

ETHICS AS NARRATIVE

Universality in Particularity

Lancelot S. Tong

The Problem, the Phenomenon

On what basis do we make a decision on ethical issues? The standard answer would be the Bible. Of course this is a crude answer which tells almost nothing on what base a decision is made. Nevertheless this is THE Christian answer. There are no other resources we can more rely on to address the issue. We are given nothing more to our salvation than the Bible to help us with our everyday ethical decision. The logical question is how the Bible should be used to deal with moral issues and ethical problems. There are two books which have very similar titles addressing this most basic issue. David H. Kelsey's classic book written in 1975, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*,¹ dealt with the fundamental and general question of doing theology. This effort is

¹ David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

furthered by Thomas W. Ogletree's *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics*.² Unlike Kelsey's survey and analysis of various theologians' approaches to the authority of the Scripture, Ogletree assumed a road map for the use of Bible in ethics. Kelsey sought to identify how theologians authorized theology in various creative uses of the Scripture³ while Ogletree presented a range of possible sets of principles to integrate the Bible and ethics.⁴ This phenomenon only befuddles a standard and well recognized approach of how the Bible can be used to interpret or help authorize ethical decision. In fact, they pointed to an inconsistent use of the Bible as the source of ethical interpretation. In particular, if the Bible is used as the basis of the ethical code, there is really no code to rely on beyond the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, and some other well regarded imperatives. In other words, we have no common assumption as a rule to help us to form a "biblical ethical code" which can embrace today's ethical dilemma. A propositional ethical code is not apparent in this case.

Towards the evangelical end of biblical use in ethics, David K. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw⁵ put together a slew of articles which represent a good canvas of positions. None of them seems to have a universally agreeable interpretation scheme towards the encoding of ethics from the biblical narratives. Again, the most one can do is to offer the range of the many ways⁶ or the possibility of translating biblical

² Thomas W. Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). And a Catholic counterpart of the book is found in Charles Curran & Richard A. McCormick, ed., *Reading in Moral Theology, No. 4: The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984). The book of Curran and McCormick is not a complete Catholic version of the discussion. Nevertheless, it has a significant Roman Catholic blend.

³ Kelsey, *The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology*, 3.

⁴ Ogletree, *The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology*, 175, 176. "...The originality of the interpreter is to venture formulations which can contribute to the common mind towards which understanding reaches. The point is to gain a more adequate grasp of the moral life by way of an engagement with biblical materials." In fact, to this writer, Ogletree is actually outlining a biblical theology type of guideline which means nothing to the encoding of biblical ethics. He is just saying ethics should be done according to such a line.

⁵ David K. Clark & Robert V. Rakestraw, ed., *Readings in Christian Ethics*, vol.1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 179-240.

⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, "Four Ways of Using the New Testament," in *Readings in Christian Ethics*, vol. 1, ed. David K. Clark & Robert V. Rakestraw, 185-91.

narratives (particularities) to today's universals (or "principles" in Walter C. Kaiser's word).⁷

As there are so many interpretation schemes to the Bible, there are also many ways to use the Bible in ethics. This does not make it impossible to use the Bible effectively to formulate ethics. This only makes it impossible to formulate a universally acceptable ethical code from the Bible. However, is it necessary to formulate a universally acceptable code?

The above phenomenon shows us what problems we must deal with when the Bible is considered as propositional law code regardless of one's theological conviction - conservative or "liberal." The problem is real in terms of a modern view of ethics, a universally accepted ethics. Now we turn to an alternate approach of doing ethics.

Narrative as the Source of Ethics

Treating the Bible as a narrative in terms of ethics formation requires no proposed hard and fast definite principles from the biblical text. First, we have to deal with the definition of narrative, or more precisely, the biblical narrative. Beginning with the doctrine of revelation, we have to admit that the Bible as revelation started out as an event, which led to A record of AN event, then THE record of AN event, and finally THE record of THE event. Such record was recognized as the Canon. Thus the Bible becomes the written source, the only written source of Christian faith. Aside from those "context free" indicative doctrines and other imperative commands,⁸ the bulk of the Christian Canon are made up of

⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, "How can Christians Derive Principles from the Specific Command of the Law" and Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, "Distinguishing Relative from Normative Teachings," in *Readings in Christian Ethics*, vol. 1, ed. David K. Clark & Robert V. Rakestraw, 192-205. In both articles, the authors failed to address those ethical codes which have clear contradictions of modern concepts and biblical mores such as slavery. Dwellings on the indisputable incestuous law or controversial cases such as homosexuality only expose their shortcoming in encoding a Christian ethics.

⁸ This writer believes that the bible contains adequate specific commands to uphold the basic Christian faith. They are not contextually bound, but rather timeless and context free. However, this part of the bible remains in small quantities though they are significant. In regard to ethical formulation, they can only function as a foundation but not as an everyday guide for contemporary ethical decisions such as biomedical advancement in cloning and gene altering.

narrative. It remains in the genre of narrative even though it is the Canon. Narrative has little propositional value unless all narratives are regarded as fable in a simplistic sense. Even so, a fable can have more than one central lesson to learn from. The parables⁹ of Jesus in fact offer a very obvious example of how even a "fable" type of narrative has multi-layered lessons. Then we would want to see what the narrative can offer for ethics formation if not for encoding. James Gustafson termed this use of narrative as a revealed reality instead of "revealed morality."¹⁰

From Universal to Particulars

Gustafson points out:

In the place of moral teachings, particularized or generalized, [the Bible as narrative] put God in his living, free activity. Thus Christian ethics had to think not about morality reduced to propositions, but about God and how life ought to be rightly related to his power and his presence.¹¹

Gustafson's assertion puts the Bible in the place of describing moral happenings in their particular contexts. The Bible does no more than presenting the solution to a moral dilemma in a particular context.¹² As readers of the Bible, we are invited to look at the Bible as a source of insights instead of answers. Since the Bible is in a context, the only constant is the person Jesus Christ (or God).¹³ What the Bible describes (in contrast to "prescribes") has their own limitation in time, space, and character. It deals with a highly particular situation. However, Gustafson and other narrative theologians have no intention to leave the narrative at the original time and place. They see biblical narrative the progenitor of a narrative history which has an uninterrupted line of development closely bound with the original narrative.¹⁴ Paul Nelson specifically points

⁹ Mark 12:1-12 and the corresponding synoptic passages are undeniably multi-layered parables. They point at various meanings. When the audience heard it, they generated different responses from different corresponding layers.

¹⁰ James M. Gustafson, "The Changing Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics," *Readings in Moral Theology*, No. 4, ed. by Charles E. Curran & Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 140.

¹¹ Gustafson, "The Changing Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics," 141.

¹² This and the following statements should be understood in light of footnote 8.

¹³ Gustafson, "The Changing Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics," 141.

¹⁴ A good analysis can be found in the second chapter of Paul Nelson, *Narrative and Morality: a Theological Inquiry* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1987). The chapter itself

out that "...[prescriptive ethicists tend] to regard the self as being detached from the entanglements of society, history and even its own past"¹⁵ and he refuted this. In fact, we are living within a particular context. To be void of a given context is not living. The living context congregates into a narrative. At this point, all of us become a part of a narrative. The continuation of biblical narrative to our narrative takes us from the past particular to our present particular.

Alasdair MacIntyre makes it even clearer by putting the very person of the character of the narrative¹⁶ as the co-author of the ensuing narrative.¹⁷ It makes sense because the character itself is making the narrative becoming what it is. Without the participation of the autonomous character, the narrative would have an entirely different ending.¹⁸ At the same time, this character is not born out of vacuum as Gustafson has pointed out earlier. Such character is the product of history and society. Walter Bruggemann has a way of describing how the biblical narrative shapes our own narrative in his book *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism*.¹⁹ In many ways, conversion is not unlike ethical decision. Through the declaration of the biblical narrative, one's life is reshaped, harking the call of the biblical narrative.²⁰ When one is mesmerized with the biblical narrative, he can no longer think otherwise but can only act according to the ways and means of the biblical narrative, the Canon.

deals directly with narrative and history. Nevertheless, it establishes the link between the biblical narrative and the narrative of a person who is a moral being, making moral judgment, and so forth.

¹⁵ Gustafson, "The Changing Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics." The original quote has liberalism and positivism as the subject, but the description also fits in with propositional ethicists.

¹⁶ From this point on, unless otherwise qualified, "narrative" is used as the event in which a person has a moral choice.

¹⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 205.

¹⁸ This sentence is seemingly a logical tautology. However, it means co-authorship of event and people. David Tracy has an excellent discussion of social historical influence of how one interprets an event thus influencing a person's decision in *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), particularly in chapter 3 and 4. The same principle applies to ethical decision.

¹⁹ Walter Bruggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism, Living in a Three-Storyed Universe* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

²⁰ Bruggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism*, 43-47.

James McClendon also provides a very plain and clear example in doing theology with biography.²¹ He deems theology "doable" through the life story of "saints". Applying to ethics, he quoted Romano Guardini saying:

The saints, [he noted,] is not to be sharply distinguished from saints in the New Testament sense. "Viewed in this perspective, a saint is simply a man to whom God has given the strength to take this primal commandment with utter seriousness, to understand it profoundly, and to bend every effort to carry it out."²²

McClendon here clearly means that a person's ethics is not much different from the biblical saints who exemplified them during their time. In other words, their legacy lives on in our narrative. Our narrative (if we ever become a saint in the Roman Catholic term) is a continuation of the biblical narrative. At this point, our narrative becomes the current theology (say, ethics)²³ in collaboration with the biblical materials. Our narrative and the biblical narrative become collapsed into one narrative. Proposition is not the most important part of ethics. The connection of the biblical narrative and our narrative is the crux of decision making.

We have so far assumed that the biblical narrative would merge automatically with our narrative. It is not the case. As mentioned earlier, narrative by itself is a context. It has at least two dimensions, the historical and the social (or cultural if so preferred). History is only as sound as the defined community. The Nanking Massacre as history has utterly different meanings to the Japanese and the Chinese. Both of them might agree on factual historical details, but they would still come up with different meanings thus affecting each one's moral choice. The meaning and the effects on the characters (the Japanese and the Chinese) are particular regardless of the historical facts. Each person's character is nourished by his/her own community to become a person he/she is now. The community teaches and imprints a tradition for everyone in the community with a story. This story provides an identity as well as the

²¹ James Wm McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, new ed. (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990).

²² McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 156.

²³ This writer believes that McClendon was more interested in writing ethics than theology, when he wrote *Biography as Theology*. He points out in p.2 of the book that ethics is the indicator of theology.

frame of reference to all stories for the community.²⁴ Stanley Hauerwas points out the importance of community narrative in the formation of a community and its narrative in his retelling of the story of *Watership Down*.²⁵ He states that:

... the very structure of [*Watership Down*] provides an account of the narrative nature of social ethics that is seldom noticed or accounted for by most political and social theory. Adam's (the author of *Watership Down*) depiction of the various communities in *Watership Down* suggests that they are to be judged primarily by their ability to sustain the narratives that defines the very nature of man, or in this case rabbits. Thus *Watership Down* is meant to teach us the importance of stories for social and political life. But even more important, by paying close attention to *Watership Down* we will see that the best way to learn the significance of stories is by having our attention drawn to stories through story.²⁶

Hauerwas here demonstrates the relationship between the community and the narrative. The narrative gives rise to the community. Without the narrative, the community perishes. They simply have no strength to fall back on. Like the Christian community or any other defined community, we are all founded on an narrative account. Today's African-Americans founded their community in Martin Luther King and in Abraham Lincoln. They share the Gettysburg Address, the "I Have a Dream" sermon, the Montgomery March. This is the narrative which sustains their very nature of being black persons. Christians also have their narrative most prominently found in the Bible. The biblical narrative in all its historical, social, and cultural context also sustains a Christian's very nature of being, yes, a Christian. Like the rabbits from *Watership Down* which have only the stories of the prince of rabbits, El-ahrairah,²⁷ Likewise Christians have Jesus Christ as the only constant found in the transmission of the biblical narrative.

From this point on, we begin to see how the narrative is transmitted. Today's narrative is constantly informed by "the narrative" from which we create our community. For the Christians, even though our own particular (contextual) narrative is very much different from biblical

²⁴ Stanley Hauerwas has a chapter devoted to illustrating this point in *A Community of Character: Towards a Constructive Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).

²⁵ Richard Adams, *Watership Down* (New York: Avon Book, 1972).

²⁶ Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 12.

²⁷ Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 13.

narrative, the existence of the Christian community brings the two together. In other words, only the Christian community can bring forth this commonality to Christians. Thus any narrative with a Christian character becomes a Christian narrative. A biblically informed²⁸ ethical decision is thus a Christian ethical decision. Yet at the same time this is still a particular decision.

And In Reverse - From Particulars to Universal

The narrative approach of ethics seems to practically abandon the universal aspect of ethics. If any narrative is a product of the community, then Christian ethics is not ethics for everybody. Rather, I should say, Christian ethics pertains no interest, or even no meaning to non-Christians. Only Christians share the same biblical narrative of Jesus Christ. Those who do not share the same narrative have no respect for the dignity of the biblical narrative because they just do not believe in it. At least, they do not believe in it in the same way as Christians believe. As I have pointed out previously, I wish to underscore that the biblical narrative has its own context unique to the Christian community. The Bible as a book just simply lacks the community on which it can be interpreted. Only the Bible as a Canon can become the authority. The accumulated narrative of the biblical narrative just simply does not allow an outsider to appreciate its continuous saga. It is a mammoth set of traditions and values which requires faith to settle in. Those who read the Bible without the established community will create a new community. It will turn out to be a vastly different community.

Chan Shun-Hing has chronicled a debate among theologians from the established Hong Kong church community and newly gathered unchurched Chinese scholar community.²⁹ Both of the communities have the same biblical narrative,³⁰ but each particular community has

²⁸ "Biblically informed" refers to the merged result of the biblical narrative with the character's narrative.

²⁹ S.H. Chan, "A Conceptual Difference between Hong Kong and China's Theologians: A Study of the 'Cultural Christians' Phenomenon," *Jian Dao* 10 (1998): 109-30.

³⁰ Strictly speaking, these Chinese scholars do not have the biblical narrative but rather the literature from biblical narrative. Only a few of them study the bible, most of them just study theology!

its own different scheme in interpreting the biblical narrative. Arguments among them dwell on which community should hold the authority of judgment. There are approximately three parties. One party advocates the church as the orthodoxy, while another party asserts that each community should have total autonomy to its understanding. The third party tries to mediate between the two opposing positions. Currently, no one can make the final conclusion until much later. However, the debate heightens the reality of the particularity of any given community regardless of the same original narrative, i.e. the biblical narrative, as each side claims. That is to say narrative ethics is a particular ethics.

Applicability of Christian Ethics

Now we come to the crux of our discussion, that narrative ethics has limited appeal or limited truth claim if it is only sectarian. This exclusivity of Christian ethics does not only deny the Christian appeal to be universal, but it also opens the floodgate to all forms of values which may be contradictory to Christian values. An ethical standard applies only to those who have the Christian, or rather, church narrative! The phenomenon seems obviously so. But what universal appeal do we need to be more specific about? Are Christian ethics supposed to be universally accepted or universally applied?

The call for a universal appeal of Christian ethics is actually a strange concept to the Bible. Neither Jesus nor his apostles had ever pretended that their own brand of faith would be universally accepted.³¹ Post-Constantinian³² and post-enlightenment³³ attitudes assumed the necessity

³¹ This writer believes this point could be controversial but still he will not discuss at length here, as it is a matter of conviction in interpretation. The most noted passages of obvious examples are Lk 12:32 where Jesus' disciples were addressed as "little flock"; Paul's incessant line drawing between the saints and the world; and Peter's admonishment of the "aliens and exiles" (RSV) in 1 Pet 2:11.

³² Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, the triumphalism of the post-constantinian optimism also gave rise to the pretension of a sure universal truth claim. *Resident Aliens* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 21, 22. Kurt Richardson also indicated in "Eschata, Utopia, and Apatheia: Hype(e)-texts of Expectation" (A paper presented in the 1998 AAR Annual Conference to be published in 1999).

³³ The enlightenment assumes that the universal human rational function will eventually yield universal conclusion, namely, the truth. If truth is universal, then God's truth can be universally affirmed, not by confession, but also by reason! Thus an ethical code needs to be universal in order to be true, otherwise such truth becomes relative. The enlightenment presupposes provable universal ethics absolute ethics and relative otherwise.

of a universally accepted ethical code for the code to be true. This writer's question is: For whom is the code true? Hauerwas and Willimon's popular book *Resident Alien*³⁴ puts it in plain language that the church is not in synchronization with this world and should not be in synchronization with this world. Once the church moves in the same steps, securing the approval of the state, she has lost her identity. *Resident Aliens* is actually about politics. A universally accepted ethic is also about politics. Christian ethics does not need to gain societal political influence, thus does not need to be universal. Christian ethics are not about political influence in this society. They are about political influence in the church! This writer, as a Christian living in Hong Kong, China, has to agree wholeheartedly with Hauerwas and Willimon at this point. Christians are minority and will be minority in the foreseeable future.³⁵ Gaining a Christian political influence in a post-millennial eschatological sense is unthinkable. At the same time, being pre-millennial also precludes the move to win the society by the political influence in ethics.

For too long Christians have been dominated by the enlightenment idea of presenting faith in a rational and scientific manner as the sole common language and only avenue of communication which is universal. We are bound by the rule of the enlightenment as Christian liberals began to explain faith in credible terms, such as Schleiermacher³⁶ and the conservative Josh McDowell³⁷ (with due respect to both). We erroneously believe that if we can converse in the same term in modernity, resurrection

³⁴ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

³⁵ This writer is indebted to K.L. Leung for some remarkable observation from a historical investigation (K.L. Leung, "The Minority and a Minority Attitude: A Chinese Evangelical Manifesto on Society and Culture," *Jian Dao* 12 [1999]: 161-89.) He pointed out the post-Constantinian (not his term) assumption of Hong Kong Christians under the mirage of post-colonial Christian vestige that the church still has the political influence to finish her social or ethical agenda. Though this is from a very different starting point, the conclusion is much the same, that is, a champion of minority thinking happens to coincide with a sectarian thinking. We have to stand with the church and to think as the church which happens to be the minority seeking to convert the world.

³⁶ Without a doubt, Schleiermacher's hallmark publications dealt head on with the modernity of Christian faith, with sentences like: "piety is to be found in all those feelings that unite men for a higher or even a more sensuous enjoyment of life. Yet I can retract nothing from the *universality* [italics mine] of the statement and in no way admit that it was a rhetorical hyperbole." in F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1958), 105.

³⁷ A conservative like Josh McDowell is also guilty in trying to prove the reasonableness in

will then become credible. We need to have a universally accepted presentation in order to have any true claim. This idea is totally foreign in the Bible. Truth does not depend on universal acceptance. The Bible only calls for confession of faith unconditionally. A closer examination of the idea of *In Parable* by John D. Crossan³⁸ reveals that parables are for exclusive groups of people. A more recent study of parables by William R. Herzog II³⁹ has made a point by limiting the audience to the oppressed. The Kingdom is for those who are elected is not a new theme. How often we have forgotten this fact in the eagerness to pursue universality!

The Universality of Particularity

Christian ethics that seem to be private ethics will have no significant impact. They have lost the lustre as the well respected influential force in the public arena. The question we need to ask is: how public should Christian ethics be? We need to look back on narrative ethics by themselves. We will find the Christian particular is not so particular after all. The illustration⁴⁰ by Hauerwas and Willimon makes it obvious: they took sexual practice as the issue to question the church's controversial stand on lesbianism and fidelity. Some may think that sexual relationship is a private matter of choice between two individuals. At the same time, infidelity is also a matter of choice between or among individuals! This idea of private is "universally"⁴¹ accepted but is unacceptable in the Christian particular context. The church requires a particular discipline of her constituencies. This discipline is necessary for the church's very own existence:

rational terms that the resurrection of Christ is true in his *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972).

³⁸ John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenges of the Historical Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973), viii-xvi.

³⁹ William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 1-4.

⁴⁰ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live: Exercise for Christian Practice* (Nashville: TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 36-38.

⁴¹ "Universally" is a misnomer. It may only be more widely accepted but is never really universal.

The deepest problem of Christian ethics is that Christian practices like fidelity have lost their purpose as part of the formation of a community capable of sustaining itself in a world that constantly threatens to undermine it.⁴²

First, the very existence of the church depends on ethical practice which stems from herself. This set of ethics cannot be changed to adapt to the "universal" standard of private choice. A change of the stand would result in the overthrowing of the church's very own story, including her history and people. When the church accepts standard other than her own, she is no longer the church. The church is the church because she has her own narrative. Without this narrative, like the rabbits of *Watership Down*, she perishes:

One of the reasons why the church asks us to be faithful sexually is because that is part of the discipline necessary to be a people capable of confronting the powers that would destroy our lives.⁴³

Second, the church's very existence is to overthrow the power that threatens the essence of her being. The church's mission is to convert! It is an invasion from a particular group to show and tell what they believe is universal. The church within herself confesses the universality of her stand. This is what evangelism is all about: a belief of our biblical narrative, trusting that it will change lives. Without a doubt, the church's particularities would have continuities with the predominant culture. The point is that "this continuity is something the church discovers because it first knows who it is."⁴⁴

This militant stand of the church is necessary to maintain the integrity because "the church is in a longtime struggle that requires people who have the virtues to sustain a long struggle."⁴⁵ This is specially so for the church is the minority, the struggles definitely exist. Meanwhile the militant stand is a requirement for conquering and converting. The term "make disciples" does not mean an adaptation of culture, but an active conversion of the culture of the person. It is an effort to make a particular culture out of the predominant culture.

⁴² Hauerwas and Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live*, 37.

⁴³ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live*, 37.

⁴⁴ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live*, 39.

⁴⁵ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live*, 38.

As we come to the conclusion of the necessity of universality, the simple and direct answer is "no" if it means universal acceptance. The theological answer is yes; when we confess to the given particularity. Universality is not found in rational, reasonable, all-comprehensive, and agreeable principles. Truth is truth when it is embodied. It is found in the church's narratives with the Bible as the generating narrative. Without such narrative, one finds no universal as such. By confession, one steps into the world of biblical narrative and interprets the world accordingly. In Christian life, embodiment of truth⁴⁶ reveals itself as truth. Christian ethics is the embodiment of truth of the church. Yet this truth extends itself beyond the church. First, the church is still part of the larger world and the world has the church as part of it. This writer strongly believes in the continuity of the church and the world, and the "universal". If there is any continuity and universally agreeables, then "this continuity is something that the church discovers because it first knows who it is"⁴⁷ and what it is.

Unfinished Business

This is not meant to be a comprehensive essay. This writer believes that it brings in more questions than answers in terms of ethics and methodology of doing ethics. If ethics is narrative based, what kind of proposition it is, or would there be propositional ethics possible? What roles do overt commandments—the timeless truth of the Bible—play in ethics formation? Other obvious questions raised center around the content of embodiment. What kind of embodiment and how embodiment of truth can be generated from biblical narrative? The questions of "how" loom large in the horizon. A test case should be included in the upcoming essay to demonstrate the "how." These questions need to be answered before a comprehensive "narrative as ethics" can be claimed. This writer can only hope that this essay will serve as an introduction to another angle to look at Christian ethics. This will suffice for the present.

⁴⁶ Hauerwas, *Sanctify them in Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998)

⁴⁷ Hauerwas and Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live*, 39.

ABSTRACT

In the post-modern age, a universally acceptable ethical code becomes impossible. In light of Stanley Hauerwas' concept of virtue and community, narrative emerges as one venue to ethics. This article seeks to argue the un-necessity of a universally accepted truth claim in light of Christian understanding. Furthermore, the article insists only from the Christian particular, a meaningful ethics can be obtained. And a universal truth then becomes possible.

撮 要

在後現代的年代裡，普遍性的倫理道德其實不被廣泛接納。從侯爾華斯的品格和社群的概念裡，敘述成為倫理理論的一個出路。本文尋求論證普遍接納的真理在基督教裡是不必要的，亦惟有從基督教的獨特才能獲致有意義的倫理，亦由於能獨特才有普遍真理的可能。