant to be new or highly innovative. Häring sees his own work as a retrieval of traditions within moral theology, but the way in which he appropriates these traditions for his own work is novel in its own way. What is most ground-breaking in Häring’s virtue theory is how he envisions the virtues in relation to Jesus Christ, which is indeed noteworthy. As Häring emphasizes throughout his moral theology, Jesus Christ is the center of the moral life. Thus, the importance of the theological virtues is that, through them, “we are placed in dialogue with God, but only in and through Christ.”<sup>86</sup> Because

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<sup>83</sup> FFC 1: 198.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> LC 2: 96.

<sup>86</sup> LC 2: 7.

the theological virtues make possible the dialogue with God, Häring describes the theological virtues as “the inner capacity, the divine invitation, and obligation to imitate Christ, because Christ is for us the sole cause of this God-like life. Life flowing from these virtues is nothing other than actual imitation of Christ, hearkening to Christ, hoping in Christ, obediently loving Christ.”<sup>87</sup> As such, the theological virtues are possible only with and in Christ, in that the Christian disciple is given the theological virtues by God through the sacrificial obedience of Christ, and at the same time Christ empowers the Christian person in the development of the whole person who lives in the imitation of Christ. That is to say, we receive the theological virtues because of Christ, and, in turn, assimilation to the life of Christ is the purpose of the theological virtues. Häring explains,

The Christian virtues, and this refers not only to the theological virtues but to the moral virtues as well, are divinely given powers, are interior possession of our being by the virtue of Christ. In this, Christian virtue is distinguished from all laborious efforts at self-perfection, in which striving for virtue centers entirely in the petty human ego. Christian virtue has its source of power in Christ and tends with exalted end and aim toward Christ.<sup>88</sup>

God initiates the dialogue with humanity and gives the person the ability to respond through the offer of participation in the divine truth through Christ, in transforming grace. Because Christ is the invitation and the response in the divine-human dialogue, Häring asserts, “Complete dedication to the good and the sound development of the whole man which follows from it is assured through the following of Christ.”<sup>89</sup> The person strives to participate in the divine life through conversion to the life of grace in assimilation to the

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<sup>87</sup> LC 2: 8.

<sup>88</sup> LC 1: 492.

<sup>89</sup> LC 1: 72.

life of Christ, and is enabled to do so through Christ, the invitation to and the response of humanity.

In creation, God initiates the invitation to grace for humanity, which continues throughout the history of the Hebrew people, but God's invitation finds its fullest and most perfect expression in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The person who seeks the life of moral perfection seeks the perfect imitation of Jesus Christ, for "Jesus is not only the Word of the Father to us; he is also the perfect response. Thus he is the rallying call, inviting and enabling us, by his Spirit, to listen to him and to join him in his adoring, trusting, and loving response to the Father. His call to discipleship is, therefore, a call to creative responsibility in freedom and fidelity."<sup>90</sup> Christ is the Word of God, through whom God speaks to us and through whom our response is made possible. Jesus Christ is the invitation of God and the perfect response of love to the Father. Therefore, the person's "loving obedience in the imitation of Christ is the echo, the image, the participation in the triune, eternal life of God, in the Word and the response of love."<sup>91</sup>

The moral obligation of the Christian, then, is to strive for the highest love toward God and neighbor, which means to strive for Christian perfection in the fulfillment of the great commandment of love in the assimilation to Christ. Just as the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is the most complete invitation of God, the perfect response to God's offer of grace and salvation has already been given by Jesus Christ in his death on the Cross. His death and resurrection makes possible the human response to the divine offer in the redemptive love of Jesus Christ. The love of the Christian disciple must be the sacrificial love that

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<sup>90</sup> FFC 1: 20.

<sup>91</sup> LC 1: 52.

follows the way of Christ's cross in order to participate in the Redemption already accomplished through the crucified Savior. Because the person is a pilgrim on a journey, however, Häring reminds the disciple of Christ that the striving for perfection is as important as the actual accomplishment of the goal of perfection in the imitation of Christ.

Häring views the Christian life of virtue in terms of both the religious and moral aspect of response in the assimilation to the life of Christ. He concludes, "Our love for Christ is genuine only if it is reverential adoring love (according to the essence of Christianity as religion) and obedient love (according to the essence of Christian morality)."<sup>92</sup> The religious aspect of the Christian moral act gives glory to God, and the moral aspect of the act is free and faithful love in accordance with the will of God. Indeed, Häring insists that religion and morality are bound to one another through the virtue of love, just as love is the unifying principle of all the virtues. Likewise, love is the unifying force through which we love God through service to the neighbor in acts of unselfish love. Häring explains,

Love as the form of all the virtues joins religion and morality in a unique unsurpassable unity, for love animates all the moral activity of the child of God with the spirit of religion. Thus morality receives a religious form and is bound to God in the closest possible bond. Through love for God in God we become partners with God in His own effective love for Himself and for all that He has created. We love God because He is in Himself infinitely worthy of our love; we love *creatures* because they are reflections of the light of divine love. Through the love of charity (*caritas*) we love with that which is their own value, and beyond it, the infinite value radiating from the divine glory and the eternal love. In this theological virtue of charity the dynamic of our love, its ultimate motive (*objectum formale quo*), is identical in our love for God, for ourselves, for our neighbor (and therewith for the entire moral-religious attitude of the Christian in

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<sup>92</sup> LC 2: 93.

relation to himself and to others), even though the immediate (material) object is different in the two (as different as God and creation).<sup>93</sup>

Ultimately, according to Häring, the virtue of true love (*caritas*) leads the person to participation in the life of the triune God, which begins with the union of love in this life that embraces all of creation, all that God love and wills, and leads all other things to God. Therefore, in keeping with Häring's emphasis on the person as integral being both as individual as well as member of community, he insists that the virtue of charity embraces others as well as the Other, God, in unselfish service that gives glory to God and seeks the salvation of others, in the imitation of Christ's obedient and sacrificial love for God and for others.

Indeed, Häring contends that the central motive of Christian morality is obedient love. Christian love is the love of Jesus Christ, which is the obedient and sacrificial love of the Son for the Father. God's invitation to the human person is the offer of participation in the life of the triune God, and the response of the person is the grateful response of the creature to the Father who is Creator and the Lord who is Redeemer. The person recognizes herself as a creature, a child of God. Therefore, the love of the disciple of Christ, Häring insists,

must manifest itself in acts of religion in which love always adores and in acts of the moral virtues where love is stamped with obedience, where love always obeys (cf. Heb 10:5-9). Accordingly we may also look upon obedience through love as the fundamental motive. Or if we turn to the basic objective value and basic motive of obedience, we can say: the basic motive must be the will of God, loving and loved.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> LC 2: 97-98.

<sup>94</sup> LC 1: 317.

The person does not enact the divine will merely in one or two acts that respond to God's offer of participation in the life of God. Rather, the motive of divine love must be renewed frequently enough that it effects, influences, and animates the individual act. Häring explains that mere repetition of acts without divine motivation does not create an inner dynamism or drive for the obedient love of God. To the contrary, divine love must be the fundamental motive for the life of the Christian.

The divine love that serves as the foundation for the Christian life of virtue is specifically the love of Christ, the love of the Son for the Father and for all persons. As such, Häring consistently views the virtues in relation to assimilation to the life of Christ. Moral perfection in the imitation of Christ is the goal of the Christian moral life, which can be attained through the possession of the virtues. The goal of moral perfection cannot be attained through the perpetuation of the struggle against evil tendencies, however, nor through mere discipline in the moral life. In conformity with Christ, the Christian life of virtue is the life of moral perfection which can be attained "only by means of asceticism, self-denial, assimilation to the crucified Christ."<sup>95</sup> The Christian disciple who seeks authentic imitation of Christ knows that the sovereign love which we render to God must always be imbued with the spirit of submission in every act that is a manifestation of love. Love in the imitation of Christ's love must always be considered in conjunction with obedience to the will of God if it is love that is a participation in the life of the triune God. If the Christian life is truly assimilated to the life of Christ, then "it is apparent that love and obedience taken together constitute the essential attitude of the disciple of Christ. We enjoy real friendship with Christ; and in Christ true friendship

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<sup>95</sup> LC 1: 72.

with the Father. We are united with Him in an ineffable bond of love.”<sup>96</sup> Our union with God is made possible through the life of virtue lived in the imitation of Christ, particularly the love of Christ.

According to Häring, Christ’s love for the Father and for all of humanity is made evident in the Incarnation, as well as in Christ’s obedient death on the cross. This act of obedience to the point of death reestablishes the communion of love between man and God that was lost in the Fall of Adam and Eve. Eternal communion with God can be “merited” only through loving obedience to God on Earth, although nothing that the human person does can ever “merit” what has already been accomplished by and through Christ. The love of the Christian disciple is the love of Christ, for “the perfection of the disciple’s obedience is found only in his love. The world must be made to recognize in our manifestation of obedience to Christ the evidence of our love as Christ attested His love for the Father through His obedience.”<sup>97</sup> The obedient love of the disciple of Christ is the obedience that surpasses the minimum requirements of the law and instead embraces the law of Christ, the law and great commandment of love. In authentic imitation of Jesus Christ, then, “Our life has its supreme purpose and its profoundest meaning in love. Its highest mission is to prove our love in the test of obedience. On the most exalted level love and obedience are one.”<sup>98</sup>

Christians are called to imitate the obedience and fidelity, as well as the freedom, of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ’s response to the Father is adoring love and perfect

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<sup>96</sup> LC 2: 93.

<sup>97</sup> LC 2: 94.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

obedience. He is the perfect man who is completely open to God's will, God's invitation to humanity, and obedient to God's call in adoring love. The love of Jesus Christ is the paradoxical love that is utterly free and utterly obedient at the same time, the love of utter submission and utter freedom at once. Häring explains the mysterious love of Christ: "The Christian concept of love as shown in Christ and the Christian response was something utterly new for mankind. Such love was an ineffable reality transcending all mere human power to conceive."<sup>99</sup> This concept of love drives Häring's virtue theory, for love is the perfect expression of the individual person in a dialogical relationship, in fellowship with God and with others. The human response to God's invitation in Christ is made possible through Jesus Christ. Christ is the invitation and response, and it is only "possible for us to follow Christ, to imitate Him, because He is the 'Word' in whom our likeness to God rests and through whom it has been wonderfully restored by the Redemption."<sup>100</sup> What God began in creation is renewed through Christ's Redemption, to which we assent in assimilation to Jesus Christ through the cultivation of the virtues.

The theological virtue of love unites and coordinates all the other virtues throughout Häring's virtue theory. Häring warns, however, that the focus on one dominant motive in the moral life of the Christian neglects the importance of the multitude of other motivations in the moral life.

Over and above all the motive proper to each particular virtue there must be operative in all our activity, if it is to be perfectly good and supernaturally meritorious, the comprehensive motive of love embracing all the others. But it does not follow that the motive must explicitly intervene in every single action, but that it must be vitally operative.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> LC 2: 88.

<sup>100</sup> LC 1: 52.

<sup>101</sup> LC 1: 316.

The value encountered in each and every experience may, at times, be the dominant motive for Christian action. Therefore, Häring contends, while love “must be the ultimate and most comprehensive motive . . . [l]ove and obedience are not the only virtues. And they themselves are perfect only when accompanied by all the other individual virtues in their train.”<sup>102</sup> In keeping with more Thomistic virtue theories, Häring acquiesces that each virtue has its own proper motive that immediately corresponds to the object of the virtuous action in each instance. A whole series of motivations may correspond to every action, just as every action has a multiplicity of value-relations. Each motive may be good as long as the motive for the action corresponds with the object of value. Endless external acts, however, without profound realization or experience of the authentic value of the act, cannot be considered a truly motivated act founded on virtue, particularly the love of God. The underlying motive must permeate all one’s actions such that it is the fundamental drive within the person. Häring further addresses the problem of specificity and universality in Christian ethics when he insists that as long as the person maintains virtuous motives and as long as the love of God influences the person, even if only faintly and not explicitly, this divine love remains the fundamental motive.

In Häring’s virtue theory, one must face the dilemma of the Christian person being called to perfection in the imitation of Christ while also realizing that all persons live in the fallen state of nature. The problem is that in the “real world” situation of everyday life, every human person is faced with the decision to realize lower values or higher values, and everyone must confront evil practically on a daily basis. Therefore,

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<sup>102</sup> LC 1: 314.

even for the person who has one underlying motive in all her actions, even if it is the authentic motive of the love of God, the person struggles to enact this love in each and every action. Häring attends to this apparent discrepancy between the virtuous person and the act that lacks full virtue when he contends that the defect “of a particular virtue in its exterior exercise is not always to be accounted for by an absence of fundamental dedication to the good.”<sup>103</sup> The person can be devoted to the love of God and may seek to enact this virtue through all her actions, but the effort demanded of her may be too great for the person living in the fallen state. She may have an inner attachment to the good, but perhaps her many good qualities do not flow from a deep and genuine attitude of goodness, but merely an attraction to aspects of the good. Häring suggests, “Contrition and purpose of amendment can be sincere, even though they are sadly lacking in depth.”<sup>104</sup> That is to say, despite possessing all the virtues to some degree, and even with the fundamental motive of the love of God as her driving influence, she may make choices that do not necessarily reflect the influence of divine love. The person may maintain a partial blindness to authentic value.

Häring argues that for virtue to exist, the person must not have mere inborn or acquired inclinations toward the good, but a “basic attachment to all good as such,”<sup>105</sup> which is the decisive characteristic of every virtue. The life of virtue does not demand hardship and struggle by its nature. In fact, the goal of the virtues is to so steep oneself in the good that doing the virtuous deed becomes a kind of second nature for the person.

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<sup>103</sup> LC 1: 490.

<sup>104</sup> LC 1: 436.

<sup>105</sup> LC 1: 491.

This is not to say that virtue becomes merely a habit, but that virtue so transforms the individual that the person seeks the good without effort and without hesitation. The value and merit of each particular act is greater when the integral person has a profound permanent disposition to do the good. Häring draws from his teacher's examination of the virtuous life when he states, "While Scheler sees that man has to struggle for his synthesis and wholeness, he gives special attention to the person who loves virtue – loves the good – not so much in order to grow richer in goodness but, rather, because of his inner wealth of goodness."<sup>106</sup> The person steeped in virtue does the good because she realizes the innate value of the good through a thorough and perfect conformity with the good. The value of an act is judged according to the degree of love from which the act flows. The person who struggles in an act of virtue may seem more virtuous due to the effort put into the realization of the act, but the ideal moral life is not a persistent and difficult hardship in the struggle against evil. The ideal moral life is the one in which the person says "Yes" to all that is good, in each and every virtue. According to Häring, then, the Christian ideally is called to strive for perfection in the imitation of Christ. Thus Häring insists, "Christian perfection demands that the Christian see to it that this divine and basic motive impel and animate all his activity, not merely in some fainthearted manner, but with all possible force and interior penetration."<sup>107</sup> Because the goal of the Christian "is not a perpetuation of the struggle (the *agere contra*), but conformity with Christ, Ideal and Model of the whole man,"<sup>108</sup> the person must summon all her energies

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<sup>106</sup> FFC 1: 200.

<sup>107</sup> LC 1: 317.

<sup>108</sup> LC 1: 72.

to suppress all contrary instincts and tendencies in order to attain the goal of moral perfection in the imitation of Christ.

For the Christian, love of God is the fundamental motive that drives all virtuous action, precisely because this love so penetrates the very being of the person that the Christian acts always under the influence of divine love in her imitation of Jesus Christ.

Häring asserts,

And since the love of God and His paternal will were revealed to us and given to us to share in Christ, the fundamental motive must ultimately be God's loving will for us in Christ, who brings us the love and message of His Father. Ultimately the fundamental motive of the Christian merges into the ideal of the following of Christ. The pilot light, the fundamental motive, the ideal of life of the Christian must in some form or other be reducible to obedience and love, as God has taught them to us through Christ and through Him demanded them of us, and as we offer them in return to God in Christ and through Christ.<sup>109</sup>

Because the Christian life is the life in, with, and through Christ, the person attains a new orientation and a transformation of his whole life. Rather than eschewing one single evil act or doing one good act, the Christian undergoes a conversion through which he responds to God's offer of grace in the acceptance of a whole new spiritual life in Christ. Through the assimilation of his life to the life of Christ, the person resolves to change his whole life's direction such that God's will becomes his own will.

The person who abandons his own will to the will of God is in the process of ongoing conversion in which the person's will is renewed in the will of Jesus Christ.

Häring reminds us, "Even the life of grace is a law of progressive conversion."<sup>110</sup>

Although conversion demands "an effort to attain the pinnacle of perfection, the life

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<sup>109</sup> LC 1: 317.

<sup>110</sup> LC 1: 437.

totally influenced by divine grace,”<sup>111</sup> the person must recognize that the life of grace is only a gradual progress in which our actions and our resolve are imperfect. The person is still the fallen person who lives amidst numerous choices, including the choice for sin rather than grace. For this reason, the person needs divine grace and guidance in order to return to the state of friendship and grace with God, in order to respond to God’s invitation with a fundamental orientation toward grace rather than sin. Häring understands the cultivation of the life of virtue in terms of the person’s preparation for this conversion to the life of grace.

The imitation of Christ is the heart of Häring’s virtue theory, as with all of his moral theology, precisely because Jesus Christ is the invitation to participation in the divine life, and the perfect reply of humanity. Häring explains,

In the fulfillment of the imitation, our likeness to God becomes manifest. And just as all discussion about an image refers back to the original or prototype which has been copied, so too must moral theology direct the Christian life in all points to the Word or Logos, the divine pattern in whom and through whom man made to the divine image lives and to whom he can respond.<sup>112</sup>

Assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ through the cultivation of the virtues is significant for Häring’s moral theology because the imitation of Christ reveals to the Christian disciple the *imago Dei* within each person that makes possible the response to God’s offer of grace. Christ is the invitation of the Father through the Word-made-flesh. Christ reveals the divine life and invites humanity to participation in the divine life. Likewise, “Christ stands before us as perfect man, fully spiritual and devoted to the Father, entirely humane and open to His brethren, to all the joys and sorrows of the world, absorbed in

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> LC 1: 52.

the majesty of the Father and filled with wonder over the lilies of the field. He also calls to us with all our powers. He appeals to all that is in man: intellect and will, heart and spirit.”<sup>113</sup> Christ is the perfection of humanity. The perfect following of Christ in the development of the moral life of virtue, directed toward participation in the life of God, is the perfection of the integral human person on the journey toward salvation. Häring argues that the most perfect expression of the assimilation to Christ takes place primarily in the virtue of religion, in which the religious and the moral response of the Christian disciple is specifically the response of sacrificial love in communion with Jesus Christ.

### III. Religion as Virtue: Heart of the Christian Moral Life of Virtue

Häring ultimately contends that Christian morality cannot be based solely on universal terms and principles. Rather, he favors a distinctly Christian ethic understood primarily in terms of God’s invitation to grace specifically in the imitation of Jesus Christ. Having distinguished his moral theology by his concentration on the meaning of Christian discipleship in light of God’s invitation and humanity’s response, Häring identifies the virtue of religion as a particularly important aspect of the Christian moral life that explains the significance of the specifically religious-moral response of the person to God’s offer of participation in the divine life.

According to Häring, the virtues are necessary to live a fully Christian life that is responsive to God’s Word and God’s invitation to grace. Although his Christocentric moral theology addresses the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, as well as the theological virtues of love, faith, and hope, Häring does not

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<sup>113</sup> LC 1: 72.

contribute a particularly unique or new description of the virtues for the Christian moral life. He describes the traditional seven virtues generally in the same way that his predecessors had presented them, from Augustine to Aquinas to his own time. This is not to undermine the role or the significance of the virtues for the development of the Christian moral life, but only to say that Häring essentially conforms to the standard presentation of the virtues with little deviation from the tradition. While the theological virtues direct the person toward an inner spirit of devotion to and adoration of God in the divine-human dialogue, the moral virtues demand external activities in the order of creation that correspond to the dialogue. To these seven virtues discussed at length in traditional moral conversations, however, Häring gives greatest emphasis to religion as a virtue. According to Häring, the Christian life is the life lived in assimilation to the life of Christ through the cultivation of the virtues, but particularly through the development of the virtue of religion.

Far from the minor virtue, little considered or discussed in moral theology after the time of Thomas Aquinas, Häring insists that the virtue of religion has primacy in the Christian moral life. While the virtue of religion is relegated to a peripheral role, at best, in contemporary moral theology, Häring underscores the importance of religion in the development of the moral life; and thus Häring provides a renewal for moral theology in which the virtue of religion is given a place of prominence in the moral life of the Christian disciple.

Häring stresses the importance of the virtue of religion in a way unparalleled by any contemporary moral theologian, such that the virtue of religion stands at the epicenter of all the moral virtues. What is distinct and significant about the development of virtue

theory in Häring's moral theology, therefore, is that the virtue of religion is the core of all the virtues, for it is the bridge between God and humanity in the divine-human dialogue, the link between the religious and moral life of the person, and the bridge between the theological and the moral virtues. Thus, Häring argues, the Christian life of responsibility requires a specific virtue of religion for the Christian person and the Christian community.

Häring is not the first moral theologian to highlight religion as a virtue. Indeed, Häring cites the work of many theologians in his own discussion of the virtue of religion, but clearly the greatest influence on his own work in this regard is Thomas Aquinas. Notable similarities can be seen in Aquinas' and Häring's explication of religion as a virtue, particularly in the sense that both Aquinas and Häring view religion as a special virtue and, indeed, as eminent among the virtues. Although his understanding of the virtues clearly is influenced by Aquinas' virtue theory, particularly in regards to the importance of the virtue of religion for the moral life, Häring's examination of the virtue of religion is not merely a reiteration of Aquinas' moral theory.

Both Aquinas and Häring discuss the virtue of religion in terms of the divine-human relationship that lies at the heart of the virtue. For both Aquinas and Häring, religion is considered a virtue, because every act toward the good is a virtue, and religion pays honor to God, the first principle. Thus Aquinas states, "it is evident that to render anyone his due has the aspect of good, since by rendering a person his due, one becomes suitably proportioned to him, through being ordered to him in a becoming manner. . . . Since then it belongs to religion to pay due honor to someone, namely, to God, it is

evident that religion is a virtue.”<sup>114</sup> Along with Aquinas, Häring agrees that religion, by its very nature, must give honor and glory to God. Thus, Häring states, “the object of the virtue of religion is the sanctity, the exaltation, the magnificence, the honor of God, the splendor of His holiness as it is reflected in creation, in His tremendous epiphanies, and most especially in Christ and through Christ.”<sup>115</sup> Häring’s emphasis on the person of Jesus Christ is not shared explicitly in Aquinas’ moral theology, but the importance of the virtue of religion being directed to the Godhead is evident in both moral theologies.<sup>116</sup>

Despite the similarities between Aquinas’ and Häring’s treatments of the virtue of religion, Häring departs from Aquinas’ evaluation of religion as a virtue. Although both Häring and Aquinas give the virtue of religion a place of prominence in their discussion of the virtues, Aquinas places the virtue of religion among the moral virtues, specifically justice; Häring, however, views the significance of the virtue of religion in its capacity to serve as a bridge between the moral virtues and the theological virtues, most specifically, the virtue of charity. Häring still categorizes the virtue of religion as a moral virtue, but his emphasis is on the relationship of the virtue of religion to the theological virtue of love. Although the distinction between the virtue of religion in Aquinas’ and Häring’s work is primarily a difference of emphasis, rather than substantive, the different emphasis should be addressed in order to develop an evaluation of the role of religion in Häring’s moral theology. Furthermore, as mentioned above briefly, although Aquinas makes infrequent reference to Jesus Christ throughout his discussion of the virtue of religion, he

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<sup>114</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 81, A 2, Resp.

<sup>115</sup> LC 2: 115.

<sup>116</sup> Häring’s emphasis on how the virtue of religion relates back to Jesus Christ is an important aspect of Häring’s treatment of religion as a virtue which will be examined in further detail in a subsequent discussion.

clearly views the end of the virtue of religion as the triune God. Häring further distinguishes his own moral theology from that of Aquinas in his emphasis on the importance of the figure of Jesus Christ particularly in his treatment of the virtue of religion.

While the virtue of religion is considered in terms of the divine-human relationship, Aquinas and Häring view this relationship in rather different ways. As pertains to the virtue of religion, for Aquinas, the person's relation to God is considered primarily as one in which the person seeks the ultimate goodness that is God, specifically through acts which give due honor to God. In this sense the virtue of religion is generic and it is concerned with public cult. Therefore, Aquinas claims that religion as a virtue "is reckoned a part of justice which is a moral virtue."<sup>117</sup> Häring, on the other hand, insists that the divine-human relationship is so pervasive in all human activity that all human acts are essentially religious-moral actions. As such, Häring claims, "the theological virtues must be looked upon as the foundation and source of the virtue of religion. Religion flows from the divine virtues as property or essential demand from the essence or nature. Faith is an indispensable prerequisite, love is the very soul and inner form of the virtue of religion."<sup>118</sup> For Aquinas, the virtue of religion is a moral virtue that directs the operations of the will to the honor of God. For Häring, the importance of the virtue of religion is its relationship to the theological virtues. Through the virtue of religion all human action is precisely the religious-moral response of the person to God's invitation to grace, not only in order to give honor to God, but indeed to participate in the

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<sup>117</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 81, A 5, sed contra.

<sup>118</sup> LC 2: 120.

very life of the triune God. In order to understand this important difference in the virtue of religion for Aquinas and Häring, we must first evaluate the meaning of justice in Aquinas' theology and afterwards the significance that Häring attributes to the virtue of love in his moral theology.

Aquinas begins his assessment of the virtue of religion in terms of the divine-human relationship. Aquinas says that religion "denotes properly a relation to God. For it is He to Whom we ought to be bound as to our unfailing principle; to Whom also our choice should be resolutely directed as to our last end; and Whom we lose when we neglect Him by sin, and should recover by believing in Him and confessing our faith."<sup>119</sup> As such, Aquinas insists that a special kind of honor is due to God, which requires also a special kind of worship due to God. Therefore, Aquinas designates the virtue of religion as a virtue of justice, because justice is concerned with rendering to another that which is due.

According to Aquinas, the virtue of justice, "by its name implies equality, it denotes essentially relation to another, for a thing is equal, not to itself, but to another. And forasmuch as it belongs to justice to rectify human acts . . . this otherness which justice demands must needs be between beings capable of action."<sup>120</sup> The virtue of justice is not about the passions, but about external operation, "in so far as an operation or the thing used in that operation is duly proportionate to another person, wherefore the mean of justice consists in a certain proportion of equality between the external thing and

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<sup>119</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 81, A 1, Resp.

<sup>120</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 58, A 2, Resp. The relationship that Aquinas describes calls to mind the language that Häring uses to describe the divine-human relationship, such that the justice between God and the human person is made possible because God does not remain completely "Other" and isolated from relationship with humanity; rather, God makes possible the divine-human relationship through God's own initiative.

the external person.”<sup>121</sup> Justice is foremost among the moral virtues in Aquinas’ theology because, unlike the other moral virtues, justice disposes the person toward the good of another person, and in the case of the virtue of religion, toward the good which is the honor that is due to God.

Because Aquinas associates the virtue of religion with the virtue of justice, then, one could easily surmise that the divine-human relationship that Aquinas describes is one of equality in which the person renders to God what is due, not as a servant but as an equal. Aquinas explains, however,

Religion is neither a theological nor an intellectual, but a moral virtue, since it is a part of justice, and observes a mean, not in the passions, but in actions directed to God, by establishing a kind of equality in them. And when I say *equality*, I do not mean absolute equality, because it is not possible to pay God as much as we owe Him, but equality in consideration of man’s ability and God’s acceptance.<sup>122</sup>

Justice produces external actions, as do all of the moral virtues, but, unlike the other moral virtues, justice is concerned with the right order of operations, not right order in interior passions. External operations are governed “not according to how man feels in regard to them, but on the fittingness of the thing itself; and from such fittingness we derive the notion of something due, from which the notion of justice is established, for it seems to pertain to justice that one render what is due to another.”<sup>123</sup> Therefore, the justice due to God, who is superior, is not equal with the justice due to a peer, or an inferior in the same way. Although all of creation comes from and returns to God in the pattern of *exitus-reditus* that pervades all of Aquinas’ moral theology, Aquinas is careful

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<sup>121</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 58, A 10, Resp.

<sup>122</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 81, A 5, ad 3.

<sup>123</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q. 60, A 3, Resp.

to point out that the person and God are not on equal footing in the divine-human relationship. Rather, the person owes God honor and glory in due proportion to God's excellence, but since God is infinitely greater than all of humanity, no honor or glory given to God can ever equal what God truly is owed. Indeed, Aquinas insists,

We pay God honor and reverence, not for His sake (because He is of Himself full of glory to which no creature can add anything), but for our own sake, because by the very fact that we revere and honor God, our mind is subjected to Him; wherein its perfection consists, since a thing is perfected by being subjected to its superior. . . . Now the human mind, in order to be united to God, must be guided by the sensible world. . . . Wherefore in the Divine worship it is necessary to make use of corporeal things, that man's mind may be aroused thereby, as by signs, to the spiritual acts by means of which he is united to God. Therefore, the internal acts of religion take precedence of the others and belong to religion essentially, while its external acts are secondary, and subordinate to the internal acts.<sup>124</sup>

The person must always strive to give proper worship to God through the virtue of religion in acts that give honor and glory to God, who accepts the person's offerings from a position that always transcends that of humanity. What is important in the virtue of religion for Aquinas is that the internal ordering of the person be rightfully directed to God, which translates into external actions that manifest the interior disposition to God.

All kinds of justice require external operations in light of the right ordering of the intellectual appetite of the person, not the passions. Aquinas insists that the virtue of religion is concerned with operations because religion renders what is due to another, namely, God. Aquinas views religion in terms of justice because the person pays honor to God, which is what God is due because of God's excellence. Indeed, the virtue of religion commands all the other virtues because all of the other virtues should be referred to God as the end and therefore should be directed to the honor of God. Aquinas argues,

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<sup>124</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 81, A 7, Resp.

Hence two things are to be considered in religion: first that which it offers to God, viz. worship, and this is by way of matter and object in religion; secondly, that to which something is offered, viz. God, to Whom worship is paid. And yet the acts whereby God is worshiped do not reach out to God Himself as when we believe God we reach out to Him by believing. . . .

Now due worship is paid to God in so far as certain acts whereby God is worshiped, such as the offering of sacrifices and so forth, are done out of reverence for God. Hence it is evident that God is related to religion not as matter or object, but as end: and consequently religion is not a theological virtue whose object is the last end, but a moral virtue which is properly about things referred to the end.<sup>125</sup>

To clarify, Aquinas defines the “object” of a virtue as the “matter about which virtue is concerned,” while “the end of virtue, since it is an operative habit, is operation.”<sup>126</sup> The object of the virtue of religion is a special kind of act, namely, public cult. As such, in Aquinas’ explication of the virtue of religion, religion is not concerned directly with the passions but with giving God what is due, namely, reverence and honor.

The honor of God is the primary concern of the virtue of religion in Aquinas’ estimation, which is manifest in public cult. Although the interior disposition that honors God has primacy over the external acts of religion, Aquinas allows that both the interior as well as the exterior manifestation of religion is necessary in the virtue of religion.

Therefore, Aquinas contends,

Religion has two kinds of acts. Some are its proper and immediate acts which it elicits, and by which man is directed to God alone, for instance, sacrifice, adoration and the like. But it has other acts, which it produces through the medium of the virtues which it commands, directing them to the honor of God, because the virtue which is concerned with the end commands the virtues which are concerned with the means.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 81, A 5, Resp.

<sup>126</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q. 55, A 4, Resp.

<sup>127</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 81, A 1, ad 1.

The end of the virtue of religion is to be united with God, and the means to that end are the virtues correctly ordered such that the actions of the person are directed toward the honor and glory of God. Aquinas further argues that religion is accorded among the moral virtues, because “we offer a thing to God not on account of its usefulness to Him, but for the sake of His glory, and on account of its usefulness to us.”<sup>128</sup> As such, the person must seek the proper means by which to give honor and glory to God, the end of the virtue of religion that directs the other moral virtues, in order to increase within himself the interior habit that seeks unity with God above all else. The acts that honor God, however, do not reach out directly to God, according to Aquinas. Rather, these acts are always mediated within the sensible realm, even in the case of the internal acts. While the person seeks unity with God, the external acts of the person are actually only secondary to the internal acts.

Häring agrees with Aquinas that religion as a virtue necessarily manifests itself in acts of worship and divine cult. Also similar to Aquinas, Häring defines religion, first and foremost as “community or communion with God [arising] from the ineffable condescension of love on God’s part and the response of love which this condescension incites and demands on our part. . . . Through sanctifying grace it becomes a community of supernatural life.”<sup>129</sup> The divine-human relationship is not one in which the person merely is capable of offering sacrifice or adoration alone to God. Rather, the divine-human relationship described by Häring is the relationship in which God and the person are in a continuous dialogue of call and response, in which the person seeks actual

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<sup>128</sup> Aquinas, *ST* II-II, Q.81, A 6, ad 2.

<sup>129</sup> LC 2: 119.

participation in the very life of God in a bond of unity and fellowship, not merely of out of reverence and honor, but also out of genuine and adoring love in devotion to the glory of God. For Häring, however, public cult is not the most important aspect of religion for formation and development in the Christian religious-moral life.

The secondary and more restricted or technical understanding of religion that Häring identifies is the worship of God or divine cult; but Häring underscores that this is not the very essence of religion. Rather, divine cult flows from religion, for religion “is essentially the life in communion with God which demands cult or worship as its direct manifestation. Hence we say that religion as cult or worship is the first mandate of religion, which is life in union with God.”<sup>130</sup> Häring’s emphasis on the importance of communion with God clearly indicates the underlying influence of Aquinas’ virtue theory in Häring’s work. Häring’s ultimate definition, then, is: “Religion in the full and perfect sense of the term is a personal bond of unity with God and a mutual unity in solidarity with all those who are thus likewise united with Him.”<sup>131</sup> The communion with God, throughout Häring’s moral theology, is most perfectly attained through the life of the Christian disciple who seeks perfect assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ. Thus, the most significant aspect of religion for Christian moral formation is the religious-moral life that seeks to attain the perfect imitation of Jesus Christ’s adoration and loving obedience to God the Father, a life that seeks participation in the divine life of the Trinity.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid. Häring additionally identifies religion as “the community of those who have the same faith and cult” as well as the Church designation for those who “live in religion” in terms of the religious life, those who have consecrated themselves to divine cult in service of God’s honor (LC 2:120). Aquinas also acknowledges the religious and the contemplative life in his understanding of the meaning of religion, in *ST* II-II, Q. 81, A 1, ad 5.

<sup>131</sup> LC 2:120.

Although both Häring and Aquinas understand religion in terms of the person's relation to God with the goal being unity with God, the two theologians have rather different explications of the fundamental meaning of religion. Their overall views are not completely divergent on a substantive level, but more in terms of the emphasis that Aquinas and Häring give to the virtue of religion in its relation to justice and charity. Aquinas and Häring both agree that religion, in terms of worship or divine cult, is the direct manifestation of that aspect of religion which gives glory and honor to God. Häring, however, articulates the meaning of the virtue of religion not only in terms of the glory of God rendered by the human person, but also in view of the holiness of the person in the response to God's invitation. Thus, Häring explains the virtue of religion in light of the divine-human relationship:

The cultal sanctification of man, caught up as he is by the loving majesty of the Most High, to which the virtue of religion corresponds as response, demands by its very nature moral holiness in man. The Christian must do far more than merely dedicate his moral efforts to God or subordinate them to the religious. Rightly viewed, the whole moral endeavor, and above all the moral perfection of cultal or religious man, initially flows from his sanctification and is a manifestation of his holiness.<sup>132</sup>

While Aquinas primarily views religion in terms of worship or cult that is directed toward God, Häring defines religion primarily in terms of complete dedication to the glory of God, through both an interior spirit of religion that is essentially and immediately directed toward God and through external acts of worship or cult by which the person gives glory and honor to God specifically in the imitation of Christ. That is to say, the religious act of the person, in Häring's moral theology, is at the same time the moral act of the person toward that same goal.

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<sup>132</sup> LC 2: 128.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Häring consistently refers to Christ as the Word or the Logos in his evaluation of God's invitation to humanity. In his examination of the response of humanity to God's offer, particularly throughout his discussion of the virtues, Häring refers to Jesus Christ primarily using the metaphor of Christ as the High Priest. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Häring's discussion of the virtue of religion. Through, with, and in Christ the High Priest, the Christian person is dedicated to the honor of God. Häring argues that, because Christ is God among us, Christ "demands loving adoration of His holiness. In Christ creation has received its High Priest with whom it could share in the most tremendous adoration and glorification of the triune God. Christians, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, incorporated in the priesthood of Christ, may and must look upon the glory of God as their sovereign honor and their most consecrated vocation."<sup>133</sup> Through Christ the response of the human person to God is made possible and acceptable to God. Christ's zeal for the honor of the Father was the impetus for his whole life, to the point of sacrificing His life on the Cross in sanctifying love. Thus, Häring argues,

The sacred humanity of Jesus must be honored with *latria* or latreutic cult, for through the hypostatic union it is filled with the majesty of God, made evident above all in the resurrection. Christ, risen and glorified Lord of heavenly majesty, whose holy passion is the supreme manifestation of the sovereign love of God, reflects the fullness of the Father's might and glory in the splendor of the resurrection and ascension. And therefore there is owing to Him all our adoring love on the title of his passion and death.<sup>134</sup>

Just as Christ's death and resurrection makes known God's glory, the Christian disciple also participates in the glory of the divine life through Christ's sacrifice on the Cross.

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<sup>133</sup> LC 2: 111.

<sup>134</sup> LC 2: 117.

The primary motivation and concern of the disciple of Christ must be, with and through Christ, the honor and glory of God. Thus, Häring argues that dedication to the honor and glory of God must be the vocation of all Christians. Because we participate in the divine life in, with, and through Jesus Christ, the “first and highest end and purpose of creation and redemption is the eternal glory of God.”<sup>135</sup> Therefore, the duty of the Christian is to offer God adoring love in the imitation of Christ, particularly in the virtue of religion, which brings together the religious and the moral in the Christian life of virtue.

For Häring, the virtue of religion is not concerned only with offering glory and honor to God, but also service to God and to the neighbor. Häring thus argues that the virtue of religion is both directed to God in acts of worship, but also in acts of service that flow from participation in the divine life in unity with God, ultimately from the loving and sacrificial love of the disciple for God. The orientation of the Christian life toward God is evident throughout Häring’s discussion of the virtue of religion. He further insists, however, that service to others is an essential component of the Christian religious-moral life in the virtue of religion. The importance of the virtue of religion is revealed aptly in Häring’s theology of the Cross, the revelation of God’s love for humanity and humanity’s response in adoring and sacrificial love, and likewise a call to service in the imitation of Christ. Thus, Häring states,

The Sacrifice on the Cross endows us with unbounded love for God the Father and our neighbor. As gift of God’s love for us it demands in return our love for God and man, even for sinners. In His Sacrifice on the Cross Christ manifests the new law of love which is taken up entirely with the loving majesty of God and at the same time is mankind’s response to the heavenly Father. Here the “new law” of unbounded love is both the sundering of the law of mere human justice bounded by the potentialities and limitations of human fulfillment and the transcendent fulfillment of divine justice with infinite mercy. Here is the new law

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<sup>135</sup> LC 2: 111.

in whose fulfillment love and obedience mingle. The Sacrifice of the Cross is the culmination of the high-priestly life of Christ offered as Victim of love and obedience unto the honor and glory of the Father and the salvation of all the brethren.<sup>136</sup>

The Cross is, in many ways, the central symbol for Häring, because the Cross is the perfect embodiment of God's call and humanity's response, in the person of Jesus Christ, in sacrificial and obedient and adoring love, in service to God and to others. The Cross of Christ is also the perfect example of how the virtue of religion excels above the other virtues, for what is revealed on the Cross is the supreme act of love, devotion to the ultimate glory of God, and dedication to the glory of God for humanity. The Cross is the perfect communion of God and humanity in sanctifying love.

For Häring, the response of the Christian disciple to God's invitation is the specifically moral-religious response dedicated to the glory of God. Aquinas insists that the worship offered to God is acceptable to God in proportion to each individual person's capacities because the virtue of religion is considered among the moral virtues. Häring agrees that this is an accurate assessment of the divine-human relationship in that God accepts the human response to the offer of grace through acts of worship and divine cult. Häring additionally argues, however, that all moral acts – not merely acts of religion specifically in terms of worship – are capable of responding to God with honor and glory, for all acts that are responses to God are religious-moral responses that accept God's offer of grace with the response of adoring and grateful love. Häring asserts that the virtue of religion must be "distinguished from the other moral virtues by a closer and firmer bond of orientation toward God. But we should not forget that our moral theology

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<sup>136</sup> LC 2: 303.

treats all the moral virtues as supernatural and animated by the virtue of charity.”<sup>137</sup>

Häring treats the moral virtues, at least in the Christian, as divinely bestowed. For Häring, the virtue of religion is accorded the preeminent position among the moral virtues, but the virtue of religion also serves as a bridge between the moral virtues and the theological virtues. Although he never explicitly refers to the virtue of religion as a theological virtue, Häring consistently discusses the virtue of religion in close association with his examination of the theological virtues, and particularly the virtue of love.

For Aquinas, the virtue of love is immediately and essentially directed to God, while the virtue of justice concerns operations that are mediated through the sensible world. Thus, Aquinas states, “It belongs immediately to charity that man should give himself to God, adhering to him in a union of the spirit; but it belongs immediately to religion, and, through the medium of religion, to charity which is the principle of religion, that man should give himself to God for certain works of Divine worship.”<sup>138</sup> As a virtue of justice, religion is concerned with works that manifest honor and reverence to God, according to Aquinas. Häring allows that the works that give honor to God are secondary to the actual offering of one’s very self to God in a spirit of devotion as well as in works.

Häring identifies the content of the virtue of religion primarily in the three key concepts of the Sanctity, the Name, and the Glory of God. Although his clear focus is on the Sanctity and the Glory of God, Häring insists that all three concepts must be viewed together as a whole. The Glory of God is always placed “in the light of the holiness of God which forces man to his knees and at the same time beatifies him. And we never fail

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<sup>137</sup> LC 2: 125.

<sup>138</sup> Aquinas, *ST* II-II, Q. 82, A 2, ad 1.

to view it likewise in the light of the Name of God revealed to us with the most intimate and personal of revelations.”<sup>139</sup> Häring argues that the Sanctity, the Name, and the Glory of God are revealed to humanity most perfectly in Jesus Christ. God is glorified in Christ through the crucifixion, but God also glorifies God’s-self by communicating the eternal glory of God through Christ’s human manifestation. Indeed, Häring insists that all external manifestation of the sovereignty of God “reflects the invisible glory of the Trinity.”<sup>140</sup> Fundamental to his understanding of religion, then, is the divine-human relationship in which God reveals God’s very self to humanity, and likewise, the person responds by offering her integral self to God, through her life lived in the assimilation of Jesus Christ, as actual participation in the divine-life lived with, in, and through Christ.

Aquinas and Häring both assert that religion is a special virtue that directs the person to God as the greatest good, in a manner unlike the other virtues. Aquinas claims, “religion approaches nearer to God than the other moral virtues, in so far as its actions are directly and immediately ordered to the honor of God. Hence religion excels among the virtues.”<sup>141</sup> Religion as a virtue directs the other moral virtues toward God; the virtue of religion produces acts that are directed to God, but does not actually reach to God as the end, which is the situation with the theological virtues. Thus, Aquinas states,

The power or virtue whose action deals with an end, moves by its command the power or virtue whose action deals with matters directed to that end. Now the theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity have an act in reference to God as their proper object: wherefore, by their command, they cause the act of religion, which performs certain deeds directed to God.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> LC 2: 111.

<sup>140</sup> LC 2: 114.

<sup>141</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 81, A 6, Resp.

<sup>142</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 81, A 5, ad 1.

Aquinas views the virtue of religion in terms of the moral virtues that produce acts in accordance with the end, the honor due to God. The virtue of religion directs the other moral virtues such that, in the religious act, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance work together to give honor to God. Prudence rightly disposes the person in regards to God as the end; justice renders God what is due to God through external actions, according to the abilities of the person as creature; fortitude orders the passions to be directed toward the proper end, and especially gives appropriate direction to fear and the more aggressive passions (e.g., anger); while temperance moderates the passions such that, in conjunction with one another, they carry out the commands of reason in orderly interior movements toward giving appropriate honor to God. Aquinas contends that the virtue of religion is chief among the moral virtues because the moral virtues are ordered to God as their end, not their object.

Indeed, Häring also contends that the virtue of religion is chief among the virtues. He insists, however, that not only in the act of religion, but in all aspects of the person's life as a whole, the person's moral life must be driven by the virtue of religion. Häring states, "All that belongs to the virtue directly and immediately must be accorded the position of primacy in the Christian life, so that the totality of man's moral endeavor is truly ordered to the glory of God. This means that the virtue must be earnestly and suitably cultivated, and that the explicit acts of worship be given due prominence."<sup>143</sup> The meaning that Häring gives to the virtue of religion is complex, in that it includes the interior as well as the exterior manifestations of the virtue, as the bridge between the moral and the theological virtues. Thus, Häring contends, "Without charity and the

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<sup>143</sup> LC 2: 128-129.

interior spirit and disposition flowing essentially from it there can indeed be external and legal performance of the acts of worship, but not the virtue of religion with the fully worthy and fruitful acts of cult.”<sup>144</sup> Because the person lives in the order of creation and seeks the order of redemption in eternal salvation, or eternal bliss, with God, all of the virtues contribute to the moral life of the Christian disciple through external, visible acts (products of the moral virtues) driven by an interior spirit devoted to participation in the divine life (associated with the theological virtues). Häring insists that “the Christian must esteem the acts of religion properly so-called above all the acts of the other moral virtues, in order that the firmness and vigor of his inner spirit of worship may effectively direct all else to the glory of God.”<sup>145</sup> Thus, Häring continues,

To be truly fruitful and pleasing to the infinite majesty and holiness of God, our external acts of religion must be made possible, on the one hand, through the objective consecration to God (by the sacramental mark of baptism, confirmation, holy orders, and the other consecrations and blessings of God and the Church). And, on the other hand, they must be manifestations of faith, hope, and love flowing from a true interior spirit of loving and reverential dedication.<sup>146</sup>

The external actions of the person must reflect the inner spirit of devotion to God, not only in terms of giving honor to God, but in terms of sharing in the life of God. That is to say, not merely acts directed toward God are important in the virtue of religion; true love, faith, and hope must drive the person in the life utterly committed to the moral life lived precisely as the moral-religious response to God’s invitation to grace. The virtue of religion, in Häring’s moral theology, should be considered in relationship with the theological virtues primarily because it is immediately and essentially directed to God,

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<sup>144</sup> LC 2: 121.

<sup>145</sup> LC 2: 126-127.

<sup>146</sup> LC 2: 121.

not just in acts of worship but also in a whole life devoted to the sanctity and glory of God.

Häring emphasizes, “Every virtue of every Christian must bear the sacred stamp and impress of worship.”<sup>147</sup> In Häring’s estimation, the virtue of religion produces acts that are both immediately directed to God (as with acts flowing from the theological virtues) and mediated through the order of creation (as with acts flowing from the moral virtues). The goal, or end, of the virtue of religion is not only to give honor and glory to God, but actual participation in the divine life through a life completely dedicated to the divine glory. Häring concedes to Aquinas that, when religion is understood primarily in terms of worship or divine cult, “this virtue does not directly and immediately give the value-response to the hidden holiness of God as do the theological virtues. In its content there must be a task for man in space and time, in the body and in the community, a task which belongs to it necessarily and immediately. Such is the nature of the virtue of religion by contrast with the strictly theological virtues.”<sup>148</sup> Häring is careful to emphasize, however, that the placement of religion among the moral virtues is proper primarily in terms of religion as acts of worship, not as direct participation in or communion with God in the distinctively religious-moral life.

Häring agrees with Aquinas’ placement of religion among the moral virtues in the sense that the object of religion is the holiness of God revealed in the created order rather than the hidden holiness of God in the final beatitude in the eternal life. Häring further argues, however, that religion is practiced in the temporal realm, although the purpose

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<sup>147</sup> LC 2: 128.

<sup>148</sup> LC 2: 122.

and end of the virtue of religion is the manifestation of the divine life, of glory and honor. Therefore the virtue of religion cannot be considered as purely moral due to the overriding theological goal of religion, the divine glory. Both Aquinas and Häring argue that religion as a virtue must express itself in exterior acts, but Häring further insists that religion is directed immediately to God, not only in the created order, as with the moral virtues. Thus, Häring claims,

the virtue of religion, far more than any of the other moral virtues, essentially and immediately directs our acts to God. This virtue flows totally and utterly from inner submission and dedication to the glory of God. But surely the honor and glory of God lays claim to far more than mere inner response to value in holy awe and love. As manifestation of the majesty of God, by its very nature it also claims the recognition of worship carried out in acts of religion, acts which manifest themselves exteriorly and enter into time and space”<sup>149</sup>

Although Häring understands the virtue of religion primarily in terms of unity with God, he also acknowledges, with Aquinas, that the external manifestation of that communion with God must be made visible in the temporal realm. As with the person who is both finite and infinite – a being composed of body, soul, and spirit – so, too, is the virtue of religion tied to both the temporal and the eternal realms in that the inner spirit utterly dedicated to God must express itself in exterior actions that give glory to God through acts of divine cult in the religious-moral life.

According to Häring, however, the acts that reveal themselves in the temporal realm are not limited to the moral virtues alone. Indeed, all the virtues, even the theological virtues, exist at least in part in the spatio-temporal world. Häring explains,

Faith consents to the visible manifestation of God in the flesh, continued in the structure of the Church and the ‘sacraments of faith.’ Christian hope turns to the ‘invisible realities,’ but still because of the visible pledge in the mysteries of the Incarnation. And divine love for us pilgrims on this earthly sojourn is anchored in

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<sup>149</sup> LC 2: 123.

the visible covenant of love between Christ and the Church. Nor can it in principle be torn from this sacred basis.<sup>150</sup>

Häring clearly sees the theological virtues as the foundation for the virtue of religion, for they join with religion in the temporal realm in such a way that religion directs the theological virtues in their dedication to the glory of God. As such, Häring discusses the virtue of religion along with the theological virtues as well as the moral virtues because religion as a virtue, by its very essence as unity with God, immediately directs our acts to God through a disposition that seeks the divine glory above all else. Furthermore, the acts of divine cult belong to religion essentially and directly as the life of worship makes visible the person's participation in the divine life through the religious-moral response to God's offer of grace. For Häring, the virtue of religion is not primarily about giving God what is due, but loving God according to the measure that the person is dedicated to the glory of God in gratitude.

For Aquinas, the acts of religion are the acts of justice because the person gives God what is due in order to give honor to God in reverence for God's excellence and majesty. Aquinas contends that the person recognizes himself as a subject in the act of religion, and as a subject the person gives to God what is due to an infinitely superior being. In this respect, the act of religion has a twofold dimension because, Aquinas states,

By the one same act man both serves and worships God, for worship regards the excellence of God, to Whom reverence is due; while service regards the subjection of man who, by his condition, is under an obligation of showing reverence to God. To these two belong all acts ascribed to religion, because, by them all, man bears witness to the Divine excellence and to his own subjection to God, either by offering something to God, or by assuming something Divine.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> LC 2: 122.

<sup>151</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 81, A 3, ad 2.

In the one act directed by the virtue of religion, the person recognizes the glory of God and, at the same time, his own status as a creature of God who owes God reverence and gratitude. The worship of God is also the act of the servant of God offering honor and glory that is made acceptable only by God. The act of religion directs the reason and the will of the person, for in the act of religion is revealed God's transcendence and the finitude of the human person, and thus the need to offer reverent praise and honor to God who condescends to accept the offering.

Häring also admits that the virtue of religion reveals the magnificence of God and the creaturely status of the person. Häring further contends, however, that the "primacy of the virtue of cult (religion) over all the moral virtues corresponds to the cultal vocation of man in the universe in which he is supreme, manifesting both his significance as creature and his dignity as a child of God."<sup>152</sup> That is to say, while the virtue of religion manifests the status of the created nature of the person, it further reveals the fact that the person is a co-creator with God in the history of salvation. The true Christian disciple offers himself to God and to others in the spirit of gratitude and service, as the devoted servant of God. The person is offered participation in the divine life due to no merit of his own, but out of God's acceptance of the person's response of humble adoration to God's offer of grace. As such, Häring insists that religion offered in the divine cult is directed immediately and essentially to God who freely reveals the divine life to humanity, and who freely offers participation in this triune life. The response of the person who is utterly devoted to the divine glory responds to this offer in sacrificial and

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<sup>152</sup> LC 2: 127.

adoring love dedicated to the honor and glory of God. Thus, Häring emphasizes love as the primary virtue under which the virtue of religion must be understood.

Häring generally draws from Aquinas' moral theory throughout his own work.

The fundamental difference between Aquinas' and Häring's views of the virtue of religion primarily is a difference of emphasis more than a substantive difference.

Aquinas examines religion fundamentally in terms of justice, but he does not deny that the virtue of religion has a close affiliation with the virtue of charity. Likewise, Häring evaluates the virtue of religion as a bridge between the moral and theological virtues, with a particular focus on the association of religion with aspects of the virtue of charity.

Häring does not deny, however, that the virtue of religion is chief among the moral virtues, and also that religion contains within it concern for, and elements of, justice as well as charity. Like Aquinas, Häring views the virtues as distinct, but also as working together. Thus, Häring views the relationship between charity and justice as integral to the authentic moral life. In his description of the relationship of love and justice for the specifically religious-moral life of the Christian disciple, Häring states at length,

The believer, seized by God's saving justice, recognizes that the new justice includes, above all, love for one's fellowmen, a love according to the measure of God's grace bestowed on each. This measure of the divine gift is hidden from the public eye and can therefore not be enforced by law or by concepts of human justice. Yet for the sake of peace among humans, the minimum requirements of justice must somehow be defined and sometimes be enforced. Redeemed love does not cling to the lowest limit; it is always on the road towards greater love in the image and likeness of God's saving justice.

Life according to God's saving justice is in a special way reflected in social justice that goes far beyond commutative justice and group interests. It is a social life that accords with the truth that God has created us as a social unity, as if we were his family. This solidarity must be constantly increased until the coming of the Lord, when it will be brought to perfection. Then, saved by grace, man will offer flawless glory to God as a family beloved of God and of Christ, their brother.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> FFC 2: 470.

For Häring and Aquinas, the Christian must enact not merely human renderings of charity and justice for one another in the world. Rather, the Christian embraces and embodies for others the abundant love and saving justice of God through a life devoted to offering glory and honor to God. Aquinas views this instantiation of the virtue of religion primarily in terms of public cult, while Häring understands public cult as one aspect, but not the only aspect, of the outpouring of the virtue of religion. For Häring, the entire religious-moral life of the Christian is devoted to giving glory to God, not only in public cult, but in every action done in accordance with the assimilation of the Christian's life to the person of Jesus Christ. The Christian moral life is formed in the imitation of Jesus Christ, and is therefore the distinctively religious-moral life specific to the Christian community. While the love and justice of the Christian may appear similar to that of the non-Christian, Christian love and justice is that which strives for the perfection of God's own love and saving justice manifest most perfectly in the person of Jesus Christ.

The difference in emphasis between love and justice in Aquinas' and Häring's theories of religion demonstrates their visions of the divine-human relationship. For Aquinas, the person is always living in the state of graced-nature, but the person primarily recognizes her inferior nature as a subject of God. For Häring, fellowship with God is not relegated solely to the final beatitude with God in eternal salvation, but begins in the present in the person who understands herself as the creature who is also co-creator, as the one who is loved by God and who is made capable of responding to God with love. Aquinas would agree with Häring's assessment, for Aquinas also concludes that grace makes us friends with God and thus we begin our eternal beatitude with God even in the temporal realm. For both Aquinas and Häring, grace operates through

charity. Häring more explicitly and clearly identifies the significance of the virtue of charity in relation to the virtue of religion than Aquinas allows, but the difference primarily is a difference in emphasis on the role of charity for the virtue of religion.

The virtue of religion is of utmost significance for Häring's Christocentric moral theology. Because he presents the virtue of religion in light of the virtue of love, one gains clearer insight into what Häring means by defining religion as "a community of supernatural life" and the bond "uniting us with God through the God-formed life of grace and the personal encounter with God in the acts of the theological virtues."<sup>154</sup> According to Häring, the virtue of religion is the manifestation of the divine-human relationship in the call of God and the response of humanity in dedication to the glory of God through each and every act of virtue.

The virtues are important for the Christian person whose motivation and zeal throughout the entirety of her life is dedication to the divine glory. For Häring, the external actions as well as the interior spirit of adoring and grateful love to God are made possible, and acceptable, before God through Jesus Christ; and the assimilation to the life of Christ is made manifest most fully in the development of the virtue of religion, according to Häring. Häring states unequivocally that the virtue of religion "can very correctly be considered a component part of the divine virtues and as their primary manifestation."<sup>155</sup> The primary purpose of the theological virtues is to make possible the dialogue between God and humanity, for the theological virtues endow the person, through divine grace, for a life oriented toward God and toward full participation in the

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<sup>154</sup> LC 2: 119.

<sup>155</sup> LC 2: 5.

divine life, which will be completed and perfected only in eternal salvation. As such, Häring contends, “the theological virtues must be looked upon as the foundation and source of the virtue of religion.”<sup>156</sup>

Although religion is categorized among the moral virtues, the virtue of religion is founded on the theological virtues in Häring’s theology, but particularly the virtue of love. Häring explains that love begins with the sentiment of good upon the recognition of the value of another impelling the person to act toward the other. As such, “Once man realizes that only God can make him happy, that he is ordered entirely and utterly to God, and accordingly begins to sacrifice everything which proves an obstacle to his effort to seek his happiness in God, then he already has true love even though at direct first blush it is no more than the movement of love of desire.”<sup>157</sup> The person who loves with the divine virtue of love seeks fellowship due to the love of the value of another for his own sake, regardless of the value for self. The supernatural love of charity flows from God who condescends and gives God’s self to us in the person of Jesus Christ. In this sense, the virtue of love emphasizes the importance of dialogue, for “God freely gives us a love which can become our own love for Him through His gracious bounty. This love *from* Him, which becomes a love *for* Him, is an utterly undeserved participation in His own proper eternal love.”<sup>158</sup> The person does nothing to merit God’s love and grace, but God gives out of love for creation. Just as Christ abides in the love of the Father, so too must we abide in the love of Christ. The virtue of charity is a participation in the intimate life

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<sup>156</sup> LC 2: 120.

<sup>157</sup> LC 2: 87.

<sup>158</sup> LC 2: 88.

of the triune God, for we give ourselves completely to God “in the love of the Holy Spirit who is infused into our hearts with the gift of grace” that the Father and Son give us in the Holy Spirit.<sup>159</sup>

While Aquinas builds his theory of the virtue of religion in terms of justice, in which the person renders to God what God is due, Häring founds his theory of religion on the concept that the entire moral life of the Christian must be founded on the specifically religious-moral response to God in the dialogical divine-human relationship, with love as the primary vehicle for the discussion. Häring insists that God does not need the response of love by human beings. Rather, human persons love God because “true love of friendship by its very nature demands the response of love.”<sup>160</sup> Part of the ineffable mystery of the divine-human relationship is that God is happy in God’s-self, but is concerned enough with our love that we receive the privilege to turn to God in an intimate and affectionate relationship of love, in abiding personal friendship, made possible by God’s initiative. Our love for God, in turn, stems from our gratitude for God’s infinite goodness. Häring is careful to clarify that the virtue of love that “looks first to the goodness of God bestowing on men the blessings which we have experienced”<sup>161</sup> is different than “love” that looks to our own well-being, which is the virtue of hope. The primary way to God is through the virtue of the love of God, most perfectly embraced by and responded to through the imitation of Christ.

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<sup>159</sup> LC 2: 89.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> LC 2: 90.

Throughout his examination of the virtues, Häring insists that the theological virtues open up the dialogue between God and humanity. Häring does not relegate the moral virtues to an irrelevant role in the life of the Christian, but he does insist that they must be directed to God through the virtue of religion such that the theological virtues animate the moral virtues and the whole Christian religious-moral life.

Häring explicitly identifies the fundamental driving force of the Christian life as not only unity with God, but communion with God precisely with, in, and through Jesus Christ. God initiates the dialogue and the person responds through the life of virtue, most especially in the virtue of religion, in assimilation to the life of Jesus Christ. As such, the external acts are important in the imitation of Christ, but, Häring argues, the adoption of a basic attitude and disposition in the spirit of Christ is essential for authentic discipleship in the assimilation to the life of Christ. Häring consistently argues that this interior spirit is precisely the spirit of sacrificial and loving adoration, specifically in the imitation of Jesus Christ.

God reveals the divine life through external works, most perfectly in the person of Christ, through whom we experience God dwelling in our midst. The Christian vocation is assimilation to Christ, including the imitation of Christ the High Priest. In authentic imitation of Jesus Christ, then, Häring argues,

the Christian has the mission first of all to sanctify himself in the service of cult and for the service of cult. In other words, through a personal acceptance of his objective sacral holiness he must consecrate (through devotion or submission to God) himself and all his activity to the service of God. Moreover, he receives the mission of exercising in the created world a priestly service.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> LC 2: 127.

Throughout his explication of the virtue of religion, Häring provides the most complete explanation of what the life in the imitation of Christ entails. Häring's evaluation of the virtue of religion demonstrates that the Christian disciple must perfectly embody the very spirit of Jesus Christ in one's own life through a renewed attitude and disposition for the good, but specifically the good that is the desire to give glory and adoration to God throughout the entirety of one's life in the assimilation to the priestly consecration of Christ the High Priest. Thus Häring claims,

But since all things are to be consecrated to God in this fulfillment of the priestly vocation, not only formal acts of cult as such, but all human acts are subject to the law of sacral ethos. The total morality of man must bear the stamp of consecration, must "be made holy." The injunction, "As the One who called you is holy, be you also holy in all your behavior; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Pt 1:15f.; cf Lv 11.44; 19:2; 20:7), does not demand merely cultal holiness but also moral perfection imbued with the spirit of cult. Thus moral perfection becomes religious morality or holiness, that is, a moral rectitude sustained by the love of God and consecrated to the divine glory.<sup>163</sup>

More than just a copying of actions or embracing ideals, the Christian moral life lived in assimilation to the life of Christ is an adoption of a fundamentally new attitude, a new inner spirit converted to the life of grace in Christ. In accordance with his evaluation of the virtue of religion, then, Häring emphasizes that the moral life of the Christian disciple is the life of priestly consecration in adoring and sacrificial love in service to God and to others.

While Häring argues that the Christian life of virtue involves the interior life in which the person's attitude is utterly transformed into the loving, obedient, sacrificial disposition of Jesus Christ, he further argues that the external manifestation of that attitude is essential in the religious-moral response to God's summons through the life of

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<sup>163</sup> LC 2: 127-128.

service to God and to neighbor. The person who responds to God in the life of virtue, particularly through the virtue of religion, participates in the very life of the Trinity.

Häring claims that dedication to the glory of God necessitates a life of service, in authentic imitation of Christ. Thus, Häring states,

The visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon Christ at the beginning of His public life was a manifest expression of His exalted consecration, of His sanctification as High Priest and servant of God. Similarly for us the Holy Spirit sent by Christ upon us is the Spirit of sanctification, who consecrates us to holy service, to life and death in union with Christ in the sacred mysteries. Only through sanctification in the Holy Spirit are we made an acceptable offering to God (cf. Rom 15:16).<sup>164</sup>

Religion is inherently social, by its very nature. Religion is directed toward another, namely, God, just as love moves beyond the self in an outward movement toward the other. As public cult, religion also embraces other people. While the Christian's vocation is a sharing in the priestly consecration of Christ, Häring emphasizes that the priestly life is the life of service in love, in the assimilation to the life of Christ. As such, Häring is careful to point out that love cannot survive in a moral being capable of moral action without the works of love. This is precisely why religion matters so much to Häring. Thus, Häring states, "Above all, our love of God bears our fellow man with us on our way to God, because this divine love empowers us to love him. We can and must love our neighbor as God loves him. In a certain sense we can and must love him with God's own love, and hence with a love that impels him in turn to love God."<sup>165</sup> Such a contention is further evidence of Häring's divergence from the works of Rahner and Fuchs. Christian love is distinct not only in motivation, but from its very source and

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<sup>164</sup> LC 2: 142.

<sup>165</sup> LC 2: 90.

principle. Although the salvation of one's own soul, one's supernatural end, is the ultimate concern for the Christian moral life, the salvation of the soul of all other persons is an inherent concern for the Christian disciple who wants all persons to experience God's love and to love God in return. The Christian disciple is called to the imitation of Christ not only for her own salvation, but also as an example or model for the neighbor, to be Christ for others. Indeed, Häring argues, the love of the Christian is the love of Christ, the love of God among us. The sacrificial love of the Christian is authentic union with Christ.

In contrast with Rahner's position, Häring uses the virtue of religion to further his point that morality is not separate from religion. The response of adoring love is both the moral and the religious response, as the moral-religious response of the person whose whole life is dedicated to the glory of God. Hence, Häring argues,

true morality may be said to accept all earthly tasks only in their relation to God. If the *religious* in the narrow sense of the term is *response* directed immediately to God, then the *moral* is *response-ability* as to the spatial-temporal before God and toward God. It is a call for action in the world. It is not merely a task commanded by God but a task which must be ordered entirely to the glory of God.<sup>166</sup>

Häring thus demonstrates that not just the acts of divine cult or worship are directed to God, but rather all the moral virtues have God as their goal. In this respect, in fact, Häring understands his moral theology as perfectly in keeping with that of Aquinas. Häring defends Aquinas against contentions that the scholastic's virtue theory is ultimately mere moralism devoted solely to the created order. Rather, Häring insists, Aquinas "gives to the whole moral realm the clearest and sharpest religious orientation.

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<sup>166</sup> LC 2: 123.

Otherwise it would be unthinkable to insert into the realm of moral virtue the obligations and duties which directly and immediately are concerned with divine cult.”<sup>167</sup>

This statement, however, raises the most important aspect of Häring’s moral theology that is distinctive of his Christocentric ethic: the religious and the moral life of the person is not a moral obligation, but the response to God’s invitation in the life of the individual and in the life of the community. Therefore, the “dynamism of religion, animating and orienting not merely the elicited cultal acts properly so-called, but also the whole moral activity of the Christian, directs the entire life of man to the goal of the divine honor and glory. The end and purpose is the majesty and greater glory of God.”<sup>168</sup> For Häring, then, the moral life is not merely the life lived out in either the moral life of the person in her everyday experiences or the religious life of the person revealed in worship, prayer, or sacrifice. Much more than that, the moral life of the disciple of Christ is the religious-moral life integrally ordered to God.

Because Häring’s presentation of the virtue of religion is so intimately connected to his examination of the virtue of charity, Häring shows that the relationship to which God calls the person is not a relationship based on a superior in relation to an inferior, but a true and authentic fellowship in which the person is invited to participate in the very life of God through the response of love in the imitation of Jesus Christ. The virtue of religion is concerned with the response of love, through loving adoration and loving obedience. Through the virtue of religion the person responds with the love of Christ, in

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<sup>167</sup> LC 2: 125.

<sup>168</sup> LC 2: 126.

the capacity that Christ has enabled us to love God, through His sacrificial and obedient death on the Cross in loving submission to the will of the Father.

By emphasizing the virtue of religion as a significant aspect of the distinctively Christian life, then, Häring departs significantly from traditional moral theology after the time of Aquinas. For this reason in particular, I believe that Häring's examination of the virtues is important for contemporary moral theology. Prior to his work, the category of the virtue of religion was considered by most theologians to be relatively minor as compared to the other virtues. In fact, worship was seen as flowing from the other virtues only as the secondary effects of the primary cause. For Häring, however, religion is integrally related to the whole of Christian life, such that the virtue of religion is the center of the moral life. Religion and morality are response to God's invitation and summons. Therefore, Häring's emphasis on the virtue of religion suggests that moral theology must account for how to integrate the moral and the religious life as response to God's invitation to grace, particularly in the life of worship as both moral and religious response to God.

In all aspects of Häring's work, Jesus Christ stands at the heart of all moral theology. What distinguishes Häring's virtue theory from most of his predecessors' is that the imitation of Christ is the driving force behind the cultivation of the virtues in the Christian moral life. The person who lives in assimilation to the life of Christ also imitates Christ the High Priest, who gives glory and honor to God in all aspects of His life. Therefore, Häring argues, the virtue of religion is the eminent virtue in an authentic Christocentric moral theology.

#### IV. The Sacramental Life of the Church in the Imitation of Jesus Christ

For Häring, the sacramental life of the Christian is not completely separate and distinct from the moral life of the Christian person, because moral theology necessarily focuses on the religious-ethic of the Christian person and the Christian community.

Ethics cannot be fully separated from the sacramental life of the adult Christian.

According to Häring, the Christian has two possible responses to God. The Christian responds to God's self-communication 1) in the life of worship and prayer, broadly construed as the religious or sacramental life, and 2) through moral acts, with both their interior and exterior components. For Häring, religion (the life of prayer and worship, particularly in the sacraments) and morality are mutually related. The Christian religious-ethical life is lived in imitation of Christ, even when moral acts are not specifically or explicitly associated directly with the life of prayer and worship. The imitation of Christ necessarily involves moral acts in the world for the kingdom of God. The moral life, therefore, is religious response to God's initiative in the person of Jesus Christ, in the offer of grace and fellowship. This response takes place in the sacramental-moral life of the Christian disciple.

The primary concern of this project is the moral life of the Christian in terms of moral acts in response to God's summons in the figure of Jesus Christ. Given Häring's assessment that the entire Christian life must be dedicated to the glory of God specifically in light of one's moral-religious response to God in the imitation of Christ, however, we cannot neglect at least a brief discussion of the role of the sacraments and the specific acts of worship in the moral life of the Christian. The focus of this project is the moral life of the Christian, and while this necessarily includes a consideration of the

sacraments, our primary concern is how the sacraments extend beyond the life of the Church and into the world at large as human persons living within human community.<sup>169</sup>

The sacraments obviously are of immense interest to Häring. Each section of both *The Law of Christ* and *Free and Faithful in Christ* begins and ends with a discussion of Jesus Christ and the sacraments. In Häring's moral theology, the figure of Jesus Christ clearly has the place of greatest prominence for the Christian moral life, and the sacraments are always viewed in light of the divine-human relationship as revealed in Jesus Christ. The fundamental concern for the sacraments in Häring's theology, for our purposes at least, is the relation of the sacraments to the figure of Jesus Christ.

Häring views the person in her entirety, as body and soul, as well as an individual who also is a member of the community. In Häring's theology, the Church is the primary community in which the Christian is formed in the life of virtue, and in the Church community the Christian is assured devotion to the glory of God in the following of Christ. Therefore, Häring states,

Complete dedication to the good and the sound development of the whole man which follows from it is assured through the following of Christ. Christ stands before us as perfect man, fully spiritual and devoted to the Father, entirely humane and open to His brethren, to all the joys and sorrows of the world, absorbed in the majesty of the Father and filled with wonder over the lilies of the field. He also calls to us with all our powers. He appeals to all that is in man: intellect and will, heart and spirit. Christ who lives on in history, Christ who is the Church mystically does the same. She is visible and at the same time invisible, supra-terrestrial and fixed in space and time. To this corresponds the ecclesial piety in sacraments and sacramentals and in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. There the whole man and the whole of creation are invited to the chorus of divine praise.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Indeed, Kathleen Cahalan has already provided a very proficient exposition of Häring's sacramental-moral theology in her *Formed in the Image of Christ*, so any examination of Häring's understanding of the role of the sacraments in the moral life of the Christian would be a supplement to her work.

<sup>170</sup> LC 1: 72.

Because humanity is created in the Word of God and renewed in Christ, all human beings bear within us the law of Christ that is revealed naturally in creation and supernaturally in Christ's word and example which continues through the teaching of the Church. The aim of Christian morality is the perfection of the whole person, body and soul totality, in the imitation of Christ. Conformity with Christ who is the Ideal and Model of the whole person is the goal of the authentic Christian moral-religious response to God. According to Häring, there is "no surer way to the full perfection of the whole man than the perfect following of Christ in the communal life of the Church"<sup>171</sup> because the Church is Christ who lives on in history, appealing to human intellect, will, heart and spirit. Jesus Christ is the responder *par excellence* to the divine initiative, and the transformation of the life of the Christian in imitation of Christ takes place in and through the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ that, through the sacramental life, instantiates the perfect following of Christ in the communal life of its members.

Häring refers to Christ as the High Priest as frequently as he refers to the Logos, God's Word made flesh. Likewise, throughout his Christocentric moral theology, Häring emphasizes the priestly vocation of the Christian person. In accordance with the vocation of the Christian in devotion to the glory of God, Häring insists that the imitation of Christ includes imitation of His priestly consecration. Häring argues that the purpose of creation is to give glory to God, which is the essentially priestly aspect of human nature. As Häring suggests throughout his moral theology, worship and the moral life are not utterly separate, for all people are called to perform priestly duties just as Christ, our High Priest. Therefore, Häring claims, "The sacramental consecration of the whole man,

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

including also his body, implies an essential relation to the high-priestly passion of Christ and to His glory in the resurrection, ascension, and the parousia. This relation we find expressed in the sacred signs and symbols of the liturgical cult.”<sup>172</sup> The Christian participates in the life of the triune God through imitation of Christ’s obedience, freedom, love, and sacrifice. In the life of worship, particularly in the sacraments, the faithful are anointed and assimilated to the life of Christ. Ultimately, the sacramental life and the moral life are the same for Häring. “Christ is the supreme sacrament: through Him and in Him we have the most evident and perceptible sign and pledge of the divine favor; in Him mankind is consecrated and admitted to the filial cult in adoration and love and is assured of the acceptance of its worship. The seven sacraments unite us with Christ the supreme sacrament and the High Priest.”<sup>173</sup> Through the imitation of Christ, the priestly vocation of the Christian is fulfilled.

The central act of the Christian life is imitation of Christ in the religious-moral response to God’s invitation to grace. The response to God is not only external, but is also inner assimilation into the life of Christ. This assimilation in particular takes place through the sacraments such that all inner dispositions are in conformity to Christ as well as manifest in the celebration of the sacraments in the community of the Church.

Participation in the sacraments is, in Häring’s theology, a participation in the divine life of the Trinity. He explains,

The holy sacraments, particularly those which anoint us with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of glory, incorporate us in the high-priestly consecration of Christ and His ineffable mission and set us apart absolutely for the unfathomably exalted cult of God in Christ. (We say that man is deputed interiorly, marked by the sacramental

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<sup>172</sup> LC 2: 130.

<sup>173</sup> LC 1: 93.

character indelibly, not merely chosen or designated externally.) The Christian is 'holy unto the Lord,' he is singled out from the ranks of the profane. He is separated from the strangers to God, from those who have not been immediately and directly struck by the rays of the divine majesty and holiness.<sup>174</sup>

The social nature of religion and the social nature of the person are one, to the extent that the sacraments form a bond within the community of the Church that gives honor to God. Both the strengths and the problems with Häring's Christocentric moral theology are expressed in his contention that, while the Christian is a part of the universal human community, at the same time he is set apart from that universal community because of the sacraments that consecrate him in Christ.

Yet the religious-moral acts of the Christian must distinguish his actions from those of the profane world that are not attributed to the life in, with, and through Christ. That is to say, the actions of a non-Christian may have the same appearance as the actions of the Christian, but the inner motivation and the zeal of the Christian is utterly distinct from that of the non-Christian precisely due to being marked by the sacramental life devoted to God in the imitation of Jesus Christ. Häring claims,

The Christian's union with the Christ of glory through the sacramental consecration and the imparting of the Spirit of sanctification is not merely a designation or assignment for divine cult. It is a real bond of assimilation to Christ and His sacrifice. It is an obligation and a mission to the sacrificial service of a holy life, a charge engraved into our very being by the consecration of sacramental efficacy. This priestly union with Christ is effected, first of all, through the sacraments which imprint the mark of priesthood, the sacramental character. But each sacrament in its own special way binds us to Christ, so that our prayer, our suffering, our whole life is vested with a new and higher fitness and commitment for sacrificial service in Christ.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> LC 2: 127.

<sup>175</sup> LC 2: 142.

The sacraments impart the priestly vocation upon the Christian disciple, and at the same time strengthen the bond of unity between Christ and the Christian. The sacraments in general give the disciple a special mark of dedication to Christ, but at the same time, each individual sacrament in a distinctive way ensures the fastness of the bond between Christ and the person.

Although Häring suggests that all persons are capable of virtue, Häring insists that the Christian person is assured moral perfection only through the following of Christ. Häring further contends that the imitation of Christ takes place most fully in the community of the Church. Indeed, Häring states:

The entire fabric of our social life with its social endeavors should be placed on a higher level than that of natural law and natural right. We must view it in the light of supernatural forces and figures, particularly in the light of Christ as supreme in the whole order of being. Without doubt, in our dealings with non-Christians, which involve cooperative effort in social life, we can certainly appeal to the principles of the natural law as more readily acceptable and as offering a common basis for united effort toward certain desirable goals which all accept as good. But for our own conduct and for the ultimate orientation of our life the forms and the laws of the sacramental life of grace must be taken as seriously as the natural laws. In fact we cannot clearly grasp and correctly carry out these latter, unless we consider them in the light of the totality of the supernatural order in which God has placed them. Thus the sacraments, particularly those which imprint a character, give us not only for the strictly religious or sacred domain but also for the formation of public life itself a social mission, a participation in the mission of the Church in the sanctification of all creation.<sup>176</sup>

Häring insists that the good will alone is not enough for moral perfection. Although all persons are capable of love and have the capacity to be dedicated to the good, Häring contends that conformity with Christ is necessary for authentic and complete moral virtuosity. Morality is concerned with the human person as a whole, or integrally considered human being in service to God as well as in service to others. All persons are

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<sup>176</sup> LC 2: 171.

invited to participate in the divine-human relationship. The Christian responds to God's summons in a distinct way through the life of worship in the Church community that celebrates the sacraments as the fullest revelation of God's offer of participation and humanity's acceptance, in the imitation of Christ's dedication to God and humanity.

Häring's moral theology is an ethic of response, responsibility, and dialogue. God initiates communication with the human person through the offer of grace, particularly in the manifestation of God's self in the person of Jesus Christ. This invitation is both gift and task, to which the Christian must affirmatively respond in the life of prayer, worship, and in moral acts throughout the life of ongoing growth and conversion. For Häring, no single or momentary act or inclination achieves ultimate conversion to the way, the truth, and the life of Jesus Christ. Rather, Christian moral formation is a continual process undertaken throughout the entirety of one's religious-moral life. Häring sets himself apart from his predecessors in moral theology by emphasizing the importance of the life of worship for the Christian person as the appropriate response to God's invitation to grace. Indeed, both *The Law of Christ* and *Free and Faithful in Christ* demonstrate Häring's pastoral concerns for the Christian person and the Christian community as clearly as they show his understanding of the importance of Christocentric moral theology.