THE REASONING HEART: AN AMERICAN APPROACH TO CHRISTIAN DISCERNMENT

WILLIAM C. SPOHN, S.J.
Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley

MAKING MORAL decisions is as common an experience as walking and as difficult to analyze. Physiologists despair of providing a full description of the interplay of nerve, muscle, tendon, and bone that comprises walking. Moral philosophers rarely attempt to delineate the processes which lead to moral decisions. Fortunately, most people manage both operations with some degree of success despite the lack of a descriptive rationale. However, rapid cultural change and social instability can confuse moral decision-making just as a slight malfunction of the inner ear can ruin a person's balance. In such periods of confusion greater attention needs to be given to examining the actual practice of moral agents.

"Discernment" plays a central role in making moral decisions. It is the skill of moral evaluation in the concrete. It employs symbolic and affective criteria to accomplish this evaluation. When taken in a religious context, discernment connotes a graced ability to detect what is the appropriate response to the invitation of God. It goes beyond the question "Is this action morally right?" to the more personal question of appropriateness: "Is this action consistent with who I am and want to become? What sort of person does this type of action?" Abstractions are less helpful here than the resources of memory and imagination.[1]

Moral philosophers and theologians do not usually consider the processes of discernment, the use of symbols and affectivity to find the personally fitting course of action. They concentrate on justification of decisions rather than on their initial formulation. It is doubtless important to give publicly intelligible reasons for what we have decided; but it

EDITOR'S NOTE.—This is the second in a series of articles in philosophical theology by the John Courtney Murray Group. The central theme of the series is the development of an inculturated theology for the U.S. through the retrieval, in a theological context, of classical North American Philosophy. The first article, by Donald L. Gelpi, S.J., "Conversion: The Challenge of Contemporary Charismatic Piety," appeared in December 1982. The rest will follow in successive issues.

[1] "'Discernment' seems to be appropriate for pointing to the ability to distinguish the important from the unimportant information and the insightful interpretations from the uninsightful. It refers to the ability to perceive relationships between aspects of the information that enables one to see how it all fits together, or how it cannot fit together. It refers to the ability to suggest inferences that can be drawn from the information, and thus to an imaginative capacity" (James M. Gustafson, *Theology and Christian Ethics* [Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1974] 104).

would be misleading to imply that we must make our decisions in the same logical way that we justify them. Moral theologians have often used the practical syllogism in framing their arguments: moral principle was applied to relevant case to yield a moral conclusion about action. However, do we actually *make* our decisions by the practical syllogism? An exclusively rational moral agent might do so, but ordinary mortals perceive and evaluate their situation in a more complex fashion.

In this discussion I will refer to this neglected aspect of moral experience by the term "the reasoning heart." If Pascal was correct in assigning the heart its own distinctive reasons, then we should determine the moral capacities of memory and imagination. The "heart" refers to the agent as engaged, as a being of vision and feeling. In biblical morality it is the seat of affectivity and virtuous qualities. The heart refers to the moral agent in his or her particularity, as a definite character with a specific sense of identity and set of dispositions. Discernment is precisely this reasoning of the heart.

Discernment should not be set in opposition to the "reasoning head," to abstract reasoning with general moral principles. We need not be as pessimistic as Pascal that reason is oblivious to the reasons of the heart. The concrete judgments of discernment complement these general moral considerations. Discernment operates within the boundaries set by general principles of justice, honesty, and the like. Discernment attends to the particular situation, illuminating its meaning for this agent and indicating what response is appropriate. It makes *judgments of affectivity* which are based upon central convictions of the person's character. These are open to their own kind of scrutiny. It is a different scrutiny from the formal logic which tests out the general judgments of morality which we will call *judgments of rationality*. Just because discernment is personal does not imply that it is private: the aesthetic judgments of affectivity are accountable to symbolic and affective criteria which are derived from public traditions.

Situation ethics and intuitionism make the mistake of opposing concrete judgments of affectivity to general norms of morality. Judgments of rationality are necessary in morality to set the boundary conditions for action and to provide reasons for conduct which are publicly intelligible. Training in sound moral reasoning can help the agent detect logical and unwarranted exceptions to norms. However, another set of skills is necessary to become a discerning person. This article will argue that discernment can be scrutinized by attending to the central symbols which shape self-understanding and to the dominant affective convictions which dispose the self to action. The Christian tradition offers certain normative symbols and patterns to affectivity which can serve as criteria for Christian discernment. These symbols and affections are correlated

with the fundamental religious convictions about God and Jesus Christ. Therefore, while discernment is a personal skill like prudence, it need not be strictly private but should also be accountable to the public convictions of the Christian tradition.[2]

Karl Rahner has provided one of the most widely accepted accounts of Christian discernment. He analyzes the Spirtual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola to determine how concrete courses of action can have a religious significance, an indication of divine calling. In subsequent applications Rahner suggests that Christian discernment may be at the core of the assent of faith and should become central to the pastoral task of moral theology. He proposes training the laity in an "existential ethics" which can perceive God's invitations in the concrete situations of politics and economy in order to supplement the traditional "essential ethics" of natural law.[3]

However, Rahner has not given sufficient attention to the role of religious symbols and affectivity in guiding sound discernment. This article will argue that a more adequate account of Christian discernment may be derived from American theologians, particularly Jonathan Edwards and H. Richard Niebuhr. They provide a richer analysis of the moral agent, extend discernment to a critical reading of the signs of the times, and also incorporate biblical material into the act of discernment more adequately than does Rahner. All three theologians suppose that God is active in history and enters the experience of men and women. God's intentions for the world and individuals are not only to be found in the general structures of creation and universal moral principles. For the Christian the moral question "What ought I to do?" needs to be preceded by a more fundamental question: "What is God enabling and requiring me to do?" To answer the question, the Christian must always engage in serious discernment.[4]

SYMBOLIC CRITERIA FOR DISCERNMENT

The first criteria for discernment are the symbols which guide its evaluation of the concrete situation. Judgments of affectivity, the conclusions of the reasoning heart, are felt to be appropriate both to who I am

[2] See Louise M. Des Marais, *Signs of Glory: Making Christian Choices* (Denville, N.J.: Dimension, 1975).

[3] Cf. Karl Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964) chap. 3, "The Logic of Concrete Individual Knowledge in Ignatius Loyola"; *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (tr. Louis J. Puhl; Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1963); Karl Rahner, "On the Question of a Formal Existential Ethics," *Theological Investigations* (hereafter *TI*) 2 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1963).

[4] "Theologically, it might be said that God is enabling men to discern what God is enabling men to do; but the locus for discernment is in the self as it relates beliefs about the God in whom it trusts to the situation in which it acts" (Gustafson, *Theology* 115).

and what I am responding to. Karl Rahner tests possible responses against a basic sense of the self. Niebuhr clarifies this by analyzing the basic symbols which shape the individual's self-understanding and the symbols the agent uses to interpret the situation. While Rahner analyzes the moment of individual consciousness to discover the structure of discernment, Niebuhr brings the history of the person to bear on the process, thus utilizing the symbolic resources of imagination, memory, and the Christian tradition.

Rahner notes that traditional spirituality recognized that Christians can receive particular calls from God, vocations which are not simply the application of general moral norms and values. These are not only calls to a particular state in life, such as marriage or ordination, but also to specific courses of action. Traditional moral theology had difficulty in explaining the serious sense of obligation which accompanied these vocations. How could one person be obliged to do something when another individual faced with the same choice would experience no moral obligation at all?

In these vocation experiences the will of God is not discovered by appealing to general moral principles. In fact, these material norms of "essential ethics" are presupposed. An "existential ethics" which will examine the formal structure of vocation experiences to test their authenticity must complement essential ethics.

Most people come to serious decisions in a manner that is quite similar to the ordinary process of discernment in the Spiritual Exercises.

> In such decisions a man thinks things over for a long time. Consequently in every case he will probably make his decisions through a fundamental global awareness of himself actually present and making itself felt in him during this space of time, and through a feeling of the harmony or disharmony of the object of choice with this fundamental feeling he has about himself. He will not only nor ultimately make his decision by a rational analysis but by whether he feels that something "suits him" or not. And this feeling will be judged by whether the matter pleases, delights, brings peace and satisfaction.[5]

Rahner has outlined the formal structure of the experience of discernment; the options facing the person are tested against the global awareness of the self. The criteria used are not logical but aesthetic, because peace, radical satisfaction, and delight are the signs which determine which option harmonizes with the sense of self. The right option is not only morally correct; it also is the most appropriate one, the one most consistent with the kind of person the agent is and aspires to become.

Rahner fails to explain how each person has this "fundamental sense of self" that is unique. Instead, he focuses on a certain kind of religious

[5] Rahner, *Dynamic Element* 166.

experience. This is the experience of radical receptivity to God, a nonconceptual awareness of God, who is the goal of human reaching out to infinity. This orientation to God as mystery constitutes for Rahner the core of every human person. The test of discernment is precisely this "experience of transcendence as such."[6] If a proposed course of action harmonizes with this central religious attitude, then it is recognized as the will of God for the person. The end will indicate what is the most appropriate means. Here the end is God Himself, who is present in the person's longing and hope. The most apt means to the end are determined by a judgment of affectivity. The means will harmonize with this radical longing for God, while inappropriate courses of action will stifle and obscure this reaching out to God.[7] This process of discerning the means presumes that the end is actually present, that conversion has occurred to the extent that God is the final value of the person's life. Only such a person would have been able to make the Spiritual Exercises.

This sense of self is difficult to locate in our consciousness. The awareness of self which accompanies our every thought cannot itself be expressed conceptually. When we focus on who we are, our cognitive description never measures up to the full reality. Hence Rahner describes this as an "unthematic" awareness, since it cannot be adequately thematized or comprehended directly.[8] It remains a sense, an awareness that is concomitant to all our conscious experiences. Can such an elusive sense serve the role of criterion in practical discernment?

American theologians have also employed the self as a basic norm in moral reflection, but they have a richer notion of the self than Rahner. He focuses on radical freedom and "transcendence" as the core of the self, while their description points to the unique history which has formed the individual. That history is present to the discerning person through memories and symbols which form his or her identity. The pattern of God's previous action in the person's life can therefore become a more central part of discerning the immediate situation. Rahner concentrates on the moment of discernment, like one freezing a moving picture to examine a single frame of film. Considering the personal history and social context of the person would be like viewing the film progressively

[6] Ibid. 139. Accordingly, "the operative principle of choice will be God, or, more precisely, that concrete, unique, intrinsic orientation to God which constitutes the innermost essence of man, emerging actually into awareness in operation and active accomplishment . . . " (ibid. 160).

[7] "For the freely accepted transcendent experience of the Spirit is only possible here and now through concentration upon one distinct object of choice among others. This means that this object does not in any way lessen or distort the experience of the Spirit but rather provides a concrete and practical means of expression for it" (Rahner, "Experience of the Spirit and Existential Commitment," *TI* 16, 32).

[8] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978) chap. 1.

up to this moment, thereby providing a richer framework for discernment. What is needed is a fuller phenomenology of moral character than Rahner offers, a description which sees the self emerging as an identity in a specific history and social context.

H. Richard Niebuhr and other American thinkers have developed a theory of the self which shows the importance of symbols in shaping personal identity. First we will examine how symbols from the Christian tradition shape the self and then we will consider how these symbols aid in discerning the signs of the times, God's call in the larger social world.

In *The Responsible Self* Niebuhr argues that the self-understanding of the moral agent is prior to questions of action.[9] Whatever answer I give to the moral question, "What ought I to do?" will be profoundly affected by my answer to the question of identity, "Who am I?" Identity rests more on images and metaphors of the self than on definite ideas. They provide pictures through which the unique character of the self can be glimpsed and they organize habitual ways of responding to the world. For example, if I feel myself to be a victim, I am likely to inject weariness and fear into even innocent relationships. My defensiveness may be all the more powerful if this image of being a victim remains unconscious. My spontaneous reactions will be defensive or even hostile, leading me to actions which are more appropriate to my fear of being violated again than to the actual situation, which may contain nothing objectively threatening. Discernment will be operating but it will be neurotic discernment, skewed by my inadequate self-image. Until this level of self-understanding is altered, it will distort my perception and evaluation of the world around me.

Christian conversion involves moral transformation precisely because it challenges the central images of the self. *Metanoia* means rethinking my personal history through a new set of images which the community proposes as normative. If I have previously conceived of myself as victim, I no longer can remember the past as a series of undeserved injuries and fear a future which will contain more of the same. Viewing myself as one who has been forgiven and empowered to forgive others, I need to reinterpret that history of injuries. Because I now believe that the cross and resurrection of Jesus will be part of my own experience, my attitude towards injury cannot be simply resentment and wariness. The events are not changed, but their meaning must be if I am to be a Christian. If the God I now believe in brought life precisely where death had seemed invincible in the experience of Christ, then I am enabled to look for life in the most threatening memories of my own past. Reinterpreted in light of the normative images of faith, my past can issue in compassion for

[9] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 48.

the suffering and a new capacity for service.[10]

Most systems of ethics are incapable of describing the change of personal identity which Christian faith requires. They do not consider the moral agent in his or her particularity, but rather focus on certain aspects of the agent which are shared in common with other moral agents. Whether that common aspect be a general human nature, rationality, or logical discourse, it prescinds from the particular identity of the person. These generalizable features of the moral agent are necessary to provide the foundations of judgments of rationality in ethics—moral principles and general theories of virtue. However, they are incapable of grounding judgments of affectivity, which are the bases of discernment. A Christian ethics which only addresses judgments of rationality will consequently shed little light on the transformation of the particular person. Because human nature and rationality presumably remain the same after religious conversion, the moral life can seem largely unaffected by coming to faith.

American philosophy, with its characteristic stress on experience, offers a more promising approach to the particularity of the moral agent. Particular events become intelligible when they are located as parts in an intelligible whole. Particular persons derive their uniqueness from the contexts in which they view themselves and from the history of their own choices. For George Herbert Mead, the self is not understood substantially but interactionally. Niebuhr developed Mead's notion that the self comes into being through interaction with others. "[The] self is a being which comes to knowledge of itself in the presence of other selves ... its very nature is that of a being which lives in response to other selves."[11] The self does not have its meaning because it is an instance of human nature; the meaning of this particular self emerges through dialog with others. Therefore a new "root metaphor" is necessary for moral philosophy: the self-as-responder is more adequate to the interactional development of the self than previous root metaphors. These have been self-as-maker, which likens the moral life to a constructive quest for human happiness, and self-as-citizen, which portrays the moral life as a life of obedience to universal laws.[12]

[10] For an account of the conversion of affections and the reinterpretation of past experience that results, see Paul V. Robb, S.J. "Conversion as a Human Experience," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 14/3 (1982).

[11] Niebuhr, *Responsible Self* 71.

[12] "Responder" is a synecdochic analogy, because it takes a special part of experience to envision the whole. Although it is more comprehensive than the other two images, it does not for that reason rule out moral reflection on goals and norms; its claim is to greater, not exclusive, adequacy. "Yet the understanding of ourselves as responsive beings ... is a fruitful conception, which brings into view aspects of our self-defining conduct that are obscured when the older images are exclusively employed" (ibid. 57).

The truly responsible self is not merely reactive; rather, it functions like the good conversationalist who seeks to further the dialog with others. Such a person attempts to make sense out of the previous remarks and to contribute something which makes further response possible. The bore, on the other hand, derails the conversation by using others as sounding boards for self-centered monolog. As the responsible self interacts with the larger community, it makes commitments which provide it with a sense of integrity. Josiah Royce has written that personal individuality is not a given commodity but only gradually arises as the self becomes committed to causes beyond itself.[13] Authentic Christian commitment rests on loyalty to the cause of Christ, which is universal reconciliation.

Defensiveness is a major threat to the responsible life. The very community which initially forms the self can become a parochial allegiance, setting itself over against other groups as rivals. Accountability is then limited only to the local social context as defensiveness takes the place of identification with others who are different. This constricted loyalty yields a faith which must inevitably conflict with faith in the one sovereign Lord of all humankind. The Church itself can generate this sort of parochialism, in contrast to genuine faith in Christ. Loyalty to the Church community can be Christian only if it is loyalty to a more universal community. "And even when I find that I can be responsible in the church only as I respond to Jesus Christ, I discover in him one who points beyond himself to the cause to which he is faithful and in faithfulness to which he is faithful to his companions—not the companions encountered in the church, but in the world to which the Creator is faithful, which the Creator has made his cause."[14] The responsible Christian is therefore accountable not only to the community of faith but also to the universal community and to its Lord. The universal frame of reference is the whole within which the individual finds meaning as a part.

Discernment seeks to be responsible to social contexts by aid of the images with which they shape our self-understanding. Our sense of self is defined in large part by images of being parent, citizen, colleague, friend, committee member, theologian, and the like. Niebuhr argues that a coherent sense of self depends on an ultimate loyalty which structures all the lesser loyalties: faith in one God who acts in all the events that happen to us. Christian discernment seeks to be accountable to this Lord through understanding itself in the normative symbols of revelation. And

[13] "Yet their loyalty gives them a business. It unifies their activities. It makes each of these loyal beings an individual self—a life unified by a purpose" (Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* [New York: Macmillan, 1909] 170).

[14] Niebuhr, *Responsible Self* 86.

the primary "symbolic form" for understanding how to respond to God is the person of Jesus Christ.

The sense of self which guides discernment is more than a present awareness. It has been shaped over time through suffering and decision. Therefore it can only be captured in a timeful symbol, one which can display the evolving identity of the self. To appreciate this historical uniqueness, we need to move from self-image to story. The fuller answer to the question "Who am I?" must be an autobiography, a narrative which can portray the character that emerges in time. In this aspect as well as in self-images, the Christian tradition provides a normative account, namely, the story of Jesus as located within the larger story of Israel. Biblical narratives function as paradigms in discernment because they reveal challenges in the present which are analogous to those of the past.

Biblical narratives can uncover the conflict of loyalties between our old way of life and the life of faith; at the same time they encourage us on the path of this costly grace. Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement, wrote of the costliness of her own decision to become a Christian. She was living with a man whom she deeply loved and who was the father of her only child. However, he could not stomach institutional religion and so had insisted that she would have to choose between him and the Church. She wrote: "God always gives us a chance to show our preference for Him. With Abraham it was to sacrifice his only son. With me it was to give up my married life with Forster. You do these things blindly, not because it is your natural inclination . . . but because you wish to live in conformity with the will of God."[15]

The story of Abraham could guide her discernment because it was characteristic of the believer before God and also characteristic of the God who calls to faith today. Character cannot be portrayed through abstraction; it is glimpsed through the surprising twists and turns of the plot of a narrative. Dorothy Day could grasp more than some analogous elements between her situation and that of Abraham. She could also discern the presence of the God of Abraham, who continues to act in character. The path from quandary to resolution which shaped the faith of Abraham could be revelatory for her because it disclosed God's call and promised His faithfulness.

Stories move from one scene to another and convey the hearer from here to there. They capture the self-in-time and point towards the particular path for the self to take. Sallie McFague writes that human experience itself has a narrative quality which these paradigmatic stories of faith support. "We love stories, then, because our lives are stories and

[15] Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: Harper, 1952) 256.

we recognize in the attempts of others to move, temporally and painfully, our own story. We recognize in the stories of others' experiences of coming to belief our own agonizing journey and we rejoice in the companionship of those on the way."[16] Our lives are stories because they have a dramatic unity that moves through time, a plot which reveals and shapes our particular character. That same dramatic unity intimates what should come next, a future coherent with what has gone before.

The story of Jesus makes a normative claim upon Christian discernment. It is not just any story, but one which claims our lives by asserting that it must be the truth of those lives. This is the story which reveals in a definitive way God's intentions for the world and for us. Christian conversion occurs when we let the story of Jesus become our story, as we let the particular shape of our lives be conformed to the particular shape of Jesus' life. The confession of faith appropriately takes a narrative form for Israel and for Christians: it is a self-involving confession to take the same journey ourselves.

Stanley Hauerwas writes that Peter's confession in Mark 8 is called into question by his subsequent reluctance to take the journey which will lead to the cross. "Jesus thus rebukes Peter, who had learned the name but not the story that determines the meaning of the name."[17] Peter projected his own worldly story of ambition and success onto the title of "the Christ." Jesus counters with the story of the cross which awaits him, and that story must change Peter. "A story that claims to be the truth of our existence requires that our lives, like the lives of the disciples, be changed by following him."[18]

The narrative of the Gospel embodies a whole way of life that is inseparable from the character of its central figure. Peter, like all of us, wanted to separate his relationship with Jesus from the threatening demands of that way of life. He wanted faith without discipleship. The Gospel narrative itself is best understood from the destiny to which it inexorably led: the cross and resurrection of Jesus. It is normative for the character of individuals and for the Church, which is the "organized form of Jesus' story."[19] The canonical Scriptures have authority for those who join this community. This does not mean that the biblical narrative is the sole source of moral wisdom but that the cross and resurrection of Christ must test moral insight from any sources. The truth of the narrative itself is manifest in the lives of the people that it forms; it cannot be

[16] Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 138–39.

[17] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1981) 48.

[18] Ibid. 47.

[19] Ibid. 50.

established without some lived participation.[20]

Discernment operates by fitting the part into a whole which illuminates the significance of the part. The sense of self of the individual gains intelligibility when its social and historical contexts provide this illumination as larger wholes. The present moment fits within the story which forms the individual's character, and that story must be appropriate to the normative context of the story of Jesus for the believer. This normative context can guide discernment by suggesting the response which best "fits in." Niebuhr describes this aesthetic logic which attempts to locate particular actions in a larger meaningful pattern.

> We seek to have them fit into the whole as a sentence fits into a paragraph in a book, a note into a chord in a movement in a symphony, as the act of eating a common meal fits into the lifelong companionship of a family, as the decision of a statesman fits into the ongoing movement of his nation's life with other nations, or as the discovery of a scientific artifact fits into the history of science.[21]

The personal history of the individual and of the believing community, therefore, can shape the process of discernment so that this sense of self can be a trustworthy criterion for decision. The self as an emerging character in time and society is a more adequate criterion for serious decisions than any religious experience which prescinds from the story of the individual or of the believing community.[22]

The second major way in which symbols guide the reasoning heart of discernment is through interpreting events to unearth their religious significance. After considering the general pattern of symbolic interpretation of events, we will apply this reflection to the specific situation of the nuclear threat.

Discernment seeks the disclosure of the whole in the part. This movement complements that in which the individual part is illuminated by its context. As David Tracy notes, the claim which religion makes to truth is a disclosure of the whole, a revelatory model of meaning. "Unlike the classics of art, morality, science and politics, explicitly religious classic expressions will involve a claim to truth as the event of a disclosure-concealment of the whole of reality *by the power of the whole*—

[20] "I would only add that scripture creates more than a world; it shapes a community which is the bearer of that world. Without that community, claims about the moral authority of scripture—or rather the very idea of scripture itself—make no sense. Furthermore, I shall argue that claims about the authority of scripture make sense only in that the world and the community it creates are in fact true to the character of God" (ibid. 55).

[21] Niebuhr, *Responsible Self* 97.

[22] Although Rahner appreciates the gradual self-definition which occurs over time, he does not develop any account of moral character as it bears on present experience.

as, in some sense, a radical and finally gracious mystery."[23] Symbols are the appropriate vehicles of disclosure. They are the prisms which refract experience in novel ways for the imagination.

Religious discernment uses symbols to seek the disclosure of the gracious mystery of God in social events as well as personal ones. It seeks to discover more than God's call as a specific invitation to action. In the public realm it searches for the action of God challenging and redeeming in all events. The symbols and stories of Scripture function as paradigms for reading the signs of the times for the disclosure of God's action.

This disclosure of the whole in the part comes to the participant in faith, to the reasoning heart which looks for revelation and is willing to be instructed by it.[24] At first glance it seems that when we move from the question "Who am I?" to the question "What is going on?" we have left the standpoint of the participant for the standpoint of the objective observer. However, to answer that second question we necessarily refer to events, and there can be no single objective description of events which exhausts their meaning. To understand events, realities which occur in our experience, we need to complement the reasoning head with the reasoning heart. The discerning heart reasons by evaluating events from different angles and trying to fit them into different contexts.

Events cannot be dissected to find their causes. Their meaning is not readily available for public inspection, like the ingredients listed on the label of a can. For example, the events of Paul's ministry disclosed only a pattern of failure to his Gnostic opponents in Corinth. In the Second Letter to the Corinthians Paul interprets them in an entirely different context which discloses new meaning (1:8–10):

Brothers, we do not wish to leave you in the dark about the trouble we had in Asia: we were crushed beyond our strength, even to the point of despairing of life. We were left to feel like men condemned to death, so that we might trust not in ourselves but in God who raises from the dead. He rescued us from the

[23] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 163. "In an analogous fashion, religion, like art, discloses new resources of meaning and truth to anyone willing to risk allowing that disclosure to 'happen' " (ibid. 67).

[24] "What concerns us at this point is not the fact that the revelatory moment shines by its own light and is intelligible in itself but rather that it illuminates other events and enables us to understand them. Whatever else revelation means it does mean an event in our history which brings rationality and wholeness into the confused joys and sorrows of personal existence and allows us to discern order in the brawl of communal histories. Such revelation is no substitute for reason; the illumination it supplies does not excuse the mind from labor; but it does give to that mind the impulsion and the first principles it requires if it is to be able to do its proper work" (H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* [New York: Macmillan, 1941] 80). Much of what is contained in this article on the reasoning heart is derivative from this masterly work.

danger of death and will continue to do so.[25]

Paul reverses the very charges of his detractors: his sufferings are rather the actual credentials for his ministry than proof of its failure. "Therefore I am content with weakness, with mistreatment, with distress, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ; for when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong" (12:10). When interpreted in the light of Christ's death and resurrection, these same facts come to bear a very different meaning. God's action is disclosed and that calls for an appropriate response.

In the middle of the Second World War, Niebuhr performed one of these symbolic interpretations of public events. He tried to interpret, or make sense out of, the suffering of innocent victims of war by asking the question "What is God doing in the war?" He employed the biblical symbols of divine judgment and the crucifixion in this interpretation. From viewing the war through these new lenses, he concluded that God was on neither side in the war and was judging all parties for their self-interest and self-righteousness. The scandal of innocent suffering of millions who were caught between the great armies could be meaningful only when seen in the context of Jesus Christ's vicarious suffering.[26]

Niebuhr's question offended nearly as many of his readers as did his answers. "What is God doing in the war?" grated on the sensibilities of those who protested that the benevolent Father of all could only grieve over human sinfulness in war. Niebuhr insisted that God must be doing something in every event, even in the most tragic. Either we are monotheists who are disposed to look for the presence of the one sovereign Lord in every deed and suffering, or we will be polytheists who assign portions of reality to another deity. Nevertheless, God is not the Great Manipulator of the universe who predetermines every action. Jesus believed that "the will of God is what God does in all that nature and man do. . . . The Universal One whom he calls Father is Lord of heaven and earth. His action is more like that of the great wise leader who uses even the meannesses of his subjects to promote the general welfare."[27] To be truly responsible in faith, Christians need to imitate Jesus in seeking out the hidden divine intention by locating even destructive events in the context of God's creating, redeeming, and judging activity.

What if we ask this strange question today: "What is *God* doing in the global buildup of armaments and the threat of nuclear annihilation?" If

[25] This and subsequent scriptural texts are from *The New American Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1971).

[26] H. Richard Niebuhr, "War as the Judgment of God," *Christian Century* 59 (1942) 630–33; "War as Crucifixion," ibid. 60 (1943) 513–15.

[27] Niebuhr, *Responsible Self* 164–65.

we restrict our discussion to the judgments of rationality employed in just-war reasoning, this fundamental question cannot even be raised. Using certain biblical symbols as lenses, we can attempt to discover an appropriate response to the signs of the times. The black civil-rights movement and Latin American liberation theology encourage this interpretation. Both movements read the situation of oppression through the lens of the Exodus symbol, and this has given direction in faith to millions in their struggle for justice.

Which symbols should we use? Scripture contains a wide range of symbolic events; hence selecting the appropriate ones must be done critically. The reasoning head must establish some general criteria for using biblical symbols. Since judgments of affectivity presuppose moral judgments of rationality as outer limits of action, this symbolic interpretation should be consonant with sound moral reasoning. The appropriate symbols must be central to the overall message of the canon. They should correlate with an image of God which coheres with the full teaching of the Scriptures. If taken from the Old Testament, these symbols must be consistent with the fundamental event of God's definitive revelation in Jesus Christ. The Exodus from Egypt is central to Israel's faith consciousness, correlates with the basic image of God as Redeemer, and foreshadows the cross and resurrection. Whether it leads to morally sound judgments must be determined from the particular application.

On the other hand, an inadequate symbol will function as "an evil imagination of the heart" which will disclose only a self-serving meaning and distort the truth of who we are and what we are doing.[28] The Dutch Calvinists of South Africa are accustomed to justify apartheid by appealing to their national election and the canonically minor symbol of "taking the Land" from the Canaanites. This symbol also fails the test of adequacy to the New Testament and leads to conclusions that violate ordinary moral standards.

One set of biblical symbols already operates in some thinking on the nuclear issue: that of crusade and martyrdom. An alternative symbol, which may yield a more illuminating significance for faith, is that of Israel's exile in Babylon.

Part of the legacy of the Cold War which affects the nuclear issue are the images of martyrdom and crusade which shaped Cold War rhetoric. The communist challenge was not fundamentally ideological but religious. An atheistic and monolithic totalitarian state threatened our way of life and religious liberty. This interpretation pointed to two responses.

[28] "Evil imaginations in this realm are shown to be evil by their consequences to selves and communities just as erroneous concepts and hypotheses in external knowledge are shown to be fallacious by their results" (Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation* 73).

Passively, one would prefer to endure martyrdom rather than give up the Christian faith. This symbol proved to be helpful as it guided the resistance of Christians to religious persecution in Eastern Europe and China. In a more active mode this vision employed the image of the crusade to marshal defenses. War becomes holy when waged for God's cause; the rhetoric of John Foster Dulles and others underlined the godless character of communism to prepare an arsenal of nuclear and conventional weaponry.

Despite some attempts to justify the crusade symbol from the Old Testament, it appears to be an evil imagination of the heart. Roland H. Bainton traces the crusade mentality back to the holy war of Judges and Deuteronomy. It renders an image of a God who delights in battle and exterminates the enemy without distinction of guilt or innocence. When Europe was threatened by the forces of Islam, the crusaders tended to ignore the restraints on knightly warfare. Bainton describes how the Allied cause in the Second World War was corrupted by becoming a crusade:

> The enemy being beyond the pale, the code of humanity collapses. . . .Those who have fought in a frenzy of righteousness against the enemies of God—or of the democratic way of life—are disposed to demand unconditional surrender, thus prolonging resistance by their refusal to state terms. The crusader is severely tempted to arbitrariness in the final settlement, for the mood of holiness leads to the punishment of war criminals by the victors under the fictitious trappings of impartial justice.[29]

A truly evil imagination of the heart occurs when we merge the symbols of martyrdom and godly crusade in the nuclear era. Then it appears better to destroy the infidel even at the cost of our own lives. However, martyrdom which takes the whole world into its blessed sacrifice becomes demonic. Martyrdom connotes self-sacrifice, not the wilful sacrifice of countless others. Murder-suicide would be a more truthful symbol for nuclear vengeance.

What would be a more adequate symbol for interpreting the nuclear threat? It would have to be more appropriate to the contemporary situation than to Cold War realities. It would also have to indicate a more authentic faith response than crusade or martyrdom. The exile of the Israelites in Babylon may help to revision the nuclear issue. After being conquered by the Babylonians and subjected to mass deportation, Israel faced a profound crisis of faith. If Marduk, the deity of their conquerors, had prevailed over Yahweh, then perhaps the God of Abraham was only a minor deity. The seventy years of exile deepened this

[29] Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960) 243.

crisis. Since all the promises had come to nothing—the Temple, the Davidic monarchy, the Land—could this mean that the covenant was null and void?

Ironically, Israel broke through to a new kind of faith during the Exile. The prophets returned to their deepest faith memories to recognize that the Exile was a second Exodus, disclosing a purified image of God. Yahweh was not the warrior king who fought on the side of the righteous, nor the god of royal civil religion who propped up a specific way of life. In Babylon, Israel came to realize for the first time that Yahweh alone was God and sovereign over all the nations. God would still be God even if Israel were dominated by foreign enemies. Yahweh would deliver His people in His own time and re-establish the covenant with a newly repentant people.

Looking at our contemporary situation through the lens of the Exile discloses some common features, even though it does not dictate a single strategy of response. It can uncover at the root of our national defensiveness a fear of being dominated by communism, a fear which is nearly ultimate. God's cause is not identical with any nation's aspirations, and the loss of our wealth and freedom would not mean the end of God. Perhaps such a loss would enable us to discover the true God we had not known before. On the other hand, any nation which would willingly devastate God's creation rather than endure an exile thereby indicates that its ultimate allegiance is to a life of national affluence. If a symbolic discernment of national values issues in a call to repentance, that does not settle all the moral questions. Moral analysis through judgments of rationality and reformulation of policy through political prudence must complement a symbolic reinterpretation. Failure to attend to these dominant symbols can only escalate the danger that evil imaginations of the heart will guide our political strategy and moral debates.

Discernment remains a personal search for the action of God in one's own history and in the events of the world. Although its conclusions are not morally generalizable as judgments of rationality are, the reasoning heart of the Christian finds normative guidance in the symbols and story of revelation.

AFFECTIVE CRITERIA FOR DISCERNMENT

Christian discernment has a second set of criteria for discovering an adequate response to God: a specific set of affections which flow from the story of Jesus. These affections complement the symbols which seek the disclosure of God's intentions in events. They set a normative matrix which guides the *manner* of action, because the morality of an action is established by both what we do and how we do it. How we act should be appropriate to the distinctive values displayed in the biblical narrative.

These affections are not transitory feelings or unfathomable moods; they are deep convictions of the reasoning heart which dispose the moral agent to act in definite ways. Religious affections are virtues, since they are habits which dispose the agent to moral action with ease and delight; this traditional Puritan term emphasizes their felt quality in experience. Roman Catholic moral theology has followed Thomas Aquinas in giving the virtues a considerable role in moral decision-making. However, the narrative of the gospel did not enter into his definition of the virtues—that rested on an assumed common human nature, even though these natural virtues were elevated by the gift of charity. An American approach to discernment makes a more integral connection between the affections (or virtues) of the Christian life and the biblical narrative. The story of Israel and of Jesus can thereby provide both symbols and a distinctive set of affections as criteria for discernment.

Karl Rahner's account of discernment discounts any role for a distinctive set of affections for two reasons. First, Rahner has no developed theory of human affectivity. Because the core of the person is self-defining freedom before God, felt dispositions are only the raw material on which freedom operates. Their moral significance arises only when they are caught up in the movement of human transcendence; he does not discuss their positive role in disposing the moral agent to evaluate and act.[30]

In addition, Rahner assigns the Gospels a minimal role in shaping the content of Christian ethics. He distinguishes a formal from a material dimension in the following of Christ, which reduces the contribution that Scripture can make to morality. The formal dimension is the same for all: a radical surrender to God made by explicit believers as well as those who are affected by grace "anonymously." "Once a man has reached Jesus, then it contains this simple message: just to be prepared to make the final act of hope and self-surrender to the incomprehensible mystery."[31] Formally, this self-surrender corresponds to the self-emptying of Jesus in the Incarnation and the cross. However, the actual conduct of the moral life, the material dimension, cannot be a copy of the life of Jesus. "The continuation of the life of Jesus that is new and different for each of us must be discovered by each individual in the way that is

[30] "If one were able to develop a theology and philosophy of freedom, it would become clear that freedom constitutes the very essence of emotion in comparison with which all other emotional factors would appear derivative, being mere conditions of possibility, a sign of the finite and passive character of created freedom and in the end analysable in terms of freedom" (Rahner, *TI* 16 [New York: Seabury, 1979] 64).

[31] Karl Rahner, *TI* 16, 18.

valid for him."[32] The love command does not refer to the specific historical example of Jesus; love resists definition, because it demands the person totally, not only in particular actions.[33]

When the natural law is the principle for interpreting the gospel, a certain leveling effect may inevitably occur. To maintain a moral system that is intelligible to those outside the Christian tradition, that tradition's distinctive contributions to reformulating moral standards and values is downplayed. In discernment a person asks not only about the morality of the action ("Is it right or wrong?") but also about the appropriateness of the action ("What kind of person does this sort of thing? Is it consistent with the person I am or want to be?"). To answer these questions, the Christian must turn to the central personal qualities which the biblical narrative exemplifies.

The American theological tradition has its roots in the Puritan experiment and in its ablest spokesman, Jonathan Edwards. In defending the conversion phenomena of the seventeenth-century Great Awakening, Edwards argued that sound religious affections are the true test of religious experience. His thesis was that "true religion, in great part, consists in holy affections."[34] In his masterpiece, *Religious Affections*, this Puritan pastor analyzed Christian conversion and growth as primarily a change of heart centering on the affections, the "springs that set men agoing, in all the affairs of life."[35] He provides twelve signs, culminating in consistent moral practice, by which the individual can gauge whether this change of heart has in fact occurred. Underlying them all as the primary gift of true conversion is a new capacity to appreciate the loveliness of God for its own sake. This same gift enables the convert to appreciate the credibility of sound doctrine and relish the goodness of proper conduct.

[32] Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965) 119. Rahner's formal language about discernment does not do full justice to the practice of the Exercises. The retreatant only makes the "election," or serious life choice, after a lengthy period of meditating on the events of Jesus' life. He or she enters imaginatively into these scenes and uses the senses to appreciate them for days and even weeks. This consititutes a "school of the affections" which sets an aesthetic context to evaluate the decisions to be faced. Even more astonishing is the fact that in the eighty-six pages of the chapter of *Dynamic Element* on Ignatian discernment the name of Jesus Christ occurs only four times, and even these are only passing references. This appears a significant omission in analyzing Christian discernment as well as the Spiritual Exercises.

[33] See Karl Rahner, "The 'Commandment' of Love in Relation to the Other Commandments," *TI* 5 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 456.

[34] Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in John E. Smith, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* 2 (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1959) 95.

[35] Ibid. 101.

Authentic conversion produces a character which bears some resemblance to the character of Jesus depicted in the Gospels. The Holy Spirit gradually develops a specific set or constellation of affections in the Christian. These affections are the main dispositions which shape the person's character. This configuration of affections has a specific historical referent. Edwards held that one of the distinguishing signs of Christian affections is that "they naturally beget and promote such a spirit of love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness and mercy, as appeared in Christ."[36] Just as Paul could specify the fruits of the Spirit which he expected the Galatians to manifest, Edwards presumed that certain common traits would emerge in the diverse personalities of Christians. These affections correlate with the dispositions manifest by God and Christ in the work of redemption. "There is grace in Christians answering to grace in Christ, such an answerableness as there is between the wax and the seal; there is character for character: such kinds of graces, such a spirit and temper, the same things that belong to Christ's character, belong to theirs."[37]

While this is an ethics of the imitation of Christ, it is not primarily concerned with reproducing the external aspects of his life and work. Rather, those dispositions which were the main ingredients of the character of the Redeemer shape the character of the redeemed. As they grow in sanctification, mature Christians should come to prefer spontaneously the conduct which is consistent with the goodness of Christ.[38]

Why should there be a *specific* set of affections which characterize the Christian? Our affections are constituted by the objects toward which they tend. Because our faith holds certain things to be true about God and the world, affections which correspond to these convictions are evoked in our hearts. "The particularity of Christian affections has to do with the objects towards which they are directed," Don Saliers writes. "They are given their particular character by virtue of the stories, concepts and practices which belong to Christianity. . . .To believe that God redeems, judges, and shows compassion for the contrite, involves a

[36] Ibid. 345.

[37] Ibid. 347.

[38] "That which men love, they desire to have and to be united to, and possessed of. That beauty which men delight in, they desire to be adorned with. Those acts which men delight in, they necessarily incline to do" (ibid. 394). Edwards' Christian ethics is a sustained response to the British "moral sense" philosophers, particularly Hutcheson and Shaftesbury. Against their position, he insisted that only the gift of the Holy Spirit could enable such a moral sense to function consistently and through trials. See Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards' Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina, 1981).

distinctive set of affections."[39] Dispositions and beliefs are mutually interdependent, because the belief shapes the affection and the affection enlivens and illumines the belief. Could one know the meaning of God's mercy without personally experiencing forgiveness? On the other hand, the forgiven person needs to know the necessity of repentance and the possibility of hope if it is to be genuine Christian forgiveness. We move from one pole to the other: we can examine affections to see what their objects are, and we can examine the convictions of belief to determine what the appropriate affections should be.[40]

Because of this interdependence of affection and faith convictions, narrative and doxology are the most common ways in which the biblical authors confess their faith. Both literary forms involve the listener or speaker insofar as they evoke the affective response which is integral to their cognitive content. They also challenge the hearer to become a participant, to act in correspondence with the movement of the story of the confession. So the prophet praises Yahweh in Isaiah 40 with images which also pointedly address the despairing exiles in Babylon: "The Lord is the eternal God, creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint nor grow weary. . . . He gives strength to the fainting; for the weak he makes vigor abound . . . they that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles' wings; they will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint" (40:28–31). In doxology the memory of the faith community becomes a paradigm for action and for affection. The Psalms, for instance, repeatedly recall God's action in the Exodus to evoke the particular form of trust which correlates with the image of God as redeemer of the enslaved. Confession of faith involves the whole person, as the reasoning heart illumines the path from conviction to action through engaging the appropriate affections.

[39] Don E. Saliers, *The Soul in Paraphrase* (New York: Seabury, 1980) 12, 19. "The essential feature of the order among Christian emotions is that they take God and God's acts as their object and ground" (ibid. 12).

[40] The object and its appropriate affection are so interrelated that the convictions of faith are not mere speculative knowledge but are "sensible knowledge." "That sort of knowledge by which a man has a sensible perception of amiableness and loathsomeness, or of sweetness and nauseousness, is not just the same sort of knowledge with that, by which he knows what a triangle is and what a square is. The one is mere speculative knowledge; the other sensible knowledge, in which more than the mere intellect is concerned; the heart is the proper subject of it, or the soul as a being that not only beholds, but has inclination, and is pleased or displeased. And yet there is the nature of instruction in it; as he that has perceived the sweet taste of honey, knows much more about it, than he who has only looked upon and felt it" (Edwards, *Religious Affections* 272). Sensible knowledge is one form of judgments of affectivity. Note the resemblance to Newman's distinction between real and notional assent: John Henry Newman, *A Grammar of Assent* (New York: Doubleday, 1955) chap. 4.

The biblical narratives enter into the definition of Christian affections because they embody the meaning of the affections metaphorically. Hauerwas writes that all virtues are narrative-dependent because their meaning is inseparable from a way of life. Only the story of an individual or a people can display how the qualities it endorses should become realized in our lives. Christian virtues are distinctive because the narrative on which they depend is the story of Jesus Christ.[41] Christian convictions do not merely provide additional motivation to enact natural virtuous dispositions; they also redefine these dispositions. "The singular feature of Christian rejoicing is that it occurs even in the midst of suffering, pain, and tribulation—even in the midst of grief.... The language which describes the world as God's creation and the arena of divine mercy is related *internally* to the ability to rejoice in all circumstances—even in the midst of suffering."[42]

Although this configuration of specific Christian dispositions is inseparable from the story of Jesus, some summary of them is possible. James Gustafson refers to these dispositions as "senses of the heart" which are the main threads in the fabric of Christian life: a sense of radical dependence, of gratitude, repentance, obligation, possibility, and direction. These dispositions are mutually sustaining and interdependent: repentance which lacks a sense of possibility and hope would not be faithful to the biblical witness. Together they provide the Christian with a set of reasons for being moral and serve as intentions to act in specific ways. Hence they ground a "moral life of a qualitatively different sort."[43] Gustafson bases these reasons for being moral on the particular images of God which are displayed in biblical revelation and confirmed in the present experience of believers.

These distinctive Christian affections can serve to discern appropriate action in two ways. First, they set an affective matrix against which options are gauged to see if they are harmonious or not. This affective

[41] Hauerwas argues that no universal account of human virtue can be given since the virtues are distinctively ordered and defined by the traditions which form them. While I agree with the penetration of virtue by a narrative tradition, I believe that some general descriptions of specific virtues can have cross-cultural intelligibility. Judgments of rationality are possible about virtues, even if they fall short of the description of character necessary to embody these skills. See Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1977) chaps. 3 and 4.

[42] Saliers, *Soul in Paraphrase* 66.

[43] James M. Gustafson, *Can Ethics Be Christian?* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1975) 92. "How one lives morally is related to these senses, and their accompanying tendencies in a moral direction, not only in terms of what persons and communities do, but also in terms of their perspectives on life, their perceptions of what is morally significant about events, their deliberations and their motivations" (ibid. 94). See also Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* 1 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1981) 197–204.

matrix corresponds to the qualities manifest in the Gospel story. The Christian "tests the spirits to see if among all the forces that move within him, his societies, the human mind itself, there is a uniting, a knowing, a whole-making spirit, a Holy Spirit. And he can do so only with the aid of the image, the symbol of Christ. 'Is there a Christ-like spirit there?' "[44] Niebuhr has brought together here the central resources of the reasoning heart in discernment: symbol and affectivity as they mutually define each other and form an aesthetic test of action.

As the Christian affections become deeply rooted in the character through practice responsive to God's call, they can intuitively suggest appropriate behavior. Edwards noted that mature Christians often come to decisions without "a long chain of reasoning," by means of a certain discerning taste. Just as a well-trained palate detects what is missing in a sauce, so the relish for the divine beauty can inform a mature Christian how to act.

> Yea its holy taste and appetite leads it to think of that which is truly lovely, and naturally suggests the idea of its proper object . . . whereby, in the lively exercise of grace, [a holy person] easily distinguishes good and evil, and knows at once, what is a suitable amiable behavior towards God, and towards man, in this case and the other; and judges what is right, as it were spontaneously, and of himself, without a particular deduction, by any other arguments than the beauty that is seen and goodness that is tasted.[45]

Edwards recognizes how dispositions guide moral intuition, the knowledge by "connaturality" familiar to Catholic moral theology.[46] Yet Edwards is no intuitionist: these intuitions must be conformable to both the rules and the dispositions presented in the gospel. In our terms, judgments of affectivity complement without contravening the judgments of rationality in moral reflection.[47]

Rahner also uses affectivity as a criterion for discernment but makes it only formally dependent upon the biblical narrative. In commenting on Loyola's Exercises he notes a sense of radical peace and openness to God which tests the authenticity of possible inspirations. However, he

[44] Niebuhr, *Responsible Self* 155.

[45] Edwards, *Religious Affections* 282. Edwards' admission of this spontaneous awareness of what is to be done is surprising, given his consistent suspicion of "enthusiasm" or direct divine inspiration of particular content.

[46] "Any singular moral judgment is a judgment by way of inclination and it will be a good one if I am inclined to what is my true good" (Ralph McInerny, "Maritain and Poetic Knowledge," *Renascence* 34 [1982] 207). The proviso is crucial, because the vicious person will have knowledge which is affectively connatural to the vicious principles that dominate his or her character.

[47] See Edwards, *Religious Affections* 387, on the necessary convergence between the affections and the moral standards of the gospel.

centers almost exclusively on surrender to the absolute mystery of God as the affective touchstone.[48] Because they attend to the diverse images of God and the particularities of the story of Jesus, American theologians are able to make a richer purchase of biblical material for an affective matrix for discernment. If there is any formal pattern running through biblical ethics, it finds expression in the new commandment of Jesus in Jn 13:34: "Love one another just as I have loved you." This formal principle refers the believer immediately back to the "material," the memory of the actual ways in which Jesus Christ loved. These memories have some correspondence in the experience of the Christian, and they can set a diverse matrix for affective testing of discernment. In sum, Christians are called to be human in a specific way, not through copying an ancient portrait but in having different reasons of the heart for being moral.

Christian discernment brings to light rich elements in moral decision-making. Judgments of affectivity legitimately ground some moral decisions through the discriminating functions of memory and imagination. These judgments are evaluated not by formal logic but by aesthetic criteria: by the sense of self, the evaluation of events through biblical symbols, and the correlation between certain ways of acting and the configuration of Christian affections. Because these criteria are normative within the public tradition of the Christian community, discernment is not finally accountable only to itself. The classic authors of Christian spirituality such as Jonathan Edwards and Ignatius Loyola have long realized the importance of discernment in Christian practice. Contemporary American theologians have a significant contribution to make to Catholic moral theology in critically integrating discernment into Christian ethics.

These same theologians can broaden the common Roman Catholic notion of discernment. Not only can we look for God's gracious disclosure in specific invitations but also in integrating our own histories and reading the signs of the times. Their rationale presents the hope that those who find God in some things may eventually be led to find God in all things.

[48] Rahner, *Dynamic Element* 154. Although he analyzes with his usual care the words of Ignatius to describe the affections of that "consolation" which is the sign of the Spirit, he fails to attend to the fuller matrix of affective criteria which the previous meditations on the life of Christ have established. Not only the goals of one's aspirations need to be in harmony with these dispositions, but also the means which one proposes to use to attain these goals. Since we rarely reach our goals, our lives become morally stamped by the means we live with. The means need to justify our ends.