Christians play favorites with the members of the Trinity. Some Christian groups find it most natural to pray to God the Father; their hymns and pious expressions seem to dwell mainly on the First Person of the Trinity, an emphasis that is also carried over into their theological reflection. Other groups find it very appropriate to pray "dear Jesus" prayers, and to sing about, and center their theological discussions on, the Second Person of the Trinity. And then there are Holy Spirit oriented Christians: people who address their prayers and hymns to the Third Person of the Trinity, and who make the Holy Spirit a very central topic of theological discussion.

That there is a pattern of this sort at work in the Christian community seems to me to be an undeniable fact; it also seems to be a fact that it is important not to deny. Taking this fact seriously, and giving it some sustained attention, can help to clarify some issues which are of significance for the Christian community.

At least I suspect so. As I have thought, as an ethicist, about why it is that Christians who accept the Bible as their infallible guide in matters of faith and practice, can nonetheless disagree strenuously with each other about the application of Biblical teaching to specific moral matters, this is one of the factors that has seemed to me to be important to take into account. To be sure, there are other factors. People come to the Bible with different cultural and ideological blinders. They operate with different hermeneutical systems and emphases. They stress different parts of the Bible as morally relevant—some pay most attention to the stories, others to the apostolic letters, others to the wisdom literature, others to legislative passages. People "weigh" Biblical principles differently.

But I am also convinced that there are different moral styles or temperaments in the Christian community, and that these styles correspond to differing emphases on one or another of the Persons of the Trinity. I haven't developed a satisfactory typology of these styles. But I do think that something along the following lines can be developed into such a typology.

One way of testing out the kind of special attachment to a member of the Trinity which I have in mind here is to ask a specific group a question of this sort: When you think about obeying God,
to which member of the Trinity do you view yourself as having a primary relationship? Which of the divine Persons is it who calls you to obedience?

There certainly seem to be Christian groups whose ethical style is strongly oriented toward God the Father. An obvious example of such a style is the ethical scheme in which the idea of God as Law-giver occupies a very central place. The Law which God gives can be thought of in terms of natural law, as in a dominant strain of traditional Roman Catholic thought, or in terms of revealed law, as in much of Dutch and Scottish Calvinism, where the Decalogue is viewed as the primary moral document for the Christian community. What is common to Christians who exhibit the obedience-to-Law ethical style is that they think of themselves as relating primarily to the First Person of the Trinity.

But there are other groups of Christians who would respond to our test question by referring to the Second Person of the Trinity. In fact, Jesus-centered ethical emphases come in many different varieties; there are probably many more sub-categories here than with either of the other two basic options. This variety is due to the fact that the person and ministry of Jesus are subject to very different interpretations in the broad Christian community, and this diversity has spawned a wide variety of ethical programs.

There is, for example, a strong imitatio Christi ethical strain in Roman Catholicism, which stands along side of the more dominant natural law emphasis. The presence of this strain is obvious in the great devotional work by Thomas à Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, and it manifests itself also in Franciscan piety. On the Protestant side, this kind of "imitation" ethics appears in a number of contexts. It certainly is a central emphasis in Mennonite ethical thought. And, ironically, both the fundamentalists and the liberals in North American Protestantism have developed a significant "be like Jesus" emphasis; each camp has promoted a moral style in which the question, "What would Jesus do?" is a central reference point for moral deliberation—although, to be sure, the two sides disagree very much as to what Jesus would actually do in a variety of situations.

What unites these various ethical programs is the conviction that significant guidance for living the good life can be received by attending to the person and ministry of Jesus. Indeed, not only can guidance for the moral life be received by way of devotion to Jesus, but proper and adequate moral guidance must, according to this view, be received in this manner. It is not enough, for example, to be aware of, and reflect upon, the Law that was given on Sinai; the person and ministry of Jesus provides us with new moral materials,