

James M. Gustafson and Catholic Theological Ethics

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FOR THIS INAUGURAL ISSUE of the *Journal of Moral Theology*, the editors invited me to write about the influence of a major Protestant theological ethicist on his Roman Catholic students. The basic directions of this influence are captured in the fact that most of them would probably refer to themselves as “theological ethicists” more readily than as “moral theologians.”¹ The shift in terminology connotes the specifically theological and biblical grounding, the ecumenical interests, and the concern with the “big picture” of agency and action (equally to specific decisions and acts) that characterize the typical “Gustafson student.”

Of course, the mutual influence of James Gustafson and Catholic moral theology is not limited to his education of students. He has interacted constantly, contentiously, and collegially with his Catholic theological peers, notably Charles Curran and Richard McCormick. In addition, Gustafson’s theological questions, insights, and warnings have influenced many Catholics who were neither his direct students nor his personal conversation partners. He has offered assessments of Catholic ethics both in ecumenical venues, and in distinctively Cath-

¹ Former student Albert R. Jonsen muses amusingly on the appropriation of this term by a group of Gustafson students who gathered regularly for lunch in the Yale refectory in the mid-1960’s: Jonsen, Stanley Hauerwas, James Childress, Gene Outka, and James Laney (“The Ethicist as Improvisationist,” in *Christian Ethics: Problems and Prospects*, ed. by Lisa Sowle Cahill and James F. Childress (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1996), 167). See also John A. Gallagher, *Time Past, Time Future: An Historical Study of Catholic Moral Theology* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1990), 219.

olic ones, such as the Catholic Theological Society of America and *Theological Studies*.

Nevertheless, as someone who wrote a dissertation under the guidance of Jim Gustafson, and has continued to be instructed, challenged and chastened by his ideas, I am privileged to illustrate his relation to Catholicism by taking as my point of departure his impact on his students. The resulting reflections will have an unavoidable personal note, due not only to my own relationship to this great teacher, but also because my first step toward researching the present essay was to appeal to the common pool of wisdom shared by my doctoral siblings. Their responses begin to illustrate both the tenor and the topics of my analysis that follows.

One student recalls Gustafson's "profound endorsement of intellectual passion, an endorsement I drew deep into my heart and which has pulsed strongly ever since." Another learned that "the primary virtue of the scholar is intellectual honesty and intellectual honesty is difficult. ...My agenda must not override the integrity of my sources and I must come to grips with other views....Yet intellectual honesty is rooted in an affective posture. Love the work. Order it to God. Order it to others. Remember, it is not about you."

That applied to Gustafson's own writing and theologizing. One notes that Gustafson's "enthusiastic embrace" of Margaret Farley's "concept of 'the grace of self-doubt' says a lot about Jim's own humility in thinking, speaking, writing." This does not, however, preclude his having "very strong convictions, some of them foreign to most Catholic approaches." These were revealed especially in his two-volume masterwork, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*,² in which he vehemently rejects theology and ethics that focus God's providence on human welfare, insisting instead in Calvinistic style that authentic piety recognizes God's sovereignty, including divine purposes that "bear down upon" and even destroy human wellbeing, as well as enable human flourishing and fulfillment. Yet Gustafson never insisted that his students conform to his theological preferences, nor even contend with them directly: "we never read his work for our courses." "He never encouraged followers or tolerated fawners." Versions of this latter point were numerous. "Jim never cultivated disciples or followers.... The result is that Jim's students are never known as 'Gustafsonians' but rather simply as a quite diverse group of con-

²James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, Volume One: Theology and Ethics (Chicago and Oxford: University of Chicago Press and Basil Blackwell, 1981) and *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, Volume Two: Ethics and Theology (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Henceforth ETP.

tributing scholars in the field of Christian ethics. This is true of the Catholics as well as the Protestants.”

In the Catholic case, the Catholic theological traditions, approaches, ecclesiology, and moral-theological questions were treated with respect and appreciation, even as Catholic students were encouraged to be critical, constructive, and ecumenically-minded. Therefore, there was no contradiction in the Catholic student remaining Catholic while being mentored theologically by Gustafson. For many of us, his courses—for example his seminar on Barth and Aquinas—were an opportunity to see Catholic tradition in a new light, to appreciate its distinctive riches in comparison with other approaches, and to freely embrace what otherwise might have seemed outdated or stultifying.³ One former student notes that it was that seminar that “pushed me to read Aquinas in depth for the first time.”⁴

Another explains, “even though he never ‘adopted’ aspects that are important to many Catholic theologians... he ‘got it’ (at least respected it) more than many other Protestant thinkers.” He always “took seriously” the Catholic and other traditions, incorporating “whatever he deemed important enough to help... his own point of view.” A different person recalls that Gustafson’s teaching style was “critical but appreciative,” that he had a “really insightful knowledge of Catholic ‘moral theology,’” and that he affirmed “the possibilities of mutual influence of Catholic and Protestant traditions.”

I recommend a few key, accessible, and relatively compact sources through which other Catholic theologians may grasp and appreciate the influence of Gustafson on our field of ethics or “moral theology.” The first is an essay that Gustafson himself identifies as one of his most successful, in terms of being an incisive analysis of contested issues that at the time were front and center in the fields both of Christian ethics more broadly and of moral theology in the Catholic sense: “Context vs. Principles: A Misplaced Debate in Christian Ethics.”⁵ A second is an early book that displays Gustafson’s ecumenical interests and his ability to appreciate the strengths of different but

³ Much of the work undertaken in that seminar is reflected in James M. Gustafson, *Protestant and Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

⁴ Gustafson includes a substantial and appreciative discussion of Aquinas on sanctification as early as 1968, in *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York, Evanston, London: Harper & Row), 98-115.

⁵ James M. Gustafson, “Context vs. Principles: A Misplaced Debate in Christian Ethics,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 58.2 (1965): 171-202. This and several other characteristic or seminar essays may be found in James M. Gustafson, *Moral Discernment in the Christian Life: Essays in Theological Ethics*, ed. Theo A. Boer and Paul E. Capetz (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

potentially complementary strands of Christianity: *Protestant and Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement*.⁶ Another comparison of Catholic and Protestant ethics, one that identifies the importance of ethics' theological foundations and (fading?) ecumenical bent, was written to commemorate *Theological Studies*' fiftieth anniversary: "Roman Catholic and Protestant Interaction in Ethics: An Interpretation."⁷

A short book that captures the theocentric perspective elaborated in the two-volume work on that topic, and situates it engagingly within a treatment of the religious affections as evoked by experiences of the natural world, is *A Sense of the Divine: The Natural Environment from a Theocentric Perspective*.⁸ Finally, *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt* traverses the course of Gustafson's theological development over his lifetime, putting hard questions to contemporary faith, and reiterating what for Gustafson's readers is a familiar refrain: "the Almighty has his own purposes."⁹ The last two works communicate beautifully the personal contexts and experiences that have shaped Gustafson's own piety and theological choices. They also bring home one of his most essential convictions: all church life and all theology are contextual and perspectival, but they are nonetheless accountable both to the reality of God, and to scientific and other sources for understanding the human condition in relation to God and nature.¹⁰

GUSTAFSON'S BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND AND ITS THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

James Moody Gustafson was born to a Swedish immigrant family in an ore-mining town on Michigan's Upper Peninsula in 1925. His father, from whom he learned "devotion to and respect for the natural environment," was a minister of the evangelical Swedish Covenant Church. Decades later, Gustafson says, to hear the cry of the loon on Maine's Lake Umbagog "is for me, like many other persons who grew up in those northern climes, a powerful experi-

⁶ James M. Gustafson, *Protestant and Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

⁷ James M. Gustafson, "Roman Catholic and Protestant Interaction in Ethics: An Interpretation," *Theological Studies* 50.1 (1989): 44-69.

⁸ James M. Gustafson, *A Sense of the Divine: The Natural Environment from a Theocentric Perspective* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1994).

⁹ James M. Gustafson, *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

¹⁰ For an overview of Gustafson's theology and its biographical contexts, not limited to its influence on moral theology, see Lisa Sowle Cahill, "James M. Gustafson" in *A New Handbook of Christian Theologians*, ed. by Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 178-88.

ence.”¹¹ Gustafson’s memories of Michigan include identifying and enjoying a variety of trees, berries, nuts, and flowers; fishing and canoeing on local lakes; and ice-skating, skiing, sledding, and tobogganing in the winter. Branded on his memory as well are the screams of girls drowning in one of those lakes; the cut of winter temperatures at 40 below zero; and the ugly environmental effects of logging and iron ore mining necessary for community survival. When the family relocated to a rural Kansas farming community, they knew both bountiful crops and drought and tornadoes.

Nature’s beauty brought peace and awe. We used its resources for our sustenance, recognizing both the harmful and beneficial outcomes of that. We knew its powers to harm and destroy and thus learned to adapt to its threats.¹²

Nature’s parts are interdependent and mutually affecting, but nature’s equilibrium is not static and harmonious, nor entirely predictable, nor ultimately controllable by humans. “We meet God as the power that brings all things into being, that bears down on them and threatens or limits them, that sustains them and is the condition of possibility for their change.”¹³

Nature, along with relationships to human persons and the experience of historical events, is for Gustafson a powerful stimulant to the “religious affections,” the affective ability to begin to comprehend God, God’s purposes, and God’s relation to finite beings and relationships. Common human experiences give rise to “senses” of dependence, gratitude, obligation, remorse and repentance; as well as of new possibilities of agency, change and happiness.¹⁴ “From experiences that are shared in common, to experience of others, or of otherness, to experience of the reality of an Other; these are the steps, phases, aspects, of monotheistic religious faith and life.”¹⁵

Yet Gustafson found the sociological, historical and ethnic differences among the churches of his acquaintance to be at least as remarkable as the similarities of their shared Christian faith. In Michigan, Gustafson’s Irish, Italian, and Belgian friends were all Catholic; while all Swedes were Protestant. In his teens, Gustafson found a book on religion and immigration that revealed that the senses of the divine that undergird religious narratives and belief systems take

¹¹ Gustafson, *Sense of the Divine*, 3-6.

¹² Gustafson, *Sense of the Divine*, 4.

¹³ Gustafson, *Sense of the Divine*, 14.

¹⁴ Gustafson, *ETP One: Theology and Ethics*, 129-36. See also, James M. Gustafson, “Tracing a Trajectory,” *Zygon* 30.2 (1995): 182.

¹⁵ Gustafson, *ETP One: Theology and Ethics*, 136.

forms that are “relative to different cultures, symbols, and communities.”¹⁶ Religion, religious belief, and theology are cultural, historical and sociological phenomena. They are also authentic expressions of humanity’s relation to and experience of God. Gustafson is adamant that religious and theological claims be investigated in terms of their historical and sociological causes, the possibility of their experiential validation, and their coherence with biblical and doctrinal premises.

Gustafson’s sense of cultural and religious relativity, along with his experience of nature as a source of the religious affections, and his conviction that ultimate powers bear down upon human beings as well as bear them up, were all reinforced by his tour of duty in India and on the China-Burma border during the Second World War. Subsequently he resumed studies in sociology and anthropology at Northwestern University, then ministerial studies at the University of Chicago and Chicago Theological Seminary.

Though he is today an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, his 1951 ordination was almost blocked due to Gustafson’s critique of standard theologies, and due to what he calls “my candid agnosticism and skepticism about personal immortality.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, as he affirmed much later, he may be a sort of “Christian stoic or a stoical Christian,” but “the life of the church and its Christian message and mission are part of my life.”¹⁸ His target is not Christian piety as such, but impious religious rhetoric that makes facile or inflated claims about God and God’s ways to serve self-interest or avoid the intransigent realities of conflict and suffering.

In Chicago, Gustafson’s previous studies in sociology found resonance in Ernst Troeltsch’s approach to the churches, and in the theology of H. Richard Niebuhr, especially *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (1941) and *The Meaning of Revelation* (1941). He saw in Niebuhr a way to affirm a historic religious tradition, while avoiding excessive metaphysical inferences, and acknowledging historical relativity.¹⁹ At the urging of James Luther Adams and other teachers, Gustafson left Chicago to begin doctoral studies at Yale with Niebuhr.

On receiving his doctorate in 1955, Gustafson joined the Yale faculty. In 1972, he relocated to the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, where he also served on the University’s Committee on Social Thought, an interdisciplinary degree-granting program. In 1989, Gustafson was invited to Emory University, where until 1996 he

¹⁶ Gustafson, “Trajectory,” 182. The book was George M. Stephenson, *The Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration* (1932).

¹⁷ Gustafson, “Trajectory,” 181.

¹⁸ Gustafson, *Examined Faith*, 106.

¹⁹ Gustafson, “Trajectory,” 183.

chaired the Luce Seminars for faculty across schools and fields. In 1998 he retired from formal academic life to his residence in Albuquerque, NM, keeping up correspondence with former students and colleagues, as well as occasional travel to lecture and participate in conferences.

GUSTAFSON, THE CHURCH, AND REFORMED THEOLOGY

Gustafson's first book, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (1961), incorporated Niebuhr's attunement to the historicity of the experience of God into a new vision of the nature of the Church. On the one hand, Gustafson maintains, particular forms of the Church cannot be equated with absolute revelation. On the other hand, the relativity of historical experience does refer to an absolute object: God. And it is only through its limited, human, social, political, and historical forms that the Church can survive over time and maintain a continuous community of "believers in God revealed in Jesus Christ."²⁰

Around the time of the writing of *Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, Gustafson reflects, the Christ and the Church Commission of the World Council of Churches produced literature about the implications for the Church of Christ, Spirit, and eschatology. However, this literature neglected to account for the human, social, and historical aspects of actual church communities or institutions. Meanwhile, the use of "middle axioms," mediating ethical guidelines derived by Christian bodies and theologians from premises such as "love," were being used to frame church responses to timely social and political questions. But the application of these axioms in the concrete was insufficiently backed by social and scientific analysis of the conditions they were meant to address. Hence the resulting recommendations tended to be either irrelevant to the real capacities of churches and their members; or platitudinous when juxtaposed with the complexity of real social problems.²¹

Gustafson's affinity with the Reformed tradition (especially John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards) leads him to embrace yet reinterpret Augustinian-Reformed themes of divine sovereignty, theocentric piety, humility and a certain pessimism about lasting or widespread reform of the social order. With Calvin and Edwards he believes that the end of human beings and of all nature is to glorify God, and that the *eschaton* will not bring universal redemption and happiness. Like them, he attributes unredeemed suffering, human or otherwise, to

²⁰ James M. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as Human Community* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961).

²¹ Gustafson, "Trajectory," 177-78, 183-84.

God's mysterious ways. His participation in the Church is strong but his confidence in its "orthodox" theologies, as in its holiness, is not high.

Gustafson holds traditional belief, theology and ecclesiology accountable to other disciplines such as the human and natural sciences, as to a breadth of human experiences of God. In the light of these critical standards, Gustafson is willing to challenge—explicitly or tacitly—the credibility of many traditional Christian affirmations, such as the Trinity, the divinity and resurrection of Jesus, and the promise of "eternal life."

The result for Gustafson however is neither religious alienation nor liberal Protestantism. His theological message is an adamant, if stern, interpretation of the *pietas* of Augustine, Calvin and Edwards. God is a force to be reckoned with, and to be worshipped in awe. As he concludes *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*:

God will not be manipulated.
 God will not be ignored or denied.
 God will be God.²²

GUSTAFSON'S CATHOLIC INTERLOCUTORS

One reason that Gustafson was able to have a large effect on Catholic students is that, throughout his career, he has engaged with Catholic moral theologians. He has published books and articles that dissect, analyze, and advise Catholic moral theology and its spokespersons. He has incorporated some of their works and ideas into his own. Gustafson has always been convinced that by working together the two traditions could make headway toward solving shared theological problems. Gustafson's work with Catholic theologians who were themselves among the most influential in postconciliar U.S. moral theology enhanced the educational environment of his students. Gustafson smoothed the way for their own personal and professional interaction with senior Catholic mentors like Richard McCormick, Charles Curran, and others to whom Gustafson introduced them.

Gustafson wrote *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement* just after the ecumenical wave that followed Vatican II had crested. The introduction expresses gratitude to his "mentor" Richard McCormick, and to "conversation partner" Charles

²² Gustafson, *ETP*, *Two: Ethics and Theology*, 322.

Curran (to both of whose *festschriften* he later contributed²³), as well as to several former students whose dissertations Gustafson advised. Gustafson explains that he began to study the social encyclicals when still a student, and that the book idea took root during a 1966 summer seminar at Union Theological Seminary (New York) that was filled with “Roman Catholic theologians and philosophers of considerable intellectual maturity.”²⁴

The book clarifies “historic divergences,” such as the centrality to Catholicism of morality and law, compared to the more diffuse, ambiguous, and pedagogical function of moral teaching in Protestantism; the Catholic emphasis on individual responsibility for sins, compared to the Protestant emphasis on the general state of fallenness; and the centrality of natural law in Catholic moral theology, compared to that of Scripture for Protestants. These differences led to differences of style and substance in practical moral reasoning. While Protestants risk losing their compass in “wastelands of relativism,” Catholics have inherited “a rather tight and closed system which needs loosening and opening to come to grips with modern moral and social problems.”²⁵ Past Catholic moral theology functioned quite autonomously from systematic theology, but is now renewing its relation to doctrinal and biblical sources, according to Gustafson. Meanwhile Protestant theologians are also finding ways to bring nature and grace, creation and redemption, closer together.

Gustafson suggests finally that the traditions are drawing together toward a view of God as “a gracious ordering dynamic presence and power,” whose being and purposes are not fully disclosed, but continue to be discovered “through human experience in time.” He believes there to be a growing consensus on “the priority of grace over ‘nature,’” leading to an ethics that affirms nature and history, “without denying the necessity for order, the reality of evil, and the distortion of human sin.”²⁶

The majority of Gustafson’s Catholic students reached him—at Yale and in greater numbers at Chicago—in the two decades following the Second Vatican Council. This was an era when the Catholic Church itself opened its windows and doors to ecumenical exchanges

²³ James M. Gustafson, “The Focus and Its Limitations: Reflections on Catholic Moral Theology,” in *Moral Theology: Challenges for the Future, Essays in Honor of Richard A. McCormick, S.J.*, ed. by Charles E. Curran (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 179-192; and “Charles Curran: Ecumenical Moral Theologian Par Excellence,” in *A Call to Fidelity: On the Moral Theology of Charles E. Curran* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 211-43.

²⁴ Gustafson, *Catholic and Protestant Ethics*, vii-viii.

²⁵ Gustafson, *Catholic and Protestant Ethics*, 32-33.

²⁶ Gustafson, *Catholic and Protestant Ethics*, 158.

and to modern approaches to knowledge. The very calling of the Council by John XXIII, in a spirit of “aggiornamento,” already suggested that ecclesial structures and theological certitudes might be open to renegotiation.

The degree to which these actually could change, did change, and are still changing, is a matter of continuing debate within the Roman Catholic communion.²⁷ But certainly a change of clear relevance for the future of Catholic theology and theological ethics was the entry into the study of theology by a huge number of lay persons, inspired by the engaging openness and vitality of the Council proceedings and documents. For the first time, large numbers of lay students were welcomed to the study of theology by Catholic colleges and universities. Jesuit and other Catholic institutions began to admit women, and to establish undergraduate theology majors. Within a few years, not only lay Catholics but priests and religious were seeking entry to originally Protestant, now interdenominational, divinity schools like Yale and Chicago. Catholic applicants were inspired by the post-conciliar spirit of ecumenism, the hope that vocational opportunities would be available in the sorts of schools from which they had graduated, and attraction to the longstanding academic reputations of the theological schools at which they were soon to arrive.

It would not be for another two decades or so that Catholic universities in the U.S. would have developed research faculties and well-established doctoral programs that could educate theologians to be research scholars and mentors of new generations of graduate students. In the 1960's and early 70's, little was available in the U.S. other than the Catholic University of America, a pontifical institution administered by the U.S. Catholic bishops, whose mandate in theological graduate programs had been primarily the education of clergy and religious. Rather than seek out degrees at Catholic institutions in Europe, many U.S. Catholic doctoral applicants turned to non-Catholic schools at home.

In a history of Catholic moral theology in the United States, Charles E. Curran notes that James Gustafson was familiar not only with Aquinas, but with postconciliar Catholic developments on the European and North American scenes. According to Curran, “No Protestant scholar illustrates the thoroughly ecumenical aspect of Catholic moral theology better than James Gustafson,” both in research and in teaching.

²⁷ See David Schultenover, ed., *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2007).

At Yale, Chicago, and Emory universities, Gustafson directed the doctoral dissertations of more than twenty Catholic moral theologians, almost all of whom have published extensively and made significant contributions to moral theology. No Catholic moral theologian in the United States in the latter part of the twentieth century even came close to directing that number of dissertations by future Catholic scholars.²⁸

The Catholics found Gustafson's correlation of different ethical sources—Scripture, theological traditions and figures, philosophy or “reason,” human experiences, the human and natural sciences—amenable for many reasons. Like Protestants, of course, they were attracted to his astute mapping of contemporary theological options, their roots, and their consequences for ethics. Moreover, as one student recalls, “post-conciliar Catholic aspirations for lay renewals encountered cratered confidence in ecclesial leadership that unjustly fragmented practical questions into camps—bereft of nonpolemical constructive scholarship.”

From Gustafson they began to appreciate that contested issues were part of a bigger picture—theologically, ecclesially, socially and politically. By reading together and on the same topics (like marriage, war, or euthanasia) figures like Aquinas, Barth, John C. Ford, John Courtney Murray, Bernard Haring, John Howard Yoder, Paul Ramsey, and Catholic popes, they began to see the theological commitments behind natural law ethics, how conclusions develop over time, and how they are continually renegotiated: “living traditions are always contested.”

Gustafson seminars not only introduced major figures, texts, and theological ideas, they also provided a model for critical yet non-polemical engagement. The texts and readers constituted “a community of moral discourse” in which Catholic students learned that if they were going to work within a tradition that makes public moral claims, they would have to appreciate “the value of argument (how assertions are linked to claims using evidence).” Gustafson believed that the churches and their ethicists should have a public voice and participate in important social and political questions.²⁹ This supported one of the most characteristic legacies of Catholic moral theology and especially of Catholic social teaching. Yet Gustafson was

²⁸ Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology in the United States: A History* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 147.

²⁹ See his address to the Catholic Theological Society of America: James M. Gustafson, “The Sectarian Temptation; Reflection on Theology, the Church, and the University,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 40 (1985): 83-94.

more clear than most Catholics that social-ethical recommendations should be coherently linked to theological and biblical base points, as well as to scientific and philosophical sources.

Most of his Catholic students work with some revised version of the ethics of “natural law” historically embedded at the center of Catholic theological ethics. But they reinterpret it in light of more explicit allusions to Aquinas’s theology, in conversation with Protestants, by engagement with biblical narratives, as incorporating the natural and social sciences, and with a critical assessment of the historical limits of past formulations. Gustafson taught Catholic students to appreciate that human individuals must be seen as part of larger wholes of culture and of the natural world, with whose other species they share continuities.³⁰

Gustafson also helped those interested in natural law to better address the “is-ought problem” (going back to David Hume and G.E. Moore), that is, the objection that no statement of moral obligation can be derived from a simple description of beings or states of affairs that in fact exist. Gustafson astutely distinguished between two senses of “the human”: the normative and the descriptive. Natural law begins with the descriptive, that is, with descriptions of what in fact exists or occurs. But the descriptive alone does not yield moral obligations and norms. Moral judgment involves a “normative” view of the human: which among the observed “facts” of human existence actually fulfill human beings, or contribute to human wellbeing or flourishing? Only on the basis of the latter discernment or judgment can a moral claim be made.³¹

It is important that nature and natural law be integrated with more properly theological stances, themes and concepts. A salient example is the relation of nature to grace, understood as the gift of Christian love, charity, or *agape*. A recurrent theme in Gustafson’s courses was the meaning and force for ethics of this central Christian virtue. Students were urged to be precise in defining love, and to evaluate the value of any specific concept partly in terms of whether the disposition and practice of love espoused by the ethicist could be confirmed as a possibility by the natural and social sciences. Particular targets of critical examination were the ideas that love as *agape* consists in radical self-sacrifice, regardless of family obligations, cost or the agent’s survival; that *agape* is diametrically opposed to “natu-

³⁰ Gustafson, “Nature,” 124-25.

³¹ James M. Gustafson, “Genetic Engineering and the Normative View of the Human,” *Ethical Issues in Biology and Medicine*, ed. Preston N. Williams (Schenkman, 1973), 46-58. See also “Nature: Its Status in Theological Ethics,” in *Moral Discernment*, 111-125 (originally published in 1982 in *Logos*).

ral” human desires and fulfillments; and that Christian love totally transforms the capacities of persons and communities.

From their mentor, Gustafson students further imbibed a healthy dose of realism about human limits and sin. They learned to beware the theological evasions and anthropocentrisms that, not just rarely, but usually infect theological pronouncements. They also learned the virtue of various modes or styles—narrative, prophetic, ethically analytic, and policy-oriented—and how to use them at different times rather than seeing them as mutually exclusive.³²

Gustafson’s Catholic students, virtually without exception, incorporated their mentor’s theocentrism, contextualization of theology, and empirical criteria of validation into interpretations of theological ethics that also found room for much more traditional interpretations of theology, Christology, and eschatology. I think a major reason for this was that even pre-Vatican II Catholics had been formed by a “sacramental” or “analogical” imagination.³³ Therefore, almost by innate constitution, Catholics already tended not to see biblical revelation (literally interpreted) as the sole source of knowledge of God, were inclined to “finding God in all things” (in a phrase characterizing Ignatian spirituality), and assumed no inherent contradiction between faith and reason.

Gustafson’s Catholic students also belonged to a church that since the Middle Ages had sponsored university-level engagement of theology with philosophy and even the sciences. It accepted the potential usefulness of historical-critical approaches to the Bible. And, at least since the Council, the Catholic Church endorsed the idea that God works salvation beyond the Christian churches. Catholic students, therefore, did not perceive Gustafson’s application of critical criteria in theology oppositionally, nor think it necessarily threatened their own affirmation of essentials of Christian faith: a providential Creator; redemption in Jesus Christ (as human, divine and resurrected); the presence of God’s Spirit in human churches; and the destiny of humanity, perhaps of all creation, to final union with God.

³² James M. Gustafson, *Varieties of Moral Discourse: Prophetic, Narrative, Ethical, and Policy* (Grand Rapids MI: Calvin College and Seminary, 1988). David Hollenbach registers this contribution and also notes that Gustafson demands reasons be given even for judgments in the narrative and prophetic modes. See David Hollenbach, S.J., *Justice, Peace and Human Rights: American Catholic Social Ethics in a Pluralistic Context* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1988), 192.

³³ Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Myth* (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990), 45. “The Catholic ‘classics’ assume a God who is present in the world, disclosing Himself in and through creation. The world and all its events, objects, and people tend to be somewhat like God. The Protestant classics, on the other hand, assume a God who is radically absent from the world, and who discloses [Himself] only on rare occasions (especially in Jesus Christ and Him crucified).”

APPLIED ETHICS

At a more specific level, Gustafson believes that Christian moral norms and choices ought to be informed but not tightly controlled by theological convictions and ethical dispositions. Given finitude, sin, and the ambiguity of many circumstances, absolute moral certitude belongs to God, not human beings, as Gustafson illustrated whenever he addressed applied ethics.³⁴ Instead, we may be guided by such beliefs as God intends the well-being of creation (not limited to human beings), God sustains and orders nature and history (not eradicating all conflicts of goods); and God creates new possibilities (not always used well). Hence, in medical ethics, for instance, we must approach ethics with attitudes of respect for life, of openness and courage, and of self-criticism.

Gustafson's approach to applied ethics can be illustrated by essays on abortion and on care for newborn infants with serious congenital abnormalities, areas that have absorbed much Catholic moral-theological attention. While different from the Catholic approaches within which his students tended to be most at home, Gustafson's analyses were able to expand their range of vision. On abortion, Gustafson expresses indebtedness to Catholic thinking. He then describes a "Protestant" approach as one that adopts the perspective of personal responsibility as contrasted to obedience to law, that concerns itself with a particular pregnant woman and her relations and circumstances, that takes into account the complexity of lived experience, and that attempts to be "tolerant, patient, loving, and forgiving, rather than judgmental."³⁵

In the case of a Down Syndrome infant, Gustafson views less tolerantly the decision of his parents to withhold consent for a life-saving surgical procedure. Writing in a festschrift for Gustafson, Albert Jonsen, a notable developer of the Catholic tradition of "casuistry,"³⁶ uses Gustafson's essay to illustrate that the ethicist is an "improvisationist."³⁷ In it, Gustafson appeals eclectically and experientially to religious convictions and to more general moral beliefs to defend a human calling "'to be for others' at least as much as 'to be

³⁴ James M. Gustafson, *The Contributions of Theology to Medical Ethics* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Theology Dept., 1975), 90.

³⁵ James M. Gustafson, "A Protestant Ethical Approach," in *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives*, ed. by John T. Noonan (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 106.

³⁶ Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

³⁷ Jonsen, "Ethicist as Improvisationist," in *Problems and Prospects*, 226-32.

for ourselves.”³⁸ Gustafson reflects Niebuhr, Jonathan Edwards, and American pragmatism when he depicts the Christian agent as constituted by interaction with “a more expansive natural and social environment,” and with God, whose self-disclosure commands human trust and loyalty.³⁹

Gustafson does not separate Christian theology from other sources of wisdom, nor does he expect that practical reasoning can move from certain first principles to equally certain conclusions. Over descriptions like “moral reasoning” and “moral argument,” he sees agents and ethicists as engaged in “moral discernment,” echoing H. Richard Niebuhr’s “ethics of the fitting,” or “ethics of responsibility.”⁴⁰ Moral discernment “is impossible to program, and difficult to describe. It involves perceptivity, discrimination, subtlety, sensitivity, clarity, rationality, and accuracy....it is both rational and affective.”⁴¹ It refers to “base points” such as social analysis, fundamental theological affirmations, moral principles, and the concrete Christian life as entailing moral expression.⁴²

Gustafson’s views of discernment and of the complementarity of rules and situations were instructive for those engaged in the seemingly endless Catholic debates of the 1970s and 80s over moral norms. The necessary contextuality of moral relations and obligations does not exclude identification of forms of behavior that are usually appropriate, or principles to guide behavior.⁴³ Context-sensitivity does not equate to relativism.

GUSTAFSON’S STUDENTS AS MORAL THEOLOGIANs

In time, most of Gustafson’s Catholic students became contributors to the disciplines of moral theology and Christian ethics. Following their mentor, many do interdisciplinary work, work in several areas of applied ethics, and study the intersections of systematic or dogmatic theology and ethics. Gustafson’s influence appears in sev-

³⁸ James M. Gustafson, “Down Syndrome, Parental Desires, and the Right to Life,” in *Moral Discernment* 73 (originally published 1973 in *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*).

³⁹ See Gustafson students William C. Spohn and Thomas A. Byrnes, “Knowledge of Self and Knowledge of God: A Reconstructed Empiricist Interpretation,” in *Problems and Prospects*, 119-133.

⁴⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

⁴¹ James M. Gustafson, “Moral Discernment in the Christian Life,” in *Moral Discernment*, 32 (originally published 1968, in Gene H. Outka and Paul Ramsey, eds., *Norm and Context in Christian Ethics* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons]).

⁴² James M. Gustafson, “Context versus Principles: A Misplaced Debate in Christian Ethics,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 58.2 (1965): 192 (also collected in *Moral Discernment*).

⁴³ Gustafson, “Context versus Principles,” 186

eral overlapping areas: the contextual and interdisciplinary nature of theological ethics; the relevance of theological themes and doctrines to ethics; ethics as practical discernment, and the relevance of this to natural law; applied ethics as including sexual, medical and social ethics.

Contextual and Interdisciplinary Ethics

Gustafson believes that Christian ethics is grounded in the Church, but the Church itself is a historical community, interacting with many social realities and ways to knowledge. The use of many sources pervades Gustafson's work and that of his students. Interdisciplinarity characterizes virtually all of the categories listed above. One of the more salient examples, however, is environmental or ecological ethics, a subject of enduring importance to Gustafson himself. The challenge of appropriately relating the natural sciences to theology is particularly acute here.

Cristina Traina is concerned about how to move to global discourse about common ecological threats and responsibilities. Like Gustafson, she says that scientific knowledge is essential to understand the functioning of ecosystems, their potentials and their limits, which moral agency must respect. Science, however, does not furnish moral goals such as preservation of the ecological status quo, or its radical transformation. These require particular philosophies and theologies. However, science can at least furnish a common language and point of departure from which cultures can advocate and debate arguments for ecological welfare.⁴⁴

William French dislodges ecological anthropocentrism and the idea that there is a separation between the human and the nonhuman natural world, arguing for a close connection between ecological stability and global security. He therefore calls for interreligious efforts to promote practical initiatives toward "planetary care."⁴⁵ In this process will be needed both a retelling of the creation story,⁴⁶ and a renewed natural law, in which human and nonhuman nature are interdependent.⁴⁷ Stephen Pope finds the theology of Aquinas instructive

⁴⁴ Cristina L. H. Traina, "Creating a Global Discourse in a Pluralistic World: Strategies from Environmental Ethics," in *Problems and Prospects*, 250-264.

⁴⁵ William C. French, "Natural Law and Ecological Responsibility: Drawing on the Natural Law Tradition," *University of St. Thomas Law Journal* 5.1 (2008): 12-36.

⁴⁶ William C. French, "With Radical Amazement: Ecology and the Recovery of Creation," in *Without Nature? A New Condition for Theology*, ed. by David Albertson and Cabell King (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 54-79.

⁴⁷ William C. French, "Common Ground and Common Skies: Natural Law and Ecological Responsibility," in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 44.3 (2007): 373-388.

in spelling out what this means.⁴⁸ Richard Miller argues that, from a theocentric perspective, ecological interdependence must become part of considerations of just or unjust use of force, both because war destroys nature, and because force might sometimes be necessary to protect it.⁴⁹ Bernard Brady cultivates the religious sensibility or “religious affections” necessary to respect for the rest of nature in a “spiritual field guide” to prayer and meditation outdoors.⁵⁰

Predictably, the work of these thinkers already leads into theological themes, and into the practical nature of moral discernment.

Theology and Ethics

Gustafson taught students to connect ethics to underlying conceptions of nature and grace, and to test theological claims in terms of their capacity to account for the realities of human life. The nature of Christian love, its differentiation from other types of love, and its relevance to the practical moral life was a continuing subject of debate in Gustafson seminars. The theological and practical meaning of love has continued to occupy writers like Bernard Brady, Stephen Pope and Margaret Farley.⁵¹

Brady reviews love in the Christian tradition, and maintains on both historical and experiential grounds that mutuality is the primary characteristic of love because love is unitive, in both its affective and practical dimensions. Using Aquinas and evolutionary psychology, Pope defends the validity of special relations in ordering love, and also shows that Christian love shapes and orients our natural capacities, rather than denying or overriding what is natural and fulfilling to human nature. At the same time, Pope confronts the fact that humans’ evolved traits and capacities may not fit easily into a harmonious whole, denoted as “creation” rather than as “fall.” Resisting reductionism, he envisions moral responsibility as the cultivation of human capacities for goodness, and sees grace as enhancing those capacities.

The centrality of theological themes also informs work that reflects on public social issues that can be conceived in terms of justice

⁴⁸ Stephen J. Pope, “Neither Enemy Nor Friend: Nature as Creation in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Zygon* 32.2 (2003): 219-30.

⁴⁹ Richard B. Miller, “Just-War Criteria and Theocentric Ethics,” in *Problems and Prospects*, 334-356.

⁵⁰ Bernard V. Brady and Mark Neuzil, *A Spiritual Field Guide: Meditations for the Outdoors* (Grand Rapids MI: Brazos Press, 2005).

⁵¹ Bernard V. Brady, *Christian Love* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003); Stephen J. Pope, *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love*; (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994) and *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love* (New York and London: Continuum Publishing, 2006).

and rights. Margaret Farley maintains that love must always be structured by justice, understood as the concrete well-being of equal and reciprocal human beings. This leads her to a social critique of gender injustice, taking as her cue the expectation that women are held to higher standards of love as self-sacrifice than men, and that this works to women's disadvantage.

The fact that theological presuppositions are relevant to claims about justice has had a major impact on the way Catholic students have appropriated Catholic social teaching. Bernard Brady offers an overview in which Catholic social teaching's spiritual, historical, and theological dimensions are strong.⁵² He links conceptions of justice and work for justice to the biblical prophets, Jesus' kingdom of God, and moral community.⁵³ Michael Schuck reviews papal social encyclicals from 1740 onward, with an eye not only to their social recommendations, but to the contexts and problems that prompted them, and to their theological premises.⁵⁴ William George researches the connections between theological discourse and the traditions of international law.⁵⁵ Patrick J. Lynch, S.J., shows how for John Paul II, creation and redemption yield a public theology advocating dignity and rights.⁵⁶

Love and justice are also themes in the development of Catholic social ethics into liberation theology and its move toward justice as including a gospel-based "preferential option for the poor." Dean Brackley, S.J., makes the case on experiential, social, theological and New Testament grounds that because God is good and compassionate, God takes the side of the poor.⁵⁷ Brackley is informed by experiences of church in North and Central America; by his work with the poor; by Maritain, Rahner, Gutierrez, and other liberationist thinkers, as well as feminist theology; and especially by the kingdom message of Jesus as rendered with the help of recent biblical scholarship. Brackley not only interprets Christian love to have a social content,

⁵² Bernard V. Brady, *Essential Catholic Social Thought* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).

⁵³ Bernard V. Brady, *The Moral Bond of Community: Justice and Discourse in Christian Morality* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998).

⁵⁴ Michael J. Schuck, *That They Be One: The Social Teaching of the Papal Encyclicals 1740-1989* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991).

⁵⁵ William P. George, "Grotius, Theology, and International Law: Overcoming Textbook Bias," *Journal of Law and Religion* 14.2 (1999): 605-631.

⁵⁶ Patrick J. Lynch, S.J., "Creation, Redemption, Solidarity: Pope John II's Public Theology," in *Prophecy and Diplomacy: The Moral Doctrine of John Paul II*, ed. by John J. Conley, S.J. and Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 25-39.

⁵⁷ Dean Brackley, S.J., *Divine Revolution: Salvation and Liberation in Catholic Thought* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

but also makes a stronger case than would Gustafson for the political effectiveness of a Christian social vision. In fact, Gustafson maintains that the proposition that God favors the poor and oppressed is “difficult” to maintain, given the historical certainty of their continued suffering.⁵⁸ From another perspective, Richard Roach, S.J. also represents Gustafson’s concern to ground ethics in theology when he protests that liberation theology does not capture a “sense of faith” adequate to its social purposes.⁵⁹

Practical Reason and Natural Law

For Gustafson, moral discernment involves not only a reasoning process, but also the religious affections, the worldview provided by one’s culture, and an acute sensitivity to the particular ways in which human agents are responsible before God in the face of specific bonds, opportunities, and limits. Stephen J. Pope writes that “moral claims tend to be supported as part and parcel of a complex and interdependent ‘web of beliefs’ rather than as moral conclusions produced by a self-contained, logical system or by simple and straightforward procedures of deduction or induction.”⁶⁰ Needless to say, this approach posed major questions for the Catholic debates about action-guiding norms, intrinsically evil acts, and conscience that became so heated in the wake of Vatican II; and about the meaning and viability of the underlying “natural law” ethics inherited from Aquinas.

The majority of the works of Margaret Farley display a renegotiation of the natural law sensibility, but an early example alluding explicitly to Aquinas is “Fragments for an Ethics of Commitment in Thomas Aquinas.”⁶¹ Stephen J. Pope edited a major scholarly collection on *The Ethics of Aquinas*.⁶² Cristina Traina proposes that natural law can be revised in response to feminist critiques, and in fact, offers feminist ethics an improved basis for claims about gender justice.⁶³

Gustafson’s picture of moral discernment and of human interdependence with the natural world was not incompatible with a re-

⁵⁸ Gustafson, *Examined Faith*, 109.

⁵⁹ Richard R. Roach, “A Sense of Faith,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 5.1 (1977): 135-54.

⁶⁰ Stephen J. Pope, “Descriptive and Normative Uses of Evolutionary Theory,” in *Problems and Prospects*, 167.

⁶¹ Margaret A. Farley, “Fragments for an Ethic of Commitment in Thomas Aquinas,” *Journal of Religion*, focus issue, “Celebrating the Medieval Heritage,” ed. David Tracy (1978).

⁶² Stephen J. Pope, *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002).

⁶³ Cristina L. H. Traina, *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law: The End of the Anathemas* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999).

trieval of natural law, yet it reinforced the movement of many Catholic theologians away from the methodology of the neo-Scholastic “moral manuals.” John A. Gallagher published an assessment of moral theology through the two decades following the Council, in which he concludes that the very term “moral theology” may have outlived its usefulness. “Catholic theological ethics” is now based in the university (not seminary), has intellectual as well as pastoral aims, and connects the tradition with culture and public life.⁶⁴

Gustafson students often went on to engage in “moral-theological” debates involving “Catholic” categories and touchstones, such as the meaning of intrinsic evil; the principles of double effect, totality and cooperation; the difference between ordinary and extraordinary means of life support; and the defensibility of “proportionalism.” But they usually did so in a much more open-ended way than had been typical of moral theology in the past, and they did so by stretching the discipline to include and give more authority to experience, philosophy, the sciences, Protestant thinkers, and Scripture.

An inductive understanding of the way practical reason operates concretely is reflected in Anne Patrick’s *Liberating Conscience*.⁶⁵ Patrick contests certain magisterial exercises of authority, like the removal of Charles Curran from his teaching post at the Catholic University of America because of his stand on contraception. She commends spirituality and moral virtue as nourishing our ability to discern what God is enabling and requiring of us, hence directing moral decision-making toward the good life and the common good. Margaret Farley shows why lived experience, with its complex sensations, emotions, images, insights, and understandings, is always the lens through which moral realities are seen, and part of the data that goes into their evaluation.⁶⁶

Richard B. Miller’s *Casuistry and Modern Ethics* proposes a “poetics of practical reasoning” in which the particular, the inductive, and the contextual are emphasized, along with the possibility of bringing consensus out of pluralism, both nationally and internationally. Miller applies his method to matters as diverse as contraception, uses of fetal tissue, violent pornography, and the war in Iraq.⁶⁷ These authors would agree with David Hollenbach that Gustafson, while not giving

⁶⁴ John A. Gallagher, *Time Past, Time Future*, 272.

⁶⁵ See Anne Patrick, *Liberating Conscience: Feminist Explorations in Catholic Moral Theology* (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1996).

⁶⁶ Margaret A. Farley, “The Role of Experience in Moral Discernment,” in *Problems and Prospects*, 134-151.

⁶⁷ Richard B. Miller, *Casuistry and Modern Ethics: A Poetics of Practical Reasoning* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996)

up on the possibility of at least some universal judgments, supported the endeavor of post-Vatican II moral theology to take a more historical approach to moral norms,⁶⁸ so necessary to the increasingly urgent global advocacy of human rights, women's rights, poverty reduction, ending violent conflicts, and protecting the environment.

Illustrating the confluence of Gustafson's theological grounding, contextual sensitivity, and complex moral epistemology, William C. Spohn envisions discernment within a community formed by Scripture, Jesus, discipleship, and Eucharist. Spohn's ethics of spirituality, virtue and character draws on the Catholic analogical imagination to move from narratives like the parable of the Good Samaritan to appropriate dispositions, practices, and actions, all in the context of personal and communal relation to God in Christ. He reflects Gustafson's interest in the particularity of community, and the essential connection of Christian ethics to religious experience and to theology. Spohn redirects the attention of the moral theologian from specific acts and norms to "attitudes, habits, and relationships that are conformed to the Gospel story of Jesus."⁶⁹ Finally, Dean Brackley displays an Ignatian spirituality to sustain human solidarity with oppressed peoples, and "discernment" of appropriate responses to their reality.⁷⁰

Sexual and Medical Ethics

As already indicated, Catholic Gustafson students link "personal" moral decisions with social context and social justice, as well as with theological convictions and contributions from nontheological disciplines. In sexual and medical ethics, this yields an approach that is more flexible than received Roman Catholic teaching.

Margaret Farley is a Catholic feminist, who, as a Yale faculty member, has consistently participated in ecumenical theology and in interdisciplinary exchanges. Farley has published articles and chapters addressing sexual and bioethical issues from a feminist standpoint, in debate with teachings of the Roman Catholic magisterium, and gradually incorporating an ever-larger place for considerations of global justice and ethical discourse across religions and cultures. Her early book, *Personal Commitments*, sensitively probed the quality of different sorts of committed interpersonal relationships, to

⁶⁸ David Hollenbach, S.J., "Tradition, Historicity, Truth in Theological Ethics," in *Problems and Prospects*, 60-75.

⁶⁹ William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1999), 186.

⁷⁰ Dean Brackley, S.J., *The Call to Discernment: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2004).

build an inductive ethic of freedom and responsibility.⁷¹ Her later work, *Just Love*, advances an ethics of sex, relationships, marriage, and family that includes advocacy for women's integrity, equality and rights worldwide.⁷² Similar emphases characterize my own work,⁷³ as well as that of Cristiana Traina. Traina, in addition to *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law*, has published several experientially-grounded reflections on sex, marriage, gender, and parenthood.⁷⁴

An exception to this trend is Richard Roach, S.J., who defends *Humanae vitae*.⁷⁵ More representatively, John Gallagher shows that medical ethics can no longer be reduced to decisions involving doctors and individual patients; health care has an institutional dimension that must also be the subject of Christian virtues and of justice.⁷⁶ In a variety of writings on care of the dying, James F. Bresnahan, S.J., focuses not so much on the morality or immorality of specific interventions, as on spirituality and compassion in the arts of dying and care for the dying, and on the legal and institutional policies that support such virtues.⁷⁷ This broader perspective also takes Catholics into ecumenical theological ethics, in conversation with both Catholic and non-Catholic theologians, past and present.

Social Ethics

Many Gustafson students have been active social and political ethicists, as already evident in discussions of interdisciplinarity, theology, practical reason, and sexual and medical ethics. As social ethi-

⁷¹ Margaret A. Farley, *Personal Commitments: Beginning, Keeping, Changing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

⁷² Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York and London: Continuum, 2006). On the importance of attention to the "concrete reality of persons," see also *Compassionate Respect: A Feminist Approach to Medical Ethics and Other Questions* (New York and Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 2002).

⁷³ See *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (Minneapolis and New York: Fortress and Paulist Presses, 1985); *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and *Theological Bioethics: Participation, Justice and Change* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005).

⁷⁴ See for instance Cristina L. H. Traina, *Erotic Attunement: Parenthood and the Ethics of Sensuality between Unequals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁷⁵ Richard R. Roach, S.J., "From What are They Dissenting?," *International Journal of Natural Family Planning* 4.4 (1982): 338.

⁷⁶ John A. Gallagher, "Like Shining from Shook Foil: A 'Virtuous Organization' is Prepared to Treat both the Body and the Soul," *Health Progress* 87.6 (November-December 2006): 18-23.

⁷⁷ James F. Bresnahan, S.J., "Compassionate Response to Human Suffering: A Neglected Issue in Health Care Reform," *Kansas Journal of Law and Public Policy* 3.1 (1993): 23-30; "The Catholic Art of Dying," *America* 173.14 (November 4, 1995): 12-16; "Palliative Care or Assisted Suicide?," *America* 178.8 (March 14, 1998): 16-21.

cists specifically, Gustafson students are likely to highlight the biblical and theological bases of their proposals, to regard the social sciences as important interlocutors, and to give personal and structural sin their due.

David Hollenbach's *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* stands out as a major restatement of Catholic social tradition for a pluralistic global age.⁷⁸ In *Comprehending Power in Christian Social Ethics*, Christine Firer Hinze works with Catholic and Protestant theologians (Reinhold Niebuhr, Maritain, Tillich and King) and social theorists (Weber, Marx, Arendt, Foucault, and Giddens) to assess how and why power can be enabling and collaborative, yet also ordering and hierarchical.⁷⁹ She frequently brings a gender lens to Catholic social teaching, economics, class, and poverty.⁸⁰

Richard Miller examines Protestant and Catholic versions of just war theory and pacifism, giving extensive attention to social setting and theological grounding.⁸¹ My book on just war and pacifism links positions on war and peace held by figures from the early Church through the twentieth century to their biblical and theological convictions—using many figures from those seminars to do so.⁸² William J. Buckley explores the causes of and possible remedies for civil conflict, taking into account cultural and ideological factors.⁸³ In his recent *Terror, Religion and Liberal Thought*, Miller joins Augustine, Catholic social teaching, contemporary liberal philosophy, interna-

⁷⁸ David Hollenbach, S.J., *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁷⁹ Christine Firer Hinze, *Comprehending Power in Christian Social Ethics* (New York and Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁸⁰ Christine Firer Hinze, "Women, Families, and the Legacy of *Laborem Exercens*: An Unfinished Agenda," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 6.1 (2009): 63-92; "U.S. Catholic Social Thought, Gender, and Economic Livelihood," *Theological Studies*, 66.3 (September 2005): 568-91; "What is 'Enough?' Catholic Social Teaching, Consumption, and an Ethic of Sufficiency," in *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life*, ed. by William Schweiker & Charles Mathewes (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 162-188.

⁸¹ Richard B. Miller, *Interpretations of Conflict: Ethics, Pacifism, and the Just-War Tradition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁸² Lisa Sowle Cahill, *'Love Your Enemies': Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994). For expansion into peacemaking or peacebuilding theory and practices, see Lisa Sowle Cahill, "A Theology for Peacebuilding," in *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis*, ed. by Robert J. Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby, and Gerard F. Powers (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 300-31.

⁸³ William J. Buckley, ed., *Kosovo: Contending Voices on Balkan Interventions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000).

tional law and Islamic scholarship to discuss human rights, war, terrorism, democracy and toleration.⁸⁴

CONCLUSION

The debt of his students to Gustafson shows in range of sources; theological interests; complexity of reflective judgments; and determination to give reasons for condemning certain decisions or practices, while respecting the particularity of traditions, along with Christian participation in public, multicultural politics. Gustafson's Catholic students respect his rendition of what it means to worship God above all else. They embrace his intellectual and spiritual integrity, and his theocentric faith. They know that "moral theology" cannot be and should not pretend to be divorced from prior theological commitments and choices; theological foundations must be owned and explicated. They find salutary Gustafson's skepticism regarding the permanent validity of theological construals, church structures, and authoritative teachings; as well as his conviction of the usefulness of empirical evidence (whether scientific or more broadly experiential) in holding Christian truth claims to account.

Yet many diverge from both from their mentor's vision of the Almighty, and from his estimate of the prospects for social change. Nevertheless, Catholics true to Gustafson's insistence that theological-ethical claims be backed by good reasons, not just by theologies detached from the real conditions of life, take seriously the problems posed when "the facts" are juxtaposed to Christian expectations of human sanctification and political transformation.

In sum, the responsibility of the Christian ethicist to engage seriously with the Bible and theological tradition, with the experience of God in historical Christian communities, with sources of piety and knowledge beyond Christianity, with the entire natural world, and with the challenge to shape more just social and political life, are hallmarks of the legacy bestowed by James Gustafson on his Catholic students. **M**

⁸⁴ Richard B. Miller, *Terror, Religion and Liberal Thought* (New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2010). See also *Interpretations of Conflict: Ethics, Pacifism and the Just War Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).