

church, but that is certainly a risk worth taking today. A knowledgeable and free congregation of Christians is presumably the desired ideal.

NOTES

1. Michael Grimmit, *Religious Education and Human Development* (Great Waking, England: McCrimmon, 1987), p. 258.
2. See, David Leege and Joseph Gremillion, *The U.S. Parish Twenty Years after Vatican II*, Notre Dame Study of Parish Life, report #1, Notre Dame, Ind. (December 1984), pp. 1-7.
3. See, Vincent Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides, 1978).
4. Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 291.
5. George Albert Coe, *What is Christian Education?* (New York: Scribner, 1929), p. 29.
6. George Albert Coe, *A Social Theory of Religious Education* (New York: Scribner, 1920), p. 181.
7. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, trans. Ira Progoff (New York: Delta, 1957), pp. 134-135.
8. For a Protestant treatment of the sacraments in religious education, see, Robert Browning and Roy Reed, *The Sacraments in Religious Education and Liturgy* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1985).
9. Reinhold Niebuhr, "A View from the Pew," *Christian Century*, December 19, 1984, p. 1197.
10. See, James Dunning, *New Wine, New Wine Skins* (New York: Sadlier, 1981).
11. Judah Goldin, ed., *The Living Talmud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 230.
12. Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 348.
13. See, Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 87.
14. See, Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum and the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1989), chapter 8.
15. *New York Times*, August 22, 1986, p. 1.
16. *Religion in the Curriculum*, p. 36.

7

Is Religious Education Moral?

This chapter takes up the question of "moral education" which most people view as closely related to religious education. Indeed, the words "closely related" are not strong enough. In some places, moral education has been located within religious education. In other places, religious education is thought to be part of moral education. There is no agreed upon logic to discuss this relation. I do not claim to have any simple formula that will clear up this confusion. However, I think that some of the distinctions introduced earlier in this book can throw some light on moral education in its relation to religion and religious education.

It hardly needs saying that the issue of moral education is one of practical urgency. People generally uninterested in religious education perk up when the moral aspect is raised. The press, the television, experts on society, not to mention right-wing preachers, talk about a moral crisis. No one is sure that human beings on the average are more immoral today than they were in the past. But the interconnectedness of today's actions, the reverberation of an evil act across a continent can magnify the effects of moral acts. Telling people to be good or threatening them with punishment if they are not seems less and less effective, in part because there is little agreement about what "good"

means. One person's terrorist activity is another person's act of national liberation; one woman's right to choice about her pregnancy is another woman's horror at murder.

No doubt there have always been disagreements on the fine points of the law. That is why there are courts of appeal in the legal system today and why religions developed talmudic commentary and jesuitical casuistry. Our problem today seems to be more deeply rooted, a confusion about what to talk about as morality and how to talk about it. I agree with Isaiah Berlin that "one should be able to distinguish between good, bad, and downright awful," and yet that often is not happening. Allan Bloom says that when he asks college students today "What is evil?" the only response they can come up with is: "Hitler." And since Hitler was obviously an aberration, one need not pursue the question of evil.¹ The students have been taught to believe that every question has two sides, that everyone has a right to his or her opinion, and that no one should judge another's moral actions. The word that Bloom uses to describe today's college students is "nice." That may be damning with faint praise, but the students are trying to get along the best they can in a world infested with drugs, AIDS, nuclear arms, and a volatile economy under the control of no one.

When one turns from the confusion of youngsters to the expert opinion of their elders, the level of debate about morality and moral education often leaves much to be desired. Take, for example, an exchange between the then U.S. Secretary of Education and the President of Harvard University. At a Harvard symposium, Secretary William Bennett began the volley by saying that if students happened to get a good education at Harvard "it is a matter of chance." President Derek Bok said that Bennett had not noticed changes under way such as Harvard's requirement that students take courses in moral reasoning. Bennett replied that courses in moral reasoning are not the same as moral education. "That's about dilemmas, lifeboat stuff. I don't mean theory. I mean getting drugs off campus." Bennett's comments drew hisses from the audience. In response to a question from a student as to whose morality

they should be learning, Bennett said: "Most people agree on what's right or wrong."²

This exchange is unfortunately all too typical of discussions about morality and moral education. William Bennett knows that he is playing the reactionary in this debate, but he is confident that he has popular sentiment on his side. Most people think that a moral education should turn out moral people, which means not people who reason well but people whose behavior is moral. Neither Harvard nor any other school can guarantee that their graduates will be people who morally behave. Bennett can therefore punch holes in the claims of moral education, but his own conclusion that "most people agree on what's right or wrong," could suggest that there is no need to study moral issues.

THE RISE OF MORAL EDUCATION

The twentieth century has been the century of moral education. Like the term "religious education," the words "moral" and "education" had existed for centuries and sometimes found themselves next to each other. However, people did not think of "moral education" as a well-defined world within which scholars offer theories on how best to do "it" and doctoral candidates do research on whether "it" is succeeding. One emerging tradition of moral education cast the question in social terms; a second and eventually stronger tradition spoke psychological language.

Whether the emphasis was sociological or psychological, inherent to the rise of a field called moral education was a distrust of religion. The distrust has sometimes meant an attack on religion as an immoral fraud or, sometimes more benignly, a doubt about religion's continuing effectiveness as a motivator of moral actions. Certainly, from the seventeenth century onward, Western philosophers and scientists thought that morality should not be based on religion. They thought that morality could and should be derived from reason alone. Nonetheless, they acknowledged that some people are not capable of such reasoning; fortunately, for those people, wrote John Locke, "there needs no more but to read the inspired books to be instructed; all

the duties of morality lie there clear, and plain, and easy to understand."³ While a totally secular morality was still getting on its feet, the help of religion as a motivator of the masses was gratefully accepted. As Voltaire cynically phrased it: "I want my steward, tailor, and valets to believe in God; I imagine that then I'm less likely to be robbed."⁴

By the beginning of the twentieth century, it was believed that the reasonable basis of morality was stronger and that the effectiveness of religion was weaker. It was time for a strictly moral education to be launched. The tone and direction are well captured in Emile Durkheim's announcement at the beginning of his *Moral Education* in 1903: "We decided to give our children in our state-supported schools a purely secular moral education. It is essential to understand that this means an education that is not derived from revealed religion but that rests exclusively on ideas, sentiments, and practices accountable to reason only—in short, a purely rationalistic education."⁵ Later theorists of moral education, such as Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, are equally insistent on distancing themselves from "revealed religion."

I think that the project to have a distinct field of moral education is a desirable one. Moral education is not simply a subdivision of religious education; even less should it be conceived of as being under ecclesiastical or theological control. However, one does not get a divorce by merely announcing the separation. The obstacle to an autonomous moral education is not religion or religious education so much as the particular language of the discussion and its institutional control. By announcing total and immediate separation from religion, moral educators leave behind a whole area of life, and yet there is no guarantee that the assumptions of a Christian theology have been eliminated.

I was at a meeting for parents one evening at a suburban public high school. It was the first meeting to explain the moral education program being introduced in the school. The speaker gave an excellent presentation of the need for moral education, and he went over the works that would be read by the high-school students, starting with the trial of Socrates. After the talk, he asked for questions and

when the first hand went up I correctly guessed what the woman's question was: "What has this program got to do with religion?" I knew what the speaker's answer would be, but I hoped that he would agonize a bit on his feet and take the question seriously. Instead, his answer was: "None at all. This moral education has nothing to do with religion."

It seems to me that for that woman, for her sophomore son, and for everyone else in the hall, not excluding the speaker, morality and religion are always related. At least since Amos came down from the mountain denouncing injustice almost three thousand years ago, Jewish and Christian religions have been immersed in the morality of Western culture. If moral education is going to get at the real life and the whole life of the student, the existing relation of morality and religion cannot be denied. If the relation is acknowledged, then one can begin to draw some careful distinctions.

In concerns of morality—warfare, economic oppression, medical technology, abortion, and almost any moral issue one can name—religion has had a lot to do with the way the question is posed. Neither teacher nor student can step outside of that history. What they might be able to do, one case at a time, is to distinguish between religion as a presumed source of answers and religion as a rich field of experience. If one does not make such a distinction and goes down the route that Durkheim announced, the only alternative to his "revealed religion" is "a purely rationalistic education." Moral education on that basis can mean picking over the dry bones of philosophical rationalism.

Moral education and religious education deserve to be close to one another, distinguished from but related to each other. Some of the material in religious education could show up in a discussion of moral education. And religious education should have reverberations in the moral formation of people. Of course, I am not referring here to religious education and moral education as things taught to youngsters in school. Moral education and religious education are lifelong processes that involve the whole person. Both of them concern the body, the emotions, external

activity, the formation of character, and the dedication of a lifetime. Only a small part of either religious or moral education can be provided to youngsters in school.

The main task of the school in religious education is to teach religion. I think that one can best describe the school's main contribution to moral education as the teaching of ethics. The term "ethics" has a long and honorable history. It refers to a branch of philosophy in which one thinks about issues of moral practice. Students in elementary school do not need a separate course called ethics. However, as soon as a child can think about right and wrong, good and bad, it is not too early to have ethical discussions as the need arises. In schools, discussion of ethical issues may be needed within the study of history, social science, art, religion, and the rest. Like religion, ethics as a systematic course of study belongs in the later years of secondary school, college, and professional school. The push these days to introduce ethics into business, law, and medical schools would be more encouraging if the subject were not so completely neglected previous to graduate school.

The school does in fact convey some moral education, whether or not it teaches ethics in the classroom. Even more clearly than in the parallel case of religious education, schools are always acting morally or immorally. Every written and unwritten rule in the school implies an attitude toward the student's dignity and selfhood. How children line up for the bus, eat in the cafeteria, get permission to use the toilet, and get spoken to over the public address system have an effect on the student's (and the teacher's) moral sense. If the school cannot teach the student to act morally, it can at least refrain from violating the developing moral sentiments of the young person.

The school ought to be properly modest about its part in moral education. If society were to transfer the guardianship of morality from the clergy to the professors, that would at best be a small improvement. Schoolteachers do not know how students are supposed to turn out; what the teacher can do is help students to think about the differences between "the good, the bad, and the downright aw-

ful." That is not much, but in these times it can be a crucial contribution to the moral education of young people.

I find scary this statement near the beginning of Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*: "Every educational system has a moral goal that it tries to attain and that informs its curriculum. It wants to produce a certain kind of human being."⁶ The first sentence is not bad; insofar as education is a reshaping "with end," then one can say that there is always some goal at stake in every form of education. However, Bloom's conclusion in the second sentence could have frightening implications if school staffs thought that they had license "to produce a certain kind of human being."

I find more encouraging TheodoreSizer's description of the high school's modest part in moral education. Sizer says that the school's moral concern should be "decency," a term that captures the demand that human beings be treated with respect and dignity.⁷ The school's teaching of ethics is not going to make much impression in an atmosphere of indecency. The school's staff need not spend their time examining how each rule will teach a particular virtue. It is enough to clear the atmosphere of flagrant violations of decency and then let the administrators minister and the teachers teach.

About every two months, *The New York Times* headlines a story: "'X' says that we should teach values to our children." The 'X' might be anyone from the president of the United States or the pope to the local head of the school board or the latest commission on some social problem. So why does it not happen? Probably because no one knows how to do it. The phrase "teaching values" is a particularly vacuous way to address the burning moral issues of the day. Hardly anyone attacks the teaching of values because it does not actually touch any real activities in the public arena.

I say "hardly anyone" disagrees because there have been court suits brought against the "values" language of some textbooks. In one Alabama case, a book entitled *Homemaking: Skills for Everyday Living* was attacked as un-Christian for saying: "Values are personal and subjective. They vary from person to person. You will be able to understand and

get along with other people better if you keep an open mind about the value judgments they make."⁸ The right-wing Christian group that brought suit was the butt of ridicule for objecting to such passages. I think that the group was wrong in trying censorship; however, they were not wrong in being upset at such vapid advice being given to youngsters in the context of school where intelligent discussion is called for.

The passage begins with the assertion that "values are personal and subjective." One has to admit that this is usually true—by definition. Value is the standard modern word for locating ethical issues in the inner recesses of each individual's mind. It creates instantaneous tolerance, or at least the demand for tolerance, as the rest of the passage demonstrates. Morality is put beyond the realm of discussion; everybody "makes his or her value judgment" and no one can say that he or she is wrong.

What is clear about the whole passage is that it is based upon the subjective values of the textbook maker and the nineteenth-century philosophy which underlies this language. If that bias were acknowledged, perhaps there would be less of a preachy tone in such passages. Right-wing Christian groups accurately perceive that what is preached in this textbook conflicts with what they are preaching.

One cannot actually have academic instruction on values. Since they are personal and subjective, the school-teacher has nothing to examine. The verb that often accompanies the word "value" is "to clarify." In recent years students were asked to list their values and "to prioritize" them; but the teacher was warned against trying to teach values. Some of the discussion that went on in this context may have helped students to understand real moral issues. For the most part, however, debate on real problems and advocacy of one position as morally better than another were discouraged.

Ironically, the form of discourse that sneaks in with value talk is the homiletic. If people cannot intelligently advocate a moral position, they are eventually forced into preaching. While being told in textbooks that values are personal and subjective, young people are preached at

endlessly. The messages that are preached contradict one another: incitements to sex, selfishness, and greed are overlaid with pious admonitions to live like a monk. And when the sermons fail, society goes to external restraints and punishment as the final resort. Lawrence Kohlberg shocked his followers in the late 1970s when he wrote a brief essay on the fact that his moral education seemed to have little success with some youngsters.⁹ Kohlberg expressed consternation that little boys still lie and cheat. After twenty years of ridiculing religions for indoctrinating their followers, Kohlberg said a little indoctrinating might not be a bad thing.

The moral education that flees from what are supposedly the terrible tactics of religion—preaching, discipline, indoctrination—invariably ends by having to adopt some of these tactics. No major religion in human history has ever failed to notice that people lie and cheat. Neither has any religion thought that "clarifying values" is an adequate moral education. Religions do not suddenly import new rules and methods to shore up unrealistic moral techniques. Religions are nothing if not painfully aware of the moral failings of human beings and the need to confront moral deficiencies in a thoroughly realistic way.

The field of moral education is still at an early stage of development. Like religious education, it is still threatened by an illogical reduction to a course in a classroom or some particular technique. The base needs to be broader both in regard to *how* one teaches morality and also *what* constitutes morality. Moral education's headlong flight from religion cuts it off from a major source of material on both counts. For illustrating the fruitful relation that should exist between religious education and moral education, I turn to these two questions: What does the religious experience of centuries have to offer regarding *how* to teach morality? What does that same experience have to say about the *what* of moral education?

HOW TO TEACH MORALITY

Across the major religions of the world there is great diversity in their rituals and practices. And yet, what strikes

me about the manner of teaching is the remarkable similarity that one finds in these diverse systems. Not all the major religions fit perfectly the characteristics I enumerate, but all of them have some of the flavor and the general direction of this description.

1) *The Teacher*. There is, first of all, the teacher; not just a teacher hired to do a job, but the leader, the guru, the master, whose life is an inspiration. Very often there is no greater title bestowed upon the founder of a religious community than: teacher. A religion like Hinduism may not have a single, great teacher as the fount of all, but great teachers have arisen within the tradition. In some traditions, such as Judaism, teacher is just about all. Moses was the great teacher and Jewish history is the story of teachers ever since. In Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth arose as a teacher; "rabbi" is the least controversial title applied to him in the New Testament. As can happen in any religious tradition this utterly central characteristic became obscured by polemics. "To the Christian disciples of the first century the conception of Jesus as a rabbi was self-evident, to the Christians of the second century it was embarrassing, to the Christian disciples of the third century and beyond, it was obscure."¹⁰

One of the most striking things about religious teachers is that they appeal to something given in the workings of the universe. In Eastern religion, that is usually to some suprapersonal law that governs all life, such as *karma*. In the West, it is usually to God's will written in the very nature of things. Not that facts, reasoning, and demonstrations are cast aside; it is simply that the ultimate source of authority is beyond human control. The teacher is not the source of the authority; he or she is an embodiment of that authority. Without constantly calling people's attention to it, his or her person becomes an extraordinary source of inspiration to sustain people in bad times. Gorky said of Tolstoy: "As long as this man is alive, I am not alone in the world." The same thing can be said of every great religious teacher. They convince not by their arguments so much as by their presence.

2) *A Few Disciples*. The religious teacher provides moral

guidance to a small community. Seemingly in disregard of all the world's great problems waiting to be solved, the focus is on the daily life of a handful of people. A few disciples (students) gather around the master and share a way of life. One of the major studies of religious conversion describes this phenomenon as "coming to accept the opinion of one's friends." That is not bad for a sociological description of conversion. A person joins a community, participates in the activities of the group, and gradually comes to see the world in the way the community does. The teachings or doctrines are acquired more by osmosis than by indoctrination.

So-called "cults" in the United States strike terror in the hearts of rationalistic leaders. These religious groups are accused of all sorts of brainwashing techniques and coercive restraints. Although these things occasionally are used, the success of religious communities has a much simpler explanation. Intelligent and goodwilled young people, who feel themselves to be in a morally rudderless world, encounter religious groups who live with a clear, consistent, and cohesive pattern. The initial attractiveness is confirmed by just a few days of immediate experience. As many people discovered in the 1960s, the "experience of community" can be intoxicating. Of course, if one tries to live in a tightly knit community for months, years, and decades, one runs into some very bad days when one would prefer to be somewhere else.

Within a religious community, the homiletic mode is the standard form of teaching. The master or guru gives very direct instructions to the community. What modern scholars often miss, however, is that the preaching is always a secondary element. It is commentary on how to live out the way of life already being lived. The preaching is directed toward those who have already agreed to live within this covenant or brother/sisterhood. St. Paul did not address the world at large; he told the folks at Corinth or Galatia exactly how they should act—given the fact that they had already agreed to live in the Christian community.

3) *Living within a Discipline*. Religions teach morality by the imposition of rituals that at first glance have nothing to

do with morality. What do the time of rising in the morning, the food one eats, or the clothes one wears have to do with the great moral issues of the world? "Discipline" means teaching, and it is still used in the academic world today for an area of teaching. However, the modern world more often thinks of discipline as harsh restrictions or external punishment.

If one asks non-Catholic parents in urban ghettos why they send their children to Catholic schools, the most frequent reply is: discipline. Are these parents simplistic in thinking that strict rules and frequent punishment will save their children, or do these parents correctly sense that discipline as teaching is necessarily connected to discipline as a well-regulated way of life? Their thinking may be a little simplistic, but what they know with certainty is that without moral discipline, achieved in one way or another, their children will make a mess of their lives.

Often there is an unrealistic burden placed on the school and its teachers to deliver this discipline. In religion, discipline comes out of community experience and the thousand daily rituals that weave the fabric of community relations: respect, care, compassion, courtesy, gratitude, patience. Eventually the moral life may require heroic courage and magnificent love, but most religions let those moments come as they may. If one observes all the little virtues, the big ones will be there when they are called for.

Religion is regularly accused of being "legalistic" because it insists on obedience to the rules even when there seems no point to the observance beyond the rules. Liberal Christianity often sides with modern experts who think that we should act only from motives of love and that we should get rid of all rules whose usefulness to us is not obvious. But long before Freud and Jung helped to clarify this question, religions recognized that we are the seat of competing forces, that we regularly flimflam ourselves about what is good for us, and that we need routines, fixed rules of conduct, to protect us from forces that are part of us and are too strong for the center to cope with.

4) *Toward the Unity of Self and Cosmos.* Despite the prominence of rules, religions view morality as going beyond

rules of behavior. Religions move beyond obeying rules not in the sense of being concerned with motives so much as looking at the direction of human actions. The human search for a unity is played against a backdrop of a cosmic fissure. The humans will find rightness only when the universe is healed.

What dominates modern ethics are rights of the individual and equality of treatment. Religions offer a necessary reminder that human beings are not the only individuals that have rights. Each thing in the universe has some right to be itself by the fact that it exists. The word "right" is used here in a simpler, more common sense meaning than the legal concept of "right." It is right that things are, that they stand in relation to all the other things that constitute a universe. The only alternative is to think that human beings know what is right, are smart enough to know how the universe should be arranged.

Equality is the category that has become an obsession in the modern world. It is a word that best belongs in mathematics where the negation of qualitative differences (equal) is appropriate. Equality as the bearer of all moral consideration leaves much to be desired.¹¹ As directed toward all human individuals, it is a legitimate beginning; insofar as an individual is human, he or she calls forth a certain level of respect and appreciation. But the moral life is mainly one of "discriminating," that is, of perceiving differences between human beings and nonhuman beings (who deserve another kind of respect and appreciation), among the particular human beings who call forth a wide range of response depending on whether the person is parent, spouse, child, friend, stranger. Every human and nonhuman being equally deserves that we should care, but only the precise context can specify how.

The modern idea that justice is the supreme ideal and that justice means "to treat each man equally" is a terribly truncated view. The sexual bias in the phrase is no accident, but adding the word "woman" is barely an advance in this idea. The human beings have to discover their relation to everything else and to realize that we are all of a unity. Either there is cosmic unity or there are no whole

human beings. Justice, in the Hebrew Bible, is a reconciling unity; the world will be redeemed by the everyday deeds of men and women who recognize that they are a microcosm of the universe.¹² Eastern religions have their own variations on healing or reconciling; they, too, never separate the moral activity of human beings from the great drama of the cosmos.

5) *Moral Education is Lifelong.* Religions are very realistic in understanding that moral education begins at birth, if not earlier, and continues at least until the last breath. Moral education does not begin when the child is able to discuss dilemmas and clarify values. The infant's life is shaped morally by the whole physical and social environment. Piaget called the young child "pre-moral" because the child cannot yet handle certain concepts, like equality. However, moral education for young children has to do with the care they receive and the cultivation of moral sentiment.

The child's sense of unity with the nonhuman world should not be dismissed as magical. For example, some children object to eating meat on the ground that animals are not for eating. Is the child's attitude here merely primitive or could it be postmodern moral thinking? Often, a child with the barest of conceptual apparatus is capable of profound moral insight. Frederick Douglass writes in his autobiography: "I was just as well-aware of the unjust, unnatural, and murderous character of slavery when nine years old as I am now. Without appeal to books, to laws or to authorities of any kind, I knew to regard God as 'Our Father' condemned slavery as a crime."¹³

The religious reference in Douglass's statement is hardly an accident. The stark, simple clarity of the slave's perception is not likely to arise from the kind of exercise that the twentieth century has equated with moral education. There, only the bare bones of the child's capacity to compare concepts is attended to. Of course, if the whole point of moral education is to get children to see the value of equality, then the nearly exclusive concern with a logical kind of thinking may be justified. If in contrast the point is

action for a reconciling unity, then what is commonly called moral education is only one small step along the way. To Piaget's credit, he did recognize that there was a whole world of moral language that went beyond his studies of pre-teenage children. When the child discovers that equality does not govern the world, where does he or she turn? Perhaps, speculated Piaget, to a sense of morality in which terms like care and compassion are prominent.¹⁴

One of the clearest points of conflict between religion and modern theories of moral education is the question of "backsliding." According to Kohlberg's theory, progress is "hierarchical, sequential, invariant." One needs elaborate explanations for any seeming regression. Once gained, the "higher" stage is secure forever. If one can reason at stage four, one will not return to stage two. The accuracy of this claim only reveals the gap between what passes for progress in modern moral education and the contention of religions, supplemented by overwhelming evidence, that people sometimes regress morally. People whose lives had been admirable become corrupted by power or money or pride.

Religions constantly warn that the greatest enemy of the moral life is complacency with one's virtuous achievement. Maimonides speaks for more than just the Jewish tradition when he says; "Let him not be overconfident and say: 'This virtue I have already mastered successfully, it can never leave me.' There is always the possibility it may."¹⁵

What should be particularly noted here is not merely the need for continuing improvement. There is a bigger paradox that is captured in religion and is embodied in the world's great dramatic tragedies. The great person can be brought down by a moral flaw. The most virtuous are the most in danger of moral disaster. "The more excellent the man," writes Thomas Aquinas, "the graver the sin."¹⁶ The moral life is not a question of getting better ideas; it requires a kind of "conversion," a reversal of the attempt to make ourselves better, an acknowledgement that we are permanently vulnerable to self-deception, which is why we need teacher, community, discipline, and acts of reconciliation.

THE SEARCH FOR WHAT TO TEACH

I turn to the second of my questions: *What is the morality that needs teaching?* In describing *how* religions teach morality I have already covered much of the ground. That is because part of their effectiveness in how they teach is that they never entirely separate the how and the what.

In summing up this what of morality according to religion, my interest is not to convince people to accept religion. Rather, it is to call attention to the moral substance that most religions converge upon. Moral education in fleeing from religion cuts itself off from its roots in an everyday sense of what is right and wrong. I would not endorse without reservation the William Bennett statement at the beginning of this chapter: "Most people agree on what's right or wrong." The statement can easily be interpreted in an anti-intellectual way ("there is no need to think about these things") or as a reduction of morality to public opinion polls ("whatever most people agree upon, that's what is right"). Religion can unwittingly give support to the first of these interpretations with its own brand of anti-intellectualism. But religions would be extremely suspicious of the second, that is, public opinion polls on morality. A majority of people in one place at one time can be dead wrong about morality. Lynch mobs have a total consensus; voting majorities in some countries can be, in the longer sight of history, morally obtuse.

Religions, nonetheless, do lend support to the belief that "most people agree on what's right or wrong." At least, if people could get in touch with a real self, if they could penetrate the shell of illusion they have built, they would find deep down a sense of good and evil. People feel guilty, and rightly so, when they fail to live according to their sense of what is right and good. To be conscious is to have a conscience, even if its workings can be almost entirely blocked out of mind.

Philosophers, such as John Locke who thought that religion is morality for the masses, were not far off. Philosophers understandably develop complicated theories of philosophical ethics. But morality, like religion, lives in the

practice of ordinary people. The foundation of morality has to be uncomplicated and immediate. The fragile human being, vulnerable to being crippled or annihilated at any moment, works from primitive signals of good and evil. "The food smells rotten, don't eat; the stove is hot, don't touch; the night is cold, bundle up." Whatever the meaning of "morally good," it cannot be completely at odds with these basic perceptions.

In the attempt to establish rational certainty, modern philosophy has carried out a dangerous escape from the organic world. The body is disparaged, an attitude, ironically enough, that is often attributed to religion. Although all religions have a disciplining of the body, the aim is usually to bring the warring members under governance from the center. That is different from neglecting the body. "If your eye lead you into sin, pluck it out," is a frightening saying which only the demented take literally. It is a far cry from "treat each man equally," something that lacks all moral passion and yet is still preachy. Treating each man equally is best analyzed and applied if the "man" is just an abstract agent of thought and choice.

Timothy Cooney's *Telling Right from Wrong* is a novel attempt to cut through modern ethics to the ultimate basis of morality. If the author were not so bitterly antireligious, he could have devised a stronger case. I do think, however, that his criticism of the basis of modern ethics is persuasive. The seventeenth-century philosopher, Descartes, set much of the direction for what followed in history by his method of systematic doubt. He came finally to his one certainty: "I think, therefore I am." Cooney suggests that if Descartes had stayed at his task for six or seven more hours on that day in 1620, he might have discovered a different truth: "What I know most certain is: I'm hungry." And then the second truth would have been: "I can satisfy the hunger with food."¹⁷ Cooney argues that good and bad do not arise later in the philosophic quest. The good is implicit in our first judgment about to be and not to be. The ability to satisfy at least some of our desires is our most certain link between mind and world.

Most of contemporary ethics goes through the imposing

figure of Immanuel Kant. Picking up the pieces from Descartes and his more immediate predecessors, Kant tried, as he put it, to establish a rational basis for the pious beliefs of his ancestors. Justice as equality became the secularized survival of Christianity; the golden rule reappeared as Kant's categorical imperative: Act in such a way that your action could be a universal guide of conduct. None of the sayings of Jesus is more often quoted than the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It is one of the least original lines of Jesus, found in most religions. The Jewish version, attributed to Hillel is cast in a negative formula: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor."¹⁸

Placed at the very heart of a religious tradition, this rule of mutuality can be a helpful summary of the moral life. But like sayings out of the fourth gospel ("love one another") this golden rule can be a vapid formalism. Kant was still supported by the Christian inheritance that kept men and women at their ordinary tasks under the vault of heaven. Nietzsche rightly called Kant "the great delayer," the one who temporarily obscured the fact that the substance of moral thinking was no longer there. Given the growing confusion about what was good "in the nature of things," Kant simply bailed out and located the good in the human capacity to choose, or more exactly in the capacity to make things good by choosing. "It is impossible," writes Kant, "to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a good will."¹⁹

This reduction of the good to the narrow confines of the human will is the amazing principle on which so much of philosophical ethics and moral education is erected. In Kohlberg's dilemmas it does not matter whether you think something is good or bad; what counts is your procedure for getting there. The seemingly neutral procedures are not exactly neutral in regard to what is judged to be a higher morality. Formal principles that lead to equality rank above any attempt to root morality in physical need, familial affection, or ecstatic delight.

The legacy that Kant left us is the long list of dichot-

omies that patter across the pages of ethics books: is versus ought, fact versus value, description versus prescription. Underneath these commonly cited oppositions is the less evident one: the human will versus an abstraction called "nature." There is no bridge for connecting these separate pieces, which is not to say that one must be content with them. It is constantly intoned that "you cannot derive an ought from an is"; but one need not try to do so if one's beginning point is not bare fact. A meal is neither a fact nor a value; it is a human good. So is a symphony, a mother's smile, a warm house on a cold evening. As for knowing what we ought not to do, murder, rape, or torture are not facts, they are recognizable evils.²⁰

WHAT THE RELIGIONS TEACH

I come, then, to what I think is the ultimate foundation of morality from a religious view. As in *how* to teach, there is a remarkable convergence on *what* to teach, despite the great variations across religious traditions. There is a fundamental difference between religions, and that difference shows up almost immediately. Nonetheless, I venture to offer that most, if not all, of the world's religious traditions testify to the belief: "What is unnatural is immoral."

This moral statement is appropriately in the negative. Religions, despite the arrogance of some of their spokespersons, do not have a plan for how the universe should be arranged. They are much better at saying how we should not act. Not that religions are morally negative. As religions they are generally positive, celebrating what exists and praising what is good. But when it comes to moral *statements*, the clearest thing they say is: Don't destroy it. You don't own the world's goods, so pass them on unscathed.

Here is where the division of East and West quickly arises. While they agree on the immorality of destroying the texture of life on earth, they disagree about the efforts to transform the world, to alter fundamentally the relation of human animals to the rest of the cycle of living beings. The Eastern emphasis has been on conformity with nature.

The traditions of China, India, and Japan differ, but on this point they stand together in contrast to the West.

In Western culture, there developed an alternative to either "living in conformity with nature" or "acting unnaturally." There is a realm of the non-natural, the transforming of the natural that can be good if it does not involve the contortion, violation, and destruction that the term "unnatural" connotes. Can anyone be sure of the difference between the unnatural and the transformation of the natural? As individuals we can be blind to the reverberations of our actions. For example, it is difficult to believe that a can of hairspray is destructive of the ozone layer, which is indispensable to life on earth. What seems to be a harmless activity may in time be revealed as contrary to nature; conversely, what has in the past been thought to be contrary to nature is often revealed as an imaginative variation on human possibilities. Polluting a river is surely an unnatural act, even if our moral vocabulary lags behind. In contrast, homosexual love, it seems clear today, is a variation within the human condition and not something "contrary to nature."

There will always be disagreement about the limits of human action vis-à-vis the nonhuman world. At one end of the spectrum is the Jain monk who, based on the desire to avoid all harm and killing, refrains as far as possible from moving, digging, lighting, and bathing. The Jains offer dramatic reminder to the rest of us; but short of us all becoming such monks, we must try to refrain from adding violence; after that, we can try to reduce violence by rechanneling the passions that lead to violence.²¹

The terms "natural/unnatural" used here do not refer to the abstraction "nature" that has been pitted against "man in modern science and technology." Men thought they were discovering the "laws of nature," scientific rules of activity for everything in the universe. This belief gave rise to a language whereby "man" is outside nature, defying nature; human activity was proclaimed to be unnatural. David Hume in the eighteenth century can say: "If I turn aside a stone which is falling upon my head, I disturb the course of nature."²² Even at present, our language

reflects this peculiar arrogance of thinking one knows enough about G-d and has sufficient power to interfere with some supposed plan of the universe.

Joseph Fletcher, in pushing a medical ethic that does not "leave things in God's hands," writes: "For the fact is that medicine itself is an interference with nature. It freely cooperates with or counteracts and foils nature to fulfill humanly chosen ends."²³ Contemporary medicine is painfully learning the lesson that it cannot "counteract or foil nature for humanly chosen ends." The trap here is the assumption that if one does not fight nature, then one must submit. But this warrior image is built on the huge fiction of Hume's "laws of nature." There are a lot of other images for the human being gently responding to all the other beings on earth and to the earth itself.

Religions have little to say about "the laws of nature." They have a lot to say about the law of natures, the respect due to each organism in its brief lifespan. Each nature—including each human nature—is born, grows, declines, and dies. Its nature is to occupy some place in a texture of life, whose complexity outstrips every human imagination. There are scientific facts to be discovered so we will know what helps and hinders each of the natures. But the search for factual information needs the context of a morality grounded in a religious appreciation of particular and concrete reality: this snowflake, that goldfish, these children who are my offspring, those friends from my childhood.

One of the great religious figures of Western history is Francis of Assisi, the unofficial patron saint of ecology. Those who think of Francis as a sentimental singer of hymns are not familiar with the harsh discipline that goes along with his words of love. Furthermore, as Chesterton notes in his lively biography of Francis, "He did not call nature his mother; he called a particular donkey his brother and a particular sparrow his sister."²⁴ A religious morality is not based on a love of nature but on a care for natures, for each organism in its uniqueness. That is the human vocation, one that cannot be abandoned in the name of an egalitarianism of the species.

In the ecological crisis that is upon us, Christianity (or

the abstraction "Judeo-Christian" tradition) is regularly thrashed for being the cause of our ecological problems.²⁵ Jewish and Christian religions do have to bear partial responsibility for the ecological mess. Christianity, in particular, did prepare the way for the ecological problem of recent times. But one should note that the ecological problem surfaced as Christianity's power receded. In the Christian scheme of things, "man" was at the center of creation, receiving power from G-d above. Unfortunately, it was all too easy for modern philosophy and science to take over this image and simply replace "G-d" with "man." If Christianity had resisted a sex-biased language, the relation of men, women, and nonhumans would have been imagined differently. The modern world could not then have simply replaced "G-d" with "man." I think that it is unlikely and perhaps undesirable that ecologists will start talking about "god." But ecologists badly need to rediscover the distinctive nature of human responsibility which Jews, Christians, and other religious people have understood. If writers in ecology were not so harshly anti-Christian, they might have a more imaginative language to work with.

Christian and Jewish religions do in fact recognize a superiority to human life; the human beings, as far as we know, are the only morally responsible earthlings. The Book of Genesis places the man and woman in the middle of a garden with plants and animals. The human vocation is "to dress it and keep it." The man and woman have to listen to everything else and then respond according to their best lights. At the minimum they should not destroy the world; at best, the man and woman might gently transform some things for the better. The humans own no power of their own; they have only an extraordinary capacity to receive. The human is the teachable animal who starts from near zero.

It is constantly said that the ecological problem is caused by "anthropocentrism," a result of Judaism and Christianity exalting the human.²⁶ But the ecological crisis is caused by an image that puts man on top; this is a fundamentally different image from one of man and woman at the center. The worst disease one can have is one in which the name of the cure is given to the disease. One cannot even begin to

look for the answer. The only way to get "man" from the top is to put the *anthropos* at the center. What is assumed to be the answer—an equality of species—is an implicit evasion of human responsibility. The humans have to accept their burden of superiority; when it comes to responsibility, the humans are the greatest.

There is a "human community" that has its own distinctive relations; it is from this moral community that human beings can respond to the organic relations of the biotic system.²⁷ Each organism has its right to exist, its condition and length of life being fairly well set within an order of natures. There are species such as dolphins and chimps where each member has its own individuality. There are species such as cockroaches and mosquitoes where individual life is barely discernible. In all cases, the humans have the vocation not to destroy the earth, including species that seem disagreeable. If one does not romanticize nature and if one recognizes that natures compete with one another, even eat one another, then human action can be seen to have some leeway. The human vocation includes competing and sometimes killing. To bathe, to walk across the grass, to breathe is to be a killer. The humans also have to eat, not necessarily steak, but something that has lived.

Religions here are simply realistic although they often prescribe rituals to restrain the killing of nonhuman animals. If humans do take the life of an animal, it should be done with a minimum of pain and a maximum of gratitude. This is a dying/rebirthing universe; we cannot spend our moral passion trying to defend the life of every individual in every species. Better to stand against flagrant violations such as insecticides that destroy the cycles of life. Humans have to accept with gratitude and a tinge of guilt the power to transform and, therefore, to kill on a wider scale than any other species. "In the case of food, literally, and in the case of much else metaphorically, we die into one another's lives and live one another's deaths."²⁸

A MORALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN

One final note that links ecology, religion, and moral education. I noted above that much of ecological literature

is still oblivious of its sex-biased language: man and nature. In the dichotomy of man/nature, women tended to get placed on the side of nature, that is, with the organic, the passive, the hidden interior. Man is conceived of as being just the opposite: the rational agent, who "makes decisions," who, among other things, is likely to elaborate a system of ethics. However, the moral life as a whole, especially when this is identified with sentiments and ideals, has usually been associated with women.

This split along gender lines is an unhealthy one. Christianity did not cause but neither did it heal this split. Nor has twentieth-century moral education really faced the issue. "Moral education" has almost always been in reality a male ethics with no attention to the moral formation of young children and with a bias against women. The person best known for blowing the whistle on this bias is Carol Gilligan who began in the 1970s to analyze the gender bias in Kohlberg's scale of moral development. I think it is doubtful, however, that Gilligan's own concepts, such as justice and responsibility, get free of the philosophical tradition she is trying to criticize.²⁹

There is another basis of radical criticism rooted in nineteenth-century romanticism, a body of material brilliantly explored in Marilyn Massey's *Feminine Soul*.³⁰ Although this tradition has its inbuilt distortions—mostly writings by men about women—it is nonetheless about *moral education*, not just ethical systems. It deals with passion, blood, bodiliness, emotion, protest, care, family, and all the other elements in living and dying morally. And, as one could probably guess, it is very much rooted in religion; more exactly, it springs from a radically reformed tradition in which G-d is imagined as feminine.

One should retain a little suspicion of German philosophers waxing romantically about their mother's religion. Nonetheless, buried deep in writers such as Pestalozzi is a way to think about moral education that does not prematurely divide morality and religion, reason and emotion, method and content. Pestalozzi provides a far more convincing picture than does Kant of the origin of moral duty; it takes its beginning from "the first faint shadow of the

feeling that it is not right to rage against the loving mother, the faint shadow of the feeling that the mother is not in the world altogether for his sake . . . the feeling that he himself is not in the world for his own sake only."³¹

Moral education ought to be a distinct field of its own. It should not be dictated to by any religion or by religious officials. But religion and morality have had and continue to have an intimate connection, so intimate that any simple division of territory is impossible. One thing religions have always been is practical. They have sometimes been morally obtuse but they know where the moral question is: in the bodily activities of a human community in an earthly setting. Moral education's attempt to cut all ties with all religion is suicidal. It cuts itself off from most of the practical side of morality, leaving moral education to be the ethical discussion of hypothetical dilemmas or the clarifying of subjective viewpoints. Moral education needs religious education neither as lord nor servant but as thoughtful colleague.

NOTES

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3. John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958).
4. Albert Plé, *Duty or Pleasure?* (New York: Paragon, 1986), p. 60.
5. Emile Durkheim, *Moral Education* (New York, Free Press, 1961), p. 3.
6. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, p. 26.
7. Theodore Sizer, *Horace's Compromise* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), pp. 120-130.
8. *The New York Times*, October 19, 1986. The case is *Smith v. Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County*. For commentaries on the case, see, *Religion and Public Education* 14 (Spring, 1987), pp. 123-144.
9. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Moral Education Reappraised," *The Humanist* 38 (November, 1978), pp. 13-15.
10. Jaroslov Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 17.
11. See, Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York, Basic Books, 1983).
12. See, Walter Brueggemann, "Voices of the Night - Against Justice," in *To Act Justly, Live Tenderly, Walk Humbly* (New York, Paulist, 1986), pp. 5-28.

13. Thomas Webber, *Deep Like the River* (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 80.
14. Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (New York, Collier, 1962), p. 323.
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16. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, 73, 10.
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19. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (New York: Harper, 1963), p. 1.
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21. See, Christopher Chapple, "Noninjury to Animals: Jaina and Buddhist Perspectives," in *Animal Sacrifices: Religious Perspectives on the Use of Animals in Science* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), pp. 215-217.
22. David Hume, *Ethical Writings*, as cited in James Rachels, *The End of Life* (New York: Oxford, 1986), p. 163.
23. Joseph Fletcher, in *Voluntary Euthanasia* (London: Humanities Press, 1986), p. 66.
24. G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image, 1957), p. 87.
25. See, Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 115.
26. See, Richard Watson, "A Critique of Anti-Anthropocentric Biocentrism," *Environmental Ethics* 5 (Fall, 1983).
27. Cora Diamond, "Eating Meat and Eating People," *Philosophy* 53 (1978), pp. 465-479; Jim Cheney, "Eco-feminism and Deep Ecology," *Environmental Ethics* 9 (Summer, 1987), pp. 115-146.
28. Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Random House, 1983).
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30. Marilyn Massey, *Feminine Soul* (Boston: Beacon, 1985).
31. As quoted in *ibid.*, p. 78.

Religious Education Profession

The title of this chapter is deliberately ambiguous. I wish to deal with a two-way relation between religious education and profession. The more obvious of the two issues here is: In what sense is religious education a profession? But from the opposite direction the question can be asked: How might the idea of profession be thought through with the aid of religious education?

The title "Religious Education Profession" is a parallel to the title of one of my books: *Religious Education Development*. In that book I explored a similar two-way relation. Religious education has to understand and use the idea of development if it is to engage in serious dialogue with the contemporary culture. I also argued, however, that development needs both religious and educational meaning if it is not to self-destruct. The reciprocity of the relation does not doom the discussion to being a closed circle. Development has more than its religious and educational meaning, and religious education is more than a discussion of development. The reciprocal relation could strengthen both development and religious education. I think that something very similar can be said about religious education and profession. Both development and profession are examples of